

WOMAN, FOOD AND REDEFINING HER-SELF:  
A FEMINIST READING OF FAY WELDON'S *THE FAT WOMAN'S JOKE*,  
MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE EDIBLE WOMAN* AND  
LAURA ESQUIVEL'S *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE*

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## ABSTRACT

WOMAN, FOOD AND REDEFINING HER-SELF:  
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This dissertation focuses on the connections between Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* through an analysis of woman's position and role in patriarchal societies, the metaphoric consumption of woman and finally woman's resistance. In these novels, woman as a gender category, as the opposite of man and thus as defined by the oppositional masculinist logic is questioned and problematized with the possibility of liberating 'female' from patriarchal bounds. The heroines struggle to liberate themselves from the definitions and restrictions of patriarchy in order to find and express their true selves. Food, in terms of eating and cooking, home and kitchen as feminine spaces and the female body are used to subvert the notion of woman's definition and limitation by man, thus leading to woman's representation of herself by herself.

This dissertation will discuss how eating, cooking and food related activities in the selected novels become means of subverting the gendered domestic roles, deconstructing 'woman' as well as the male defined spaces and the socially predefined body to express a self that denies male definition and that becomes a subject in her own right. Using theories of space and body as the conceptual framework, this study aims to provide a feminist reading with the claim that, Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Marian in *The Edible Woman* and Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate*, juxtapose the metaphor of consumption, by rejecting the hierarchical masculinist logic and by redefining themselves.

**Keywords:** Space, body, food, magical realism, feminism

## ÖZ

KADIN, YEMEK VE KADININ KENDİNİ YENİDEN TANIMLAMASI:  
FAY WELDON'IN *THE FAT WOMAN'S JOKE*, MARGARET ATWOOD'UN  
*THE EDIBLE WOMAN* VE LAURA ESQUIVEL'İN *LIKE WATER FOR  
CHOCOLATE* ROMANLARININ FEMİNİST BİR OKUMASI

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Bu doktora tezi Fay Weldon'ın *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood'un *The Edible Woman* ve Laura Esquivel'in *Like Water for Chocolate* adlı romanlarında kadının ataerkil toplumdaki konumu ve rollerini, kadının öznelliğinin metaforik tüketimini ve son olarak kadının buna karşı koyuşunu inceleyecektir. Seçilen bu romanlarda, ikili zıtlıklar üzerine kurulu ataerkil sistem tarafından bir cinsiyet kategorisi ve erkeğin ötekisi olarak tanımlanan kadın kavramı sorgulanmakta ve bununla birlikte kadın ve kadına ait olanı özgürleştirme amacı öncelik kazanmaktadır. Seçilen romanlardaki kadın kahramanlar, kendilerini ataerkil sistemin tanımlamaları ve kısıtlamalarından kurtarmaya ve gerçek benliklerini ifade etmeye çalışırken, yemek yemek ve yemek pişirmek, birer kadın alanı olarak ev ve mutfak ve kadın bedeni kavramları kullanılmaktadır. Bu sayede kadının erkekler tarafından tüketiliyor oluşu durumu tersine çevrilmekte ve kadının kendi kendini ifade edebilmesi sağlanmaktadır.



Bu doktora tezi, cinsiyete göre belirlenmiş aile içi rollerin ters-yüz edilmesi, kadın kavramının ve buna ek olarak erkek egemen toplum tarafından tanımlanan mekân ve beden kavramlarının sorgulanması ve kadının erkekler tarafından belirlenen benliğinden kurtularak kendini yeniden tanımlaması konuları üzerinde durmaktadır. İncelenen romanlarda bu konuların yemek yemek ve yemek pişirmek gibi yiyecek ile ilgili olan unsurla olan ilişkisi de ele alınmaktadır. Böylece, bu çalışma mekân ve beden kavramları üzerinden kuramsal bir çerçeve oluşturarak, feminist bir okuma sunmakta ve *The Fat Woman's Joke* romanında Esther, *The Edible Woman* romanında Marian ve son olarak *Like Water for Chocolate* adlı eserde ise Tita karakterlerinin birer metafor olan yemek ve tüketim kavramlarını tam tersine çevirerek erkekler tarafından baskı altına alınmayı reddedişlerini ve kendilerini yeniden tanımlama süreçlerini incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mekan, beden, yemek, büyülü gerçeklik, feminizm

*In loving memory of my grandmother Nihal Şener ...*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
ÖZ.....	vi
DEDICATION .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	xii
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Aim and Scope of the Study.....	1
1.2. Overview of the Gendered Meaning of Food in the Selected Novels.....	5
1.3. Conceptual Background .....	11
1.4. A Brief Introduction to the Novelists.....	14
1.5. Theoretical Framework .....	28
1.6. Contribution to Existing Scholarship and Organization of the Study .....	31
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND .....	34
2.1. Gendering Woman .....	34
2.2. Space and Gender.....	39
2.3. Body and Gender.....	45
2.4. Food and Gender .....	48
3. WOMAN'S SPACE, WOMAN'S PLACE: CHALLENGING THE BOUNDARIES OF DOMESTIC SPACE IN <i>THE FAT WOMAN'S JOKE</i> , <i>THE EDIBLE WOMAN</i> AND <i>LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE</i> .....	51

3.1. Theoretical Background of the Chapter .....	53
3.2. Construction of Social Space .....	61
3.2.1. Construction of Social Space in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	64
3.2.2. Construction of Social Space in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	70
3.2.3. Construction of Social Space in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> .....	77
3.3. Spatial and Social Divisions.....	83
3.3.1. Spatial and Social Divisions in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	86
3.3.2. Spatial and Social Divisions in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	90
3.3.3. Spatial and Social Divisions in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> .....	95
3.4. Contesting the Given Spaces.....	98
3.4.1. Contesting the Given Spaces in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	102
3.4.2. Contesting the Given Spaces in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	104
3.4.3. Contesting the Given Spaces in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> .....	108
3.5. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces .....	112
3.5.1. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces in <i>The Fat     Woman's Joke</i> .....	116
3.5.2. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces in <i>The Edible     Woman</i> .....	118
3.5.3. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces in <i>Like Water     for Chocolate</i> .....	121
3.6. Conclusion to Chapter 3 .....	124
4. BODY AS A FEMININE PLACE: WOMAN'S BODILY EXPERIENCE AND SUBVERSION OF BODILY ESSENTIALISM.....	127
4.1. Theoretical Background of the Chapter .....	129
4.2. Social Coding of the Female Body .....	140
4.2.1. Social Coding of the Female Body in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	141
4.2.2. Social Coding of the Female Body in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	144

4.2.3. Social Coding of the Female Body in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> .....	148
4.3. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body .....	153
4.3.1. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	156
4.3.2. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	163
4.3.3. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> ..	168
4.4. Bodily Disorders .....	173
4.4.1. Bodily Disorders in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	175
4.4.2. Bodily Disorders in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	177
4.4.3. Bodily Disorders in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> .....	181
4.5. Disobedient Bodies and Reaction to Proper Femininity .....	183
4.5.1. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity .....	185
4.5.1.1. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity in <i>The Fat Woman's Joke</i> .....	187
4.5.1.2. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity in <i>The Edible Woman</i> .....	190
4.5.1.3. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity in <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> .....	194
4.6. Conclusion to Chapter 4 .....	198
5. CONCLUSION .....	200
REFERENCES .....	212
APPENDICES .....	219
A. CURRICULUM VITAE .....	219
B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET .....	221
C. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU .....	239



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Aim and Scope of the Study

In Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, woman as a category, woman as the opposite and the other of man and thus woman as defined by the oppositional masculinist logic is problematized as Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Marian in *The Edible Woman* and Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate* question, challenge and change their male-defined subjectivity -subjectivity here used with the meaning of selfhood-. To make clear what is meant by subjectivity as used in this study, it is stated that,

Subjectivity is a less rigid term than identity, as it incorporates the understanding that the self, or more accurately, selves, are highly changeable and contextual, albeit within certain limits imposed by the culture in which an individual lives, including power relations, social institutions and hegemonic discourses. (Lupton 13)

Within a feminist context, 'woman' has been constructed as a category and as the opposite of 'man', implying that being a woman is a cultural constitution and at the same time signalling that this gendered self can be re-constituted. This dissertation, therefore, claims that the identities of the heroines are initially defined by patriarchy, by cultural norms and by gender-based power relations and reads the novels as Esther, Marian and Tita's search for an autonomous self that rejects their naturalised-essentialised female disposition.

*The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* centralise woman's naturalised gendered duties, woman's experience within the domestic sphere and within their bodies. By centralising these, the aforementioned novels problematize

the masculinist logic that defines woman within certain limits and that denies her subjectivity. The term woman has never been free from the bounds of patriarchy as being a woman means being the opposite of man, conforming to the “sexed female body” (Riley and Pearce 57) and the normative roles as a wife, a mother, a daughter and a cook. Hence, woman’s subjectivity becomes a pre-defined construct. As stated by Iris Marion Young “Since woman functions for man as the ground of his subjectivity, she has no support for her own self. She is derelict” (130). Subjectivity as well as the term self are used here as synonymous with being able to freely define oneself. In the selected novels, woman’s role, identity, duties, the spaces that she belongs to, her body, her association with food and even the way she should feel are all defined by man, making woman’s subjectivity a pre-defined phallogentric construct. Having no say in the creation of themselves, the heroines struggle with the question of who they are and what they want outside the female norm which turns these novels into a yearning towards the ability to define one’s self without the interference or governance of the other, in this case what stands for patriarchal ideology. Therefore, they desire to escape from being labelled as a ‘woman’ and having to comply with this man-imposed self. Feminist critics, Gilbert and Gubar refer to this desire as “the woman’s quest for self-definition” (76) while Elaine Showalter talks about a woman’s “search for identity” (13) and “self-discovery” (13). Thus, the idea of female subjectivity, self-representation or self-definition as the phrases that this study uses, stand for the female protagonists’ struggle for an assertion of their unique characteristics, feelings and ways of behaviour without having to be influenced and interfered by man, and as a reference of freely defining one’s self.

From a feminist perspective, our physical as well as somatic boundaries define our experiences and by drawing social boundaries, limit our gendered acts. The limits of both the domestic space and the body are determined by the society and to empower woman, it is a matter of challenging these man-made definitions and limits. This study argues that food, in terms of cooking and eating, are spatially and corporeally associated with women in order to perpetuate patriarchal norms that pre-define certain roles to women as well as to limit their body. At the same time, the claim is that, food, cooking and eating aid women in challenging the limits of space and body, help

women renounce men's definition of who a woman is, and finally, enable the heroines to reclaim their subjectivity and selfhood without men's influence over themselves.

To discuss the aforementioned social limits, this dissertation will also delve into issues that are common in the selected novels, including domesticity, family relations and marriage. These issues are central in discussing woman's definition by and her relative position to man as well as her responsibilities to social institutions and to normative constructs like family and marriage that traditionally deem her as man's inferior and that limit her agency. Feminist theories and women's writing have studied the family as a key element in the functioning of patriarchy and of women's oppression. As Kate Millett remarks in *Sexual Politics*,

Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole. Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family effects control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient. (33)

Defining its' members' roles in line with and for the purposes of perpetuating patriarchal ideology, family becomes a key limiting aspect in women's lives. What Millett argues is that the internal mechanisms of the family structure serve the larger ideology of patriarchy by ensuring that women conform to their given positions. Likewise, as Germaine Greer states, the traditional and patriarchal view was that "[t]he family, ruled over and provided for by father, suckled and nurtured by mother seems to us inherent in the natural order" (246). The naturalised normative gender roles within the family not only separate man and woman but also trap woman into the household and limit her agency by assigning her the duty of care-work. In addition, woman's condition within the household has been supported by the capitalist system as a woman's duties to her house constitute the essential support that she is giving which extends to man and to the capitalist system by freeing him from the burdens of house-care as much as emotional-care. Therefore, the naturalised historical materialist condition of woman defines her role very much as a caregiver and strengthens the male/female binary relationship. However, what feminists are more concerned with is how this division of familial labour extends beyond the male-female relations within the family and actually serves woman's oppression.

Marriage is a central query in the selected novels and is also a vital point regarding the discussion of patriarchal norms because as an institution, marriage ensures that women have the purpose of raising children and caring for her house and husband. In the like manner, marriage in these three novels is presented as a control mechanism as well as an institutional agreement that is obligatory for women and that limits her as a wife, a mother, as professionally hopeless, as a perfect cook, sexually submissive, meek, and vulnerable. Likewise, Germaine Greer states that while marriage and becoming a mother are all presented to women as natural duties, these roles end up with the devastation of women's energy, disabling them from performing anything outside these boundaries and duties (74) and as Beauvoir states, taking away a woman's right to exist as an individual (505). Based on these discussions, it is clear that woman's experience is a product of her relative position to man and her identity is an inscription by man within the "prevailing gender ideologies they inscribe and reproduce, [that] have effects on women's self-representation" (Robinson 8). Within the context of this dissertation, these representations encompass how a woman is positioned within certain places as well as how she is pictured in her body. Instead of being represented by man, when a woman defines herself and 'woman' in general, this can be a means of self-representation and a possibility of challenging the dominant discourses. The dominant discourse in the case of these novels refers to patriarchy and to the discourse of binaries between male/female and between any such implication of this gender divide, informing the dual hierarchised oppositions such as the public/domestic, mind/body, active/passive, independent/dependent as well as powerful/powerless, all of which are the dualisms that the heroines experience.

A criticism of women's condition in their male dominated societies and families, as well as within male-female relations is put forward by the female protagonists of the selected novels. As such, one common feature of these novels is a questioning of a woman's domestic duties including a concern with cooking as the expected product of woman's time and work at home, as well as a questioning of woman's relationship with eating with regards to her body image that is restrained by her position within society. Thus, food is a significant concern in these novels in representing and in problematizing the heroines' condition and in challenging the male/female binary by redefining their connection with food as well as by self-defining the normative limits

of spaces and their bodies. Consequently, as Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, puts on weight, against the dietary demands of her society, she overthrows the domestic and bodily ideals and gains control of her life and of her-self; as Marian in *The Edible Woman*, bakes a cake that mirrors herself, she overcomes her feelings of alienation from her body and gains power over her fiancé; and lastly, as Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate*, gains control of her kitchen and her body when she freely reflects her emotions through the food that she cooks, she manages to uncover herself and her femininity as opposed to the limiting traditions. Thus, by making the kitchen, their body and what they cook truly their own, the heroines gain autonomy and re-define their selves as free from the normative definitions.

## **1.2. Overview of the Gendered Meaning of Food in the Selected Novels**

In all of the selected novels, the female protagonists are denied a free self outside of what patriarchy has given them. While this is a central concern, the way they question and try to challenge their situation is accompanied by the shared symbol of food. Critics who study the significance of food in literature state that food does not simply exist as a mere object deprived of meaning. Instead, food has long been used as a symbol to say something about the text's cultural and historical context, the narrative, characters or critical issues such as class and gender (Fitzpatrick 122). In this line, it is significant that even the titles of the selected novels refer to nutritive images and reveal something essential about the narratives with respect to their concern with gender and with being a woman. As such, Esther jokes about being a fat woman, Marian parodies her being edible and Tita reaches the burning point of her temperament just like when a chocolate starts melting.

Standing for other things beyond its alimentary role, food, one's relationship with eating, being thin or fat, healthy or unhealthy body images as well as the preparation and consumption of food are claimed to be connected with gender. As such it is stated that,

Because of the close cultural association between women and food, or because of feminism's politicization of the domestic, or because of the advance of material culture, the work of women writers in the latter half of the twentieth

century is particularly fruitful for an examination of the relations between power and food. (Sceats and Cunningham 117)

When read from this feminist perspective, food in these novels is likewise central in showing the politicized-essentialised womanly duties as well as woman's condition within the domestic sphere. As related, Esther keeps calling Alan to get approval for the menu of that day, Marian frequently goes to Peter's house to fill the fridge and prepare dinner for him and Tita's only permitted act is cooking. As it is clear, within the family structure and male-female relations, it is a woman who needs to take care of the affairs of home and kitchen. Since food preparation and cooking are traditionally matters of what is done at home, food implicates a woman's domestic tasks, indicating that it is only natural for a woman to be preoccupied with care-taking and domesticity. This in turn stabilises and perpetuates the male/female power relationship by pacifying and trapping woman within the limits of the private sphere. Thus, as a result of performing their womanhood in connection with the requirements of their gender roles, the alimentary images and culinary metaphors such as cooking and creating recipes become integral to the lives of these woman and vital for studying the politics of domesticity and patriarchal role divisions.

Food is never simply served as food in the given novels, instead, food is merged with or carries female experience that encompasses a woman's relationship with not only the domestic space but also with her body. It is claimed that,

much of the literary criticism concerned with food in later twentieth-century women's fiction, written mainly by female, feminist critics, focuses on women's problematic relationships with food, for example not eating enough, eating too much, the preparation of food as a feminine endeavour, and the kitchen as a feminine space. (Fitzpatrick 127)

Hence, food implicates woman's embodied experience. This relationship of food with woman's experience is reflective of 'feminine endeavour' and the kitchen as woman's place as the third chapter of this dissertation will delve into but it is also related with woman's relationship with her body in the sense of food consumption and the physical appearance of a woman, which will be studied in the fourth chapter. Henceforth, in addition to implicating domestic roles, food is also a crucial symbol for the discussion

of the female body, how it is represented and how it is problematized. In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Esther's domestic experience and her home related roles as a married woman and a mother are accompanied with her fatness and eating and that is why and how food pronounces her experiences. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian feels a sense of entrapment in her relationship which deems her responsible for care-taking while causing her to experience anorexia. Hence, in this novel, patriarchal power relations are represented through the conspicuous and contradictory feminine body image that Marian struggles with, which is likewise observed through her relationship with food. Finally, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the kitchen and the female body are sources of Tita's limited state and her struggles with femininity but are also the only sources and the only ways of expressing how a woman is forced to be passive and made obedient to the masculinist norms. So, to challenge her spatial and somatic limitations, food becomes a matter of voicing her situation. Therefore, in these novels, food represents restrictions and demands forced by the patriarchal societies in order to determine women's roles and women's body image, but food also voices women's direct experience in domestic spaces and in their body.

In most cases the heroines' relationship with food remains limited only to food preparation rather than the consumption of food because eating and dieting habits as well as the types of food consumed refer to binary oppositions and represent male/female division. As such, it is stated that "food is still important as a boundary marker" (Lupton 25) especially in terms of marking the boundary between man and woman. Consequently, it is clear that the novelists use food as a means of representing the essentialism of sex-gender roles since it is only women who are connected with the kitchen as a result of their naturalised domestic role and burden as a caregiver yet at the same time it is again women who cannot consume food for fear of interfering with the idealised body image. Food is also used as a metaphor for representing woman's consumption by patriarchy. In this manner, an image of a woman cooking in the kitchen coincides with the patriarchal idea of woman's subjugation to the house as in *The Fat Woman's Joke* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, or is a representative of male-female, prey-predator relationship especially in the case of *The Edible Woman*. However, in these novels, the symbol of food also becomes a weapon to challenge and juxtapose the male-female power dynamics and is used in tandem with female actions

that disrupt male hegemony. As Sceats and Cunningham state, “Power relations in their broadest sense can be seen to operate, and fluctuate, in all activities associated with food and eating, encompassing cooks, carers and consumers” (117). Therefore, the claim of this dissertation is that, food and any activity related with food, operates but at the same time fluctuates or subverts power relations and becomes a means of reclaiming woman’s selfhood, identity and body. Thus, by using food as a symbol of subversion, the protagonists parody and go against their male defined gender roles.

The significance of food for this study then, has multiple layers. First, food, indicates the heroines’ daily routines and restrictions at home. Second, it represents the heroines’ struggle with their body image. Finally, food represents a challenge to patriarchy.

The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the novels with the aim of providing a brief introduction to how the narratives encompass matters of domesticity, male-female relations, concerns with the female body and the heroines’ associations with food.

In *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, Esther is a wife, a mother and she is occupied with cooking for her husband. The reader first learns about Esther’s marriage in which she apparently lacks a voice of her own and lacks individuality. She and Alan join friendly dinners together and they look physically-alike. Esther is literally the significant other of Alan i.e. the other of man. Her role is to compliment Alan and to act like his mirror image. She is a comfort zone and she represents the traditional images of femininity; she is first and foremost a wife, a mother and a perfect cook. She does not work and in no part of the narrative does the reader see her outside the house except when she decides to revolt against her condition. Esther is the embodiment of the typical feminine figure within patriarchal thinking but the novel also presents different versions of what it means to be a woman through Esther’s friends, showing that all try to comply with man’s desire about the appropriate representation of womanhood. These other female characters, especially Alan’s secretary-lover, also fit into the categories of womanhood that society defines such as a beautiful woman or a sexually desirable woman. In either case the female figures are created by and for man.



The novel also showcases reactions towards male power through domestic duties, eating and the body. Esther has long been considered fat just like her husband Alan. Both go on a diet but the husband slowly loses his control over her body and notices moments of her control over him. When Esther tries to sneak fattening ingredients into Alan's dishes, Alan feels defeated because he can neither control her body nor control her cooking for him. In addition, while her husband is still on diet, by renting a flat only for herself and neglecting her womanly and domestic duties, she resorts to excessive eating which is a means of escape and a way of having control over her own body and so over her-self. Her greedy appetite is also telling of how much she has been hungry for being all by herself, for being without her integral Other, that is man, and for denying her role as a mother. It is only when she escapes her role as Alan's wife and Peter's mother that she fully expresses her life-story, her perspectives on marriage and being a mother and more precisely her condition as a woman. This implicates that her insatiable appetite is also a yearning for telling all about her story. Thus, it is only when she becomes the sole owner and controller of her body through eating, that she becomes able to spare herself from her role as a mother and a wife and deny male power. It is also at this point that the reader can hear her real voice and her real views about being a 'woman'.

Marian in *The Edible Woman* is neither a wife nor a mother, she works in an office and is not very much occupied with the domestic duties. However, as soon as her relationship with her boyfriend gets a serious turn towards marriage, she stops eating. Marian likens eating to an act of being devoured leading to anorexia, which is both a result of and a reaction to the possibility of getting married and being trapped in marriage. Anorexia is defined as a psychological condition that is a woman's bodily reaction to her condition. This physical reaction of the body enables a literal and bodily representation of a woman's condition. In Marian's case, anorexia parallels the docility of the female body in the face of patriarchy yet at the same time shows her starvation for a better condition in her relationship. Her situation is accompanied with a loss of her first-person narrative voice, thus accentuating that she can no more express her true self. It is only towards the end of the novel that Marian gains control of and over her-self by baking a woman-shaped cake, serving it to her boyfriend and thus announcing her realisation that he i.e. patriarchy aimed to devour her just like the act

of consuming this cake. *The Edible Woman* shows that if woman is inscribed into patriarchy as a category or if woman's body is a site of social inscriptions, then the same body can be used to re-inscribe these social constructs. Marian's act of turning herself into a cake or rather metaphorically creating a self to present to her fiancé, is a subversion of the consumer-consumed relationship. At the end Marian eats the cake herself and by eating, she not just gains her appetite but she also re-enacts and subverts male consumption of woman. Marian, materialises her realisation and gains power over her own body, self and subjectivity by also self-defining the contours of this she-cake, or metaphorically, of woman. Hence, the idea of subjectivity in the case of Marian is about becoming the creator and owner of 'woman' rather than being created by man.

In *Like Water for Chocolate* Laura Esquivel uses cooking as a way of transferring and literalising the feelings that her female protagonist has. Tita is born into the kitchen of a restrictive household composed of her mother and her two older sisters. The only freedom that Tita has is cooking, as her mother follows the traditional rules of her Mexican society. Tita, as the youngest daughter of the family, cannot marry and is required to look after her mother until her mother dies. Therefore, her entrapment in the domestic sphere is again a result of her gender which posited Tita within the bounds of a gendered logic and denied her any expression of her feelings. Even though she falls in love, Tita has to see her sister get married to the man Tita is in love with as a result of the traditions and also as decided by her domineering mother. The highlight of the novel is when Tita bakes a cake for the wedding of her sister. Being affected by Tita's tears, the cake poisons the guests, leading them to feel a strong sense of yearning, which is the representation of Tita's own yearning for love. Thus, baking voices her silence. Tita's foods also signal the need for female freedom as a mixture of rose petals from her lover and a tint of her blood causes one of her sisters to run away and go against the traditions that her mother has defined. What is different in this novel is that Tita wants to marry her lover and she is happy with cooking her family's long held recipes. Thus, unlike the other two female protagonists, Tita is not against her femininity or her connection with cooking but because of the traditional boundaries that her mother imposes, her being a woman becomes a restraint to her. Likewise, Tita enjoys being in the kitchen and creating recipes that could convey her

emotions. However, she is still limited by her mother's domineering character. The reason why Tita's mother and the strict rules that she defines can still be explained in patriarchal terms is because her mother follows a very normative logic and because she stands for the conventions of a patriarchal society. The traditions that Mama Elena trusts are cultural norms and so define power relations and her narrative centrality as a woman does no justice to the secondary position of woman because her daughters are either given out as wives, chosen and kept as her servants-cooks, or denied any family relation and in a way denied an identity if they do not comply with her strict rules. Although Tita enjoys being in the kitchen, she starts to question the originator of the tradition that has prevented her from marrying and that demanded her to look after her mother. Thus, the only way for Tita to express and enact her emotions and to escape from her mother's demanding rule is through cooking, resonating with Esther and Marian's reactions.

As discussed, all three examined novels of this dissertation comply with the "traditional construction of the category 'feminine', with its emphasis on motherliness, domesticity and docility" (Riley and Pearce 41). What is common in all the selected novels is that food, eating and cooking are used as means of reclaiming woman's body, identity and sense of selfhood that has been defined by man and by patriarchy within the boundaries and binaries regarding gender. Whether it is through eating more than enough or eating less, through transferring herself and her emotions into food or merely through cooking, the protagonists re-claim themselves, their presence, voice and power that have been denied to them in their relations, at home and within their bodies.

### **1.3. Conceptual Background**

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, women are oppressed at home consecutively by their husband, fiancé and mother and by the whole phallogocentric system that turns them into docile bodies, that denies them a proper workspace, that restrains them with marriage, obliges them to be mothers and that attributes them the role of a caregiver as someone who takes care of the house, specifically of the kitchen, her husband and children. This common point of patriarchal

pressure and obligatory social roles can be observed in all of the selected novels emphasizing the feminist standpoint of this dissertation both in terms of locating Esther, Marian and Tita within the context of patriarchy and in terms of showing how they challenge this system. Hence, as the title of this study indicates, the main focus in the analysis of the selected novels will be on providing a feminist reading, by concentrating on male-female relations and the representation of woman, mainly focusing on the premise that ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are categories or rather constructs created by the patriarchal logic and supported throughout the history of Western thinking. To this end, a background to the relevant terms and concepts namely essentialism, gender binaries and gender roles will be provided in the following paragraphs.

The major points around the terms ‘woman’ and ‘gender’ that this dissertation scrutinizes come from the discussions of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, that point out woman’s becoming her gender and the myth of woman or rather woman as a category. Woman as a category has been contested by feminist critics, especially through Simone de Beauvoir’s argument that “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (14). Thus, biological sex is perceived as an excuse for attributing gendered roles to woman and in turn both sex and body become the grounds and justifications through which gender difference is established and stabilised. As the individual is born into a system of biological-sexual differences, the material i.e. the body turns into the political i.e. male and female. Consequently, subjectivity is established based on the anatomical differences of individuals but is at the same time never free from the social norms. As such, the bodies become surfaces for gender-based articulations, roles, outlooks and duties in order to conform to the societal givens and expectations.

The study of gender from such a feminist perspective brings about a questioning and a problematization of the ‘embodiment’ of gender because “Western political theory is at once symbolically centred on the (male) body” (Threadcraft 207). Henceforth, male physicality is at the centre of all systems of existence meaning that a woman is defined through and by man. In the same line, femininity and female subjectivity have been experienced and performed by women so as to conform to the normative definitions and duties that they have in society and going against these duties means

being an unruly woman. Therefore, feminist criticism and studies on gender focus on de-essentialising woman with the aim of showing that as much as the female body and the female sex have corporeality, woman's role as lover, wife, mother, perfect housewife and cook are no more than social roles that confine and conform their bodies as the opposite of man. Beauvoir argues that "being naturally different from man ... woman is consigned to the category of Other" (104) and that "the relation between the two sexes is a relation of struggle" (245). Thus, Beauvoir's ideas show that gender is an enactment of normative roles creating a discourse of power relations which is what is essentially seen in these novels; an expectation from women to act as a woman, her roles being limited to the domestic milieu, her body to be docile, incapable of eating, young or ready for man to exert power over her.

In discussing woman as a category, since there is a necessity of discussing the centrality of man and the structurality of the system of gender, Derridean concepts from his work "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" (1970) will be used. This way, the binary logic of man/woman, the linearity or rather the strict structure of Western thinking will be discussed in relation with the heroine's condition. Thus, Beauvoir is a starting point to discuss woman as a category, while Derrida is referred to in relation with discussing the linear, binary logic of Western phallogocentric thinking which confines woman into a system that does not allow free-play and freedom to play with the term woman. Derridean binaries lead to the creation of further dualisms that restrain woman because later on feminist critics like Hélène Cixous in *Sorties* (1997) state that stemming from the male/female hierarchisation, the bi-partite thinking extends to multiple other hierarchized oppositions that include active/passive and mind/body. However, Derrida also highlights that while these binaries imply the privileged and domineering position of man, there is also a possibility of deconstructing these binaries and the linear mode of thinking. Derrida refers to this act as a deconstruction or de-constitution that implies using the means at one's hand -i.e. using the terms, the givens and the binaries of Western logic- in order to challenge and subvert the system (6).

As stated, all three novels involve a struggle against the normative constructs and binaries that define woman. This dissertation claims that women in the aforementioned

novels use the means at their hands, that is the kitchen, eating, not eating, cooking, or their bodies and the notion of being caring wives, in order to challenge the aforementioned binaries and to problematize the essentialised-normative construction of their womanhood and to re-claim their subjectivity since “Subjectivity, like gender, is a ‘doing’, rather than a being” (Robinson 11). Esther in *The Fat Woman’s Joke* denies her care-giving roles by leaving her husband and eating instead of cooking, overall, by going against the limits of the pre-defined domestic sphere. She further goes against the idealised body image through excessive eating. Hence, by challenging the norms and male dominance, she gains power and manages to voice her experiences. Marian in *The Edible Woman* uses cooking to mock domestic duties and to show how man consumes woman, thus revealing the central idea of phallogocentric logic. Tita likewise, uses cooking to reveal her emotions that she was taught to suppress and this way discloses the problems of her society’s traditional ways by rejecting the oppressive state of being a woman and having to stay within the limits of her kitchen and of her body. This way, by de-constituting the long-held norms and by destabilising their secondary position within the male/female binary, the heroines challenge and de-constitute the limitations of male-defined spaces and of their sexed female bodies, gain power, reclaim their presence, re-do and self-define their womanhood in their own way, which makes these heroines’ stories a feminist challenge.

#### **1.4. A Brief Introduction to the Novelists**

The following sub-heading will provide a short introduction and background to Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel. Instead of providing a note on their biographies, the introduction provided here will concentrate more on Weldon, Atwood and Esquivel’s feminist stance and the way they communicate their individual viewpoints.

The rationale behind choosing *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* was based on their overlapping themes, concerns and the way they explore the issues at hand. The selection of novels by different novelists and from different geographies has been a conscious decision in order to provide a wider

perspective towards the major foci of this dissertation, by emphasizing how patriarchal societies have commonly created woman as a category and have trapped her into certain norms. Particular attention was given to the choice of female novelists, knowing that such a choice strengthens the feminist stance of this study. Likewise, the novels selected are specifically from dates in proximity in order not to fall into a logical trap during the analysis of the novels through the lenses and the concepts chosen. The selected works are the debut novels of their corresponding authors, which is significant in supporting the rationale of the choice. Likewise, background reading and literature review disclosed that the selected novels all include an autobiographical strand. As such, Fay Weldon was a mother fed up with her marriage not extremely different from her protagonist in *The Fat Woman's Joke*; Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* is said to be reflecting her emotional state and her condition at the time of writing the novel; and finally in *Latin American Women Writers: An Encyclopaedia*, it is stated that Esquivel got inspiration from her family in creating the characters of *Like Water for Chocolate* (169). Although this study does not aim to delve into an autobiographical analysis, the common autobiographical strand of the novels, especially with respect to the portrayal of the female characters, has major implications for the arguments of this study as it brings real-life repercussions to the feminist issues at hand. The following section aims to locate the novels and the novelists under study within the relevant literary-historical framework in order to provide a background.

Twentieth-century female fiction and criticism revolves around the questions of gender stereotypes, female experience as well as women's unheard voices and stories. Women's writing and a strand of feminist criticism gained prominence as female writers not only voiced woman's experience but as they also worked towards displacing the long-held truths, contesting and shifting the prevailing ideologies of the time and more significantly of patriarchy. In telling and retelling the stories of women from a feminist standpoint, woman's voice and her story became the foundational aspect of feminist writing as an evidence and a declaration of the devastating effects of patriarchy on woman and woman's state within this male hegemonic discourse. In line with this perspective, the novels written in the late-twentieth century aim to reflect 'woman' in full capacity and to demolish the long-held notions about and against woman.

Criticism by women at this time aimed to establish a female canon and to strengthen feminist criticism. Thus, critics including Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar as well as Hélène Cixous highlighted that women have been left in the margins of discourse as well as of literature and agreed that it necessitates a woman to write herself into his-story. In the same manner Plain and Sellers refer to Margaret Drabble's words and indicate that around 1970s "the large amount of fiction written by women [...] bears witness that a lot of women started to worry about the same things at the same time, and turned to fiction to express their anxieties" (123). Hence, writing about women by women, and by writing, voicing their unheard experiences became the agenda of female writers. In this manner, the novels written in the latter half of the twentieth century present the female condition as regulated by masculinist discourses, and challenge these prevalent discourses and the stereotypes around femininity.

Eva Figs in *Patriarchal Attitudes* argues that women's passive and oppressed state is not a result of nature but rather a result of nurture and that nurturing has been governed in line with male prospects which at the same time has been strengthened by male-centered institutions (15). Similar to Figs' argument, the critical feminist works of the 1970s such as those of Kate Millett, Germaine Greer and Betty Friedan aim to acknowledge the patriarchal approaches that nurture women as passive and silent and so they centre their work around the cultural constructions and assumptions that prevail themselves within male-female relations, sexual affairs and love, marriage, familial relations and more specifically motherhood. A discussion of woman and the female condition also involved the question of agency with respect to her oppressed and passive state in society and the body that she is made to conform to. Therefore, the 1960s and 1970s criticism and literature saw a rise in expressing a range of female experiences, extending from women's responsibilities within the domestic milieu to her subordinate position within society whilst also focusing on how women live their bodies. The narratives of female experience emphasized women's conventional roles, her powerlessness and lack of entitlement to her own identity.

Against the background of these feminist concerns, women's writing became a significant source for studying women's condition under patriarchy as well as a powerful aid in hearing woman's experiences. Important as it was to lay bare the



workings of patriarchy and women's experiences under masculinist attitudes, as Moi states in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, it was likewise important to provide "female-role models in literature ... strong, impressive female characters" (47). Hence, the demand from women's writing was not only to voice women's experiences but also to depict role models through female characters who rebel against the dominant masculinist ideologies. Weldon, Atwood and Esquivel have written their novels in agreement with this demand by engaging with the struggles of women and at the same time by centralising female characters who wish to overturn the dominance of patriarchy. This dissertation argues that the novels under study are likewise in line with the concern of the post 1960s in their desire to centralise their female characters to reflect the anxieties and the first hand experiences of women. While narrating women's actual stories, the selected novels shift our understanding of women as passive, as mere producers of food, family, and home, towards an understanding of women as capable of violating the patriarchal understandings and as characters who are actively yearning for autonomy and power.

Although it will be superficial to call Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel's works as solely feminist, for their writings encompass various topics and concerns, one of the major foci in the study of these authors' novels has been women, and the authors' engagement with the issues of feminism as well as with male-female relations. In the same line of thinking, the chosen novels by Weldon, Atwood and Esquivel revolve around the experiences of their central female characters and while doing so focus on the female world from a similar lens and with the same purpose. A close inspection of these works reveals that although these works do not fully put away the term 'woman', they challenge the long-held views about womanhood in their criticism of masculinist values through common symbols and themes. The novels under study likewise help explore the way women are nurtured in line with the patriarchal norms and lay bare that these norms can as much be observed within the familial and the domestic and through the male-female relations encompassing love affairs and marriages.

Fay Weldon, a writer of short stories, novels and plays is known as an author who connects life and more specifically her personal life with fiction, and in turn Weldon's

work moves away from being literary imagination only and draws a picture of the reality of her times and society precisely around the 1960s and the 1970s (Reisman ix). Hence, Weldon's work and more specifically her fiction provide insights into the cultural, political, national, moral as well as ethical affairs. While her fiction is highly conscientious of the social and political, she is argued to be a writer who has a concern with "the relationships between men and women" (Reisman ix) and who is likewise preoccupied with the theme of "sexual politics" (Eagleton 260). As *The Fat Woman's Joke* will reveal, Fay Weldon's writing about male-female relations shows something essential about sexual politics but more than shedding light to what happens between man and woman, Weldon provides a feminist focus, since she puts forward a "women-centered worldview" (Reisman ix-x) from the point of view of women in her novels. Her narratives provide matter of fact insights into the actual conditions of women rather than giving sermons on the liberation of women (Roby 8). In addition, her novels establish a world in which women question and search for their identity (Roby 10). Hence, she voices the direct experiences of women as lived and problematized by women. Finuala Dowling refers to one of Fay Weldon's statements in which Weldon mentions that she wrote her works at a time when "the structure of society was weighted very heavily against women and their lot was very obscure" (Dowling 20). Thereupon, in her novels, women and women's lot retains the key focus and she tries to show, question and challenge the world sometimes from a single woman's and sometimes from different women's eyes, in the literary world where no writer attempted to voice women and their stories. In the same line, Weldon was courageous to say that "Nobody wrote about women: women's lives were too uninteresting" (Reisman x) and daring to bring forward the lives of women in their full capacity, writing equally about the daily routines and deeper concerns of women was a challenge to norms. *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Fay Weldon's debut novel is one such example of voicing a woman's discontent with male-female relations on the surface and frustration with gender roles at the core.

It is stated that "[i]n her first novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967) adapted from her television play *And the Wife Ran Away*, Weldon suggests a dichotomy between men (who seek self-gratification) and women (who seek self-definition)" (Dowling 19) as the major concerns and foci of the narrative. This dichotomy as well as the sexual

politics that prevail between her male and female characters in most cases take their source from the daily lives and concerns while Weldon's women treat these daily issues in a rather uproarious way. As much as writing about women and sexual politics is a matter of voicing the unheard stories, experiences, thoughts and dialogues of women, it is equally about "Weldon's disobedient female protagonists ... [who] assert the power of the Other" (Dowling 14). Hence, Fay Weldon's engagement with sexual politics does not just reveal the structure of the social world and the female condition but more importantly, "Weldon's characters repeatedly turn to 'delinquency' to escape the position patriarchy has established for them" (Eagleton 261). The delinquency of these female protagonists are attempts to show how women were made and labelled as Others of man within a male privileged world. Thus, Fay Weldon's fiction becomes a model of questioning and challenging patriarchal conditions and gender myths.

Initially titled by Weldon as *And the Wife Ran Away*, *The Fat Woman's Joke* is not simply the story of a woman who resorts to eating in order to escape from her unhappy marriage and the norms and demands of femininity. Instead, *The Fat Woman's Joke* reveals more than its protagonist Esther's condition as the novel voices a harsh criticism about the process of gendering woman with spousal, parental as well as domestic duties and rather jokingly challenges these norms around womanhood. Integrating playful remarks and witty statements that seem as a form of entertainment that her characters use are means of feminist criticism against the undoubted beliefs and generalising statements (Dowling 22). Hence, studied from a feminist perspective, this witty attitude and mockery is an attack on patriarchal viewpoints. Finuala Dowling asserts that "Weldon's strategy is to undermine the notion of a dominant logic and thus to disrupt and dislodge all power positions" (23). The conflict between man's world and woman's world, and the power relations between the two is apparent in her work and Fay Weldon in an interview states that "I always assumed the world was female and I was astonished to discover that on the outside it was assumed to be male" (Dowling 27), thus, marking the dominance of patriarchy in the society that she criticises. The joke of her novel that is under study is Fay Weldon's satire of a woman's escape from her conventional roles and the comfort she finds in food. It is remarked that Fay Weldon's earliest works set the tone of her later works and as such "[t]heir dark humor describes the experience of women in contemporary society, especially

the conflict between traditional definitions of womanhood and the search for personal identity” (Roby 10). Reflecting the social milieu and the ideological conditions of the 1960s and 1970s, *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, represents the range of experiences that women underwent. The novel revolves around the narrative of Esther with regards to her pre-marriage years, her marriage to Alan and how it came to a point of breakdown as she and her husband start a diet. The diet ends up with Esther acknowledging her emotional hunger and the barrenness of her marriage as well as her condition as a woman making her say out-loud “my boredom with the home” (Weldon 22) while it causes Alan to start an affair with his secretary. This hunger for self-discovery that leads Esther to desire and attempt to escape her situation is parallel with Weldon’s emphasis on women’s condition. As Esther escapes from the boredom and bonds of her home, namely, her marriage, motherhood and her domestic duties, she starts to voice her past experiences as Alan’s partner while also embodying her real sense of self through eating as she likes without having to consider the kitchen as a domestic space anymore.

Margaret Atwood, a novelist, poet, a short story writer and a critic, has been studied as a writer whose novels involve a criticism of and satiric approaches to the issues of national politics of the 1950s Canada, social conflicts that mostly involve women’s condition, and the topic of survival to list a few of her foci. Similar to Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood also started writing at a time when there was scepticism towards female authors in Canada, a time when writing was accepted only when it was acquiescent with and parallel to women’s duties at home (Howells 30). Thereupon, she chooses not only to focus on the wider political issues but she also centred her novels and her work on the power politics that encompass gender relations as well. Though not calling herself and her debut novel *The Edible Woman* as feminist, Atwood’s novels are much studied with a focus on her female characters, female protagonists and the tales that these protagonists have to narrate as “Atwood’s novels are consistently concerned with the stories of women (and occasionally of men) who are ‘powerless people caught in traps devised by the powerful’” (Howells 61). In writing the stories of women, her aesthetic merit lies in the ironic twist she gives to serious topics (Howells 1) and as such, her debut novel *The Edible Woman* is called “witty” (Gorjup 12) and as centring on a “conceit” (Gorjup 12) which is the cake that

stands for Marian and her condition within a male ruled society where she is consumed like the very cake that she bakes.

As Atwood tries to voice women, who are deemed powerless in the hands of the powerful, she uses a protean style which encompasses ironic depictions of both her characters and the conditions that she tries to concentrate on. It is stated that,

Atwood is a satirist, a caricaturist with a deeply moral vision. ... She is concerned with politics not only in the traditional sense of the governmental arena but across the gamut of daily life and human relations. She asserts: 'By politics' I mean who is entitled to do what to whom, with impunity; who profits by it; and who therefore eats what.' ... And, indeed, eating is fraught with political overtones in Atwood's work. (Lecker 5)

Hence, when Atwood writes of human relations, she satirises the power politics that is at work in determining the individual's position in society. Likewise, when she gives voice to a woman who has not had a chance to speak before, she also questions the power relations underlying the whole society and the male-female relations.

Atwood's female characters go through a process of distress and self-discovery against all the odds of their limiting societies. For instance, in *The Edible Woman*, Margaret Atwood depicts her heroine Marian in the like manner, as a woman whose "subjectivity is increasingly threatened by the social and cultural snares that entrap and almost destroy her" (McWilliams 75) as she goes through a process of searching for an "autonomous identity" (McWilliams 76). Taking this dissertation's focus into consideration, Atwood's focus on and criticism of woman's condition gains significance as her novels also mainly focus on female characters, their experiences and stories while taking an ironic stance towards the notion of women as preys to men.

Most importantly for this dissertation is Atwood's serious criticism towards the condition of women through a focus on the female body and a close inspection of the condition of women via women's relationship with food. As stated, "Atwood's female bodies are inevitably coded bodies that tell the story of the subject's experience within a political economy that seeks to consume them" (Howells 60) as a result of which "Margaret Atwood's female protagonists show marked signs of bodily unease"

(Howells 58). This can be seen in *The Edible Woman* where Marian loses her ability to feel herself and to feel her body as belonging to her once she and her fiancé decide to get married. Her affair gets hold of her including the way she behaves and the way she sees herself and it is stated that “Atwood’s fictional female bodies become battlefields where anxieties relating to wider power structures are written onto female flesh” (Howells 58). Hence, the female body in Atwood’s novels becomes the ground onto which cultural, political and most significantly patriarchal rules are written and likewise, the same body becomes the site through which Atwood’s protagonists show both their unease and their protest to their condition. This focus of Atwood has very much to do with the politics of power that is inescapably ideological and gender based. Atwood also has a conspicuous relationship with food and consumption. In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood’s use of the theme of consumption is said to be double ended;

‘Consuming’ is a psychological process, the ingesting and digesting of food, as in Marian’s reference to ‘her body’s consumption’ ... and it is a socio-economic process, the purchases and use of commodities, in which Marian is implicated both by being a young woman on ‘the market’ ... and by her work as a market researcher. (Gorjup 15)

The idea of woman as a commodity, woman as being defined by man so that she is fit for the market or in other words fit for the social standards is also accompanied with the idea of a prey-predator relationship in *The Edible Woman*. A crucial moment in the novel is a dinner scene that depicts the prey-predator relationship and the idea of woman being an object of the male dominated society. It is also after this dinner scene that Marian realizes the way that the female body is perceived as consumable and stops eating, feeling a sense of repulsion towards her own self, realising that she represents nothing more than flesh. Hence, Atwood uses the idea of consumption for a discussion of male/female binary and gendered power politics. In the same way, it is argued that in Atwood’s novel,

The process of formation and transformation that the protagonist undergoes in the novel are at every turn intertwined with consumption and consumerism, as the protagonist’s relationship with food, and in particular her increasingly diminished appetite, serve as indicators of the unstable state of her self-image and subjectivity. (McWilliams 7)

The food metaphor as well as the metaphor of consumption are telling of the power politics that Atwood is concerned with which she explains as “who gets to do what to whom” (Howells 44) and her narrative is a matter of divulging woman and man’s relationship along the lines of gendered power relations. While Atwood’s work presents the prey-predator relationship between the two genders, her narratives are also concerned with the possibilities of resistance, challenging the victimhood of women. Hence, referring to the previous statement of the transformation which the protagonist Marian undertakes by running away from Peter and then mocking the notion of femininity as consumable, Marian escapes the definitions of her femininity and rejects the metaphor of an edible woman.

Laura Esquivel, is among one of the most translated Latin American woman writers. Especially her novel *Como agua para chocolate* (translated to English as *Like Water for Chocolate*) which was published in 1989 has been translated into more than 15 languages, made into a film, listed as a bestseller, won awards and studied as part of literature syllabi (André and Bueno 169-171). Unfortunately, even though Esquivel and *Like Water for Chocolate* have been immensely popular, discussions on her and her novel have been limited to several foci, mainly focusing on the magical realist aspects of the novel, not straightforwardly addressing her feminist stance. The limited information on her writing about women and themes like love, marriage and cooking can only be deduced from the interviews done with her and through what other critics have said in their close analysis of her novels. However, it is clear that in her novel, she focuses on female characters and brings to the fore their lives, experiences and voice which make it possible to locate Esquivel among the two other novelists that critically engage with the condition of women.

Similar to Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood, Laura Esquivel also chooses discreet as well as critical ways rather than directly pointing at women’s condition. Rather than a straightforward description of the traditional and oppressive patriarchal society, Esquivel merges qualities of romance, magical realism and historical narrative while integrating feminine symbols, woman’s emotions and recipes into her narrative. Through the use of magical realism, Laura Esquivel offers her female protagonist a chance to challenge traditions and the commonly held views of patriarchy. At this

point, it is necessary to provide an overview of magical realism. As a mixture of the real with the marvellous, by bringing together unlike objects, Alejo Carpentier indicates that within magical realist works, “the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvellous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America’s varied history, geography, demography, and politics” (75). Thus, both representing the contextual richness of her narrative as well as supporting the mixture of magic into the real in supporting Tita’s emotional impact on food, Esquivel provides a narrative in which juxtapositions become a matter of not only the narrative quality but also a matter of contesting woman’s condition. Magical realism provides a chance to discuss how Tita overcomes her societies’ limitations because “magical realist writing ... create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this ‘reality’ depends upon” (D’Haen 195) which could also comprise of an emancipation of the marginalized and a de-centering of gendered discourses (D’Haen 199-201). Likewise, in Esquivel’s novel, the reality of gender inequality is de-stabilised and power is assigned to woman which is only possible through employing such magical realist terms.

The implications of magical realism as a juxtaposition of the real and the unreal also supports the narrative structure of Esquivel’s novel and highlights the thematic concerns that she has. Her narrative unfolds with a recipe at the beginning of each chapter, that at the same time corresponds to the mood and the state of her protagonist Tita while at the same time communicating her emotions. As such, it is stated that,

Further, by literally providing a culinary recipe at the beginning of each chapter and a promise for a new one in the next, Esquivel foregrounds the prescriptive element of socially determined femininity. As the recipes unfold within each chapter, Esquivel makes it clear that neither stuffed peppers nor femininity can be successfully created by merely combining a predetermined set of ingredients. (Dobrian 58)

Hence, the recipes are not only real guides to follow but they represent both the societal guides for proper femininity and the feelings of her heroine. As the recipes represent both the actual process of cooking and metaphorically represent Tita, Laura Esquivel criticises woman’s condition within the traditional-patriarchal society that she depicts in the novel. Her purposeful authorial playfulness and magical touch is explained as,



In her parodic stance to the romance novel, Esquivel does not condemn the genre, but instead criticizes the social structures that engender the need for these narratives. *Como agua para chocolate* subverts cultural constructs that prescribe a single paradigm of the ideal female as domestic, submissive, self-sacrificing, and disempowered. (Dobrian 58)

Therefore, by using recipes, Laura Esquivel's narrative and her novel's generic qualities twist and turn the social expectations and cultural prescriptions of proper femininity to reveal the traditions and the limitations that women were living against in the society that she depicts.

Compared to the context of Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood's novels, the literary context of Laura Esquivel arguably included more feminine voice and involved more space for women to write about and reveal their experiences. It is stated that the 1850s to 1880s was the time during which a genre of Mexican women's writing grew as women wrote "recipes, home remedies, dressmaking patters ... ideas on home decoration" (Valdés 78), hence, details on domestic life, on women's spaces and experiences were given a literary space. Esquivel's novel takes its inspiration and origin from this genre of women's writing, which although it was rich in voicing women's authentic experience in women's words, according to Valdés was still overlooked amidst the patriarchal Mexican culture (78). Later on, the female voice in literature altogether lost its presence as Latin American literary works written between 1910-1917 were grouped as the "novel of the Mexican Revolution" (Martínez-Ortiz 167) and were mainly written by men and woman's usual mode of writing during these times turned into only that of writing cookbooks (Martínez-Ortiz 167).

Laura Esquivel's feminism and her focus on the patriarchal dominance comes to the fore as her narrative foregrounds a woman's experience, story and recipes amidst a patriarchal historical setting. While *Like Water for Chocolate* is written in the feminine mode of cookbook writing and traces Tita's emotions through the recipes, the narrative also foregrounds the "traditional Mexican patriarchy" (Martínez-Ortiz 167). As such, it is stated that "the Revolution's opposing sides, the Federals and the revolutionaries, mirror the oppressiveness and the rebelliousness found in the Garza family household" (Skipper 195). The Mexican Revolution and the civil war that take place in the background of the novel work as signs of the conflict between a strict patriarchal

background as opposed to desires for liberation against which Laura Esquivel designs her narrative and especially the limitation of women. At the same time, by emphasizing the transgressive effect that food has in the novel (Skipper 141), the recipes that accompany Tita's condition and her emotions emphasize the female empowerment against such a patriarchal background. Thus, Laura Esquivel merges and mixes the feminine mode of writing with the masculine tradition and history and while doing so writes as a woman within the female tradition but against the backdrop of a male dominated literary period.

Laura Esquivel's novel could be situated in a literary context that focuses on voicing woman through recipes and cookbooks and at the same time a generation of novels that uses food as a means of communicating characters' emotions. For instance, Dürrin Alpakın-Martinez Caro in her article, studies a novel titled as *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* by Aimee Bender, which likewise delves into the topics that have parallels with Esquivel's novel. Written in 2010, quite some time after *Like Water for Chocolate*, Bender's novel also discusses how "people find weird ways of communicating with one another" (Alpakın-Martinez Caro 138). In the article, it is indicated that this unusual way of communicating one's moods and feelings is again achieved through food (Alpakın-Martinez Caro 142). Focusing on topics such as "Loneliness, feeling lonely in a crowd, lack of traditionally expected bonds of love and friendship among family members, lack of consideration for 'the other'" (Alpakın-Martinez Caro 138), very much similar with the emotions that Tita feels in *Like Water for Chocolate*, in *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* the mother's lonely state in her marriage finds voice through food as her feelings are transferred to her daughter through the cake she bakes. Hence, it could be said that Esquivel's novel had a great impact on the tradition of writing about emotions through food and of specifically woman's expression of her feelings through the dishes that she prepares or cooks.

Laura Esquivel's preoccupation with families, family traditions and the gender dynamics within the family is stated to have biographical implications. As such, it is stated that "Esquivel's family is a major influence on her writing: her grandmother taught her the medicinal and culinary arts ... her mother was a traditional homemaker" (André and Bueno 169). As the full title of *Like Water for Chocolate* involves 'A Novel

in *Monthly Instalments, with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*, Esquivel's background and knowledge in both medicine and cooking comes handy in depicting her protagonist Tita and showing the multiple layered meanings that traditional recipes and cooking can have. Supporting this idea,

Esquivel has commented in interviews about the importance of the kitchen – her grandmother's kitchen in particular, and her own kitchen as well. ... She observed the power of these women who became priestesses, alchemists of the home. (André and Bueno 170)

Hence, Esquivel chooses to draw attention to women's agency and power from within a feminine space. Having internalised the images of women in her family, Esquivel's writing about female characters occupied with the daily affairs of the house is surely a major significance in establishing a female focused perspective. As per the significance of cooking in revealing the essential feminine self, based on her experiences in her grandmother's, mother's and her own kitchen respectively, the kitchen for Esquivel turned into a place for "care taking, healing, and cooking" (André and Bueno 170).

Likewise, the women in *Like Water for Chocolate* have more prominence and power compared to man. Mama Elena is a single powerful woman who can even challenge the military mulatto, who can control the ranch on her own. Tita has the power to impose her feelings and emotions to even men, while Pedro can only act in accordance with what is told to him as he cannot even support and protect his love. It is through the power of the kitchen and her recipes that Tita challenges her mother, the societal prescriptions of femininity as well as the traditional limitations that her being a woman imposes on her. Food gives her power and her recipes become a way through which she challenges the limits around her being and her womanhood.

Overall, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel's works focus on their heroines' condition within patriarchal societies with respect to the roles that they are given in their affairs and at home while also narrating how the heroines' perception of the female body and their relationship with food changes as they realise the limiting societal demands that they have been living by.

## **1.5. Theoretical Framework**

The selected novels are open to various readings and yield themselves to be read through different feminist perspectives with the aim of showing how woman is created as a category and how this categorical representation can again be challenged by woman. While retaining a feminist perspective at the core, this dissertation does not adopt a single theoretical frame. Rather, the theoretical concepts that this dissertation scrutinises contributes to the discussion of woman's limited and limiting roles and their resistance to this subordination. In order to extend the scope of research on the selected novels as well as to provide a wider perspective to the existing literature, the theoretical lenses that this study employs do not come from a single tradition but intentionally encompass a wider perspective through the use of conceptual headings, leading to a possibility of approaching the novels from multiple perspectives and in a more critical manner.

The framework of this dissertation is built up as a result of bringing together concepts and approaches that can emphasize and scrutinize the common concerns, reconciling ideas and themes of the selected novels and that can provide a more analytical approach. The questions of what limits the heroines in these novels and through which mediums they are trapped inside normative femininity were common for all three novels. These questions assisted in determining the main issues to be studied in this dissertation and the framework to gather these points under. Taking the starting point as women's limitation, gender ideologies and the heroines' desire to redefine themselves, space and body as the main concepts of study have been divulged on since these concepts have a masculinist assumption and gender essentialism as the underlying logic but also carry a liberating potential.

What brings gender, space and body together is how by defining woman, these concepts draw boundaries and normative limits around the subject, confining the subject and more specifically woman within certain boundaries. Hence, the analysis of the novels through the lens of the aforementioned concepts will show that the way a woman behaves within a given space and within her body is a result of the cultural gendered meanings. In addition, the analysis will clarify that the female body, its

biological qualities such as the female body being bound to childbirth and care-taking, identifies woman with home and kitchen, thus creating feminine places. Likewise, the female body itself becomes a space that is conceptualised and territorialized. This way, the theoretical frameworks provided for space and body will centre around the fact that both are socially produced, also highlighting the fact that woman as a concept, as the other of man is a social construct.

The theoretical perspective of this study will provide an analysis of the common issues that the novels display. Thus, in order to discuss domesticity and the binary roles that are assigned to man and woman, space and more specifically home and kitchen have been taken as the first starting point. To expand the discussion from physical and social limitations towards bodily limitations and norms, body has become another focus. As one of the initial foci of this study was determined as food, eating and cooking, the rationale behind choosing the concepts of space and body has also been to provide a broader perspective to the connection between woman and food by discussing woman's domestic duties within kitchen in relation with cooking, and her body as the medium through which food is experienced. Thereupon, the intention has been to use food as an element that brings to the fore the normative constructs that define the limits of the term 'woman' as well as to provide a discussion of how the same norms can be altered or re-defined that will enable the heroines to define the limits of their womanhood themselves.

An extensive reading and literature review on the scholarship on food and food studies have been done. However, there has not been a major theoretical strand on food that fully covers the purpose of this study. Since, the focus of this study is to analyse food as a binding element between space and body and as an element in the stories that signifies femininity, that stands for a woman's societal and domestic roles and her relationship with her body, food will rather be studied in line with its cultural meanings and significations for feminism. To provide an overview of the feminist significations of food; what is significant in these novels is how a concern with the limits of gender both in terms of the places that a woman can occupy and a woman's body, coincides with how women use food, either through eating or through cooking. In this line, it has been indicated that,

Feminist critics have called attention to the ways in which women have historically been deprived of food in comparison with men and have been assigned the major responsibility for preparing food, among other domestic tasks, to the detriment of their participation in public life. They have also focused in detail on the linkages between the construction of femininity and the dietary practices of women, including the quantity of food eaten. (Lupton 11)

In the same line, as the heroines explore and question their gender and their situation within patriarchal societies, a shared element in these three novels is how this questioning is accompanied with an alteration of the heroine's relationship with food which has implications both for an alteration of the normative meanings of the domestic space and of woman's body. It is argued that,

feminist food studies has locked onto the domestic sphere as a conflicted site, one that simultaneously reproduces patriarchal values and, hence, the physical, intellectual, and ideological subordination of women and that serves as a space where women enjoy an amount of power and control far surpassing that which they exert over the public and political realms. (McLean 250)

Thus, food in these novels goes beyond being merely an item of nourishment but is both a control mechanism and a channel for resistance. Food has been a tool for controlling and disciplining the female body by imposing certain dietary demands and has also meant domesticity and providing nutrition for the members of the family. However, the novels' association with food in general, including food preparation, cooking, eating and dieting are not only used as indicating women's limitations in the domestic sphere and in their given bodies, but food related practices are also narrated as ways through which women recognize their limited condition and the limitations that they had in their own bodies. As they use food, they re-shape their spatial and social situations and re-define their bodies, roles and overall self-acclaim what it means to be a woman. Overall, while the concept of food is not approached from a theoretical lens, the symbol of food is scrutinized as a binding element between the novels and as exhibiting the feminist stance employed since food represents woman's condition within the domestic sphere and within her body while also becoming an aid in challenging male-defined spaces and the limits of a woman's body as well as an aid in re-defining woman in a woman's own terms.

## **1.6. Contribution to Existing Scholarship and Organization of the Study**

The main purpose in choosing space and body as the major lenses of this dissertation has been the nature of both these concepts being physical mediums defined as inclusive of their definitive features. Even while appearing far-reaching in their borders, space and body are limitingly conceptualised in accordance with certain norms and in turn code, define and limit woman to these norms. In the light of these concepts, woman's limited condition within society and at the same time the limits that are ascribed to woman's body will be analysed through the heroines of the selected novels. It will be discussed that woman is a socially coded and constructed concept and that the gender based binary oppositions limit woman's freedom leading her to lose her sense of self as seen through a discussion of the heroines alongside the bounded concepts of space and place.

The symbol of food in this dissertation is specified as the uniting element between space and body. Topics like cooking, eating and not eating in the three novels selected for this study are strictly associated with the heroines, leading to a questioning of home and kitchen as spaces that seemingly a woman belongs to and a questioning of the female body as limited by notions such as beauty and slimness. Hence revealed by the heroines' naturalised food preparation related duties and restrictions with regards to eating, space and body will be studied consecutively as coded with cultural norms. To this end, food in this dissertation, will be studied as a tool that aids in woman's oppression as well as woman's liberation while at the same time as a result of being related with space and body, food will be serving as a bridge between the two subsequent chapters.

Until so far, the selected novels have been studied by focusing on the representation of woman, the novels' feminist standpoint, male-female relations as well as traditional gender roles that the novels discuss, the significance of the woman writer on the narrative and food symbolism as separate topics of study. Yet these studies have not examined how each of these elements relate to each other. This dissertation on the other hand, seeks to study the novels in a new light and to offer a vital perspective that brings together the aforementioned topics.

Although Fay Weldon is a novelist who has acclaimed her feminist stance and has written extensively about female characters, there have not been enough book-length studies and scholarly articles carried about *The Fat Woman's Joke*. Therefore, this dissertation aims to provide a response to this gap. Though *The Edible Woman* has been covered in anthologies published on Margaret Atwood, this dissertation aims to provide a newer perspective on the novel through integrating concepts and feminist lenses that have not been covered and pronounced in connection with each other. Likewise, *Like Water for Chocolate* has generally been studied only from a magical realist perspective as well as in relation with Mexican traditions, rather than as a novel that also underlines female empowerment. Instead, the aim in this study will be to focus more on the feminine and the feminism in Esquivel's novel. Finally, at the time of writing this dissertation, there has not been a comparative study published on these three novels and novelists.

This dissertation is organised as five chapters. The first chapter introduces the aim, rationale and the framework of the study. In addition, a brief introduction to the novelists is provided in the introduction chapter in order to highlight their feminist stance and to locate their merging concerns. In order to provide a framework for the analysis of the selected novels, Chapter 2 is dedicated to the theoretical and the conceptual background of relevant scholarship. This chapter presents how the selected approaches and concepts are associated with the feminist acts in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*.

Following the selected conceptual and theoretical background, this dissertation then follows a comparative study of the novels under two main chapters that consecutively focus on space-place and body. Rather than organizing the chapters as separately dedicated to the analysis of the novels, the purpose of organizing the discussion under conceptual headings has been to provide a parallel analysis between the novels by referring to the common aspects and the coinciding thematic concerns of the novelists.

Chapters 3 and 4 will provide a comprehensive discussion on the concepts of space and body, respectively. Since it is through their spatial, social and domestic condition that Esther, Marian and Tita become aware of their femininity and of their bodies, the



rationale of locating body as the following chapter of space has been based on the aforementioned narrative and thematic case within the novels. Under each of the corresponding discussion chapter, first, the aforementioned concepts are scrutinized in line with their theoretical background to provide an introductory overview since each novel under study will refer to the selected theoretical background. Following the theoretical background, each novel is consecutively discussed from the vantage point of the selected concept. In these chapters, the novels are studied consecutively and by following a chronological order in order not to disrupt their narrative unity. The sub-headings of the chapters are organized in a parallel way to show the coinciding matters and are planned in a manner that after the discussion of the relevant theoretical background, the chapters first provide a discussion of the social construction of space and of body and then a discussion of the situations that this social construction leads the heroines to, and ending with an analysis of how food becomes a tool in problematizing and altering the conditions that the heroines find themselves in. The examples taken from each novel focus on similar concerns in order to provide a parallel analysis and perspective on the heroines' situation. The discussions in these chapters revolve around the essentialist argument and the creation of woman as a category and as constructed by the hegemonic and patriarchal discourses. Esther, Marian and Tita's position in their societies and their gendered duties, social and traditional pressures that they are faced with, their connection with eating and cooking food and finally their resistance to patriarchy through self-expression is forming the underlying element of each chapter to provide a coherent argument. Food as a symbol is discussed under each of these chapters since the centrality of culinary elements is both the binding element between the selected concepts and the novels and is a symbol that represents gender essentialism and the female condition. Each chapter also discusses how the female protagonists of the selected novels subvert the phallogocentric logic. Finally, the conclusion chapter provides a final discussion of how these novels were grouped and analysed together and how this dissertation revealed concepts, ideas and themes that are common in Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical background on the selected concepts and theories that this dissertation makes use of. After a brief discussion on gender as employed in this study, this chapter will then focus on a theoretical background on space and place, body as well as food as connected with gender.

#### 2.1. Gendering Woman

During the 1960s and 1970s, especially in effect with Simone de Beauvoir's famous proclamation in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (14), woman, feminine behaviour, the female sex and sexuality came to the fore and were conferred as the core constructs and constituents of the patriarchal society and of patriarchal institutions. This shift towards the representation as well as the acknowledgment of femininity and womanhood brought with itself a new focus, which was a focus on the process and consequences of creating 'woman' as an effect of and in effect with masculinist expectations and conventions. Hence, feminist scholarship centred around the notion that gender is not natural but is artificial and is a means of identifying a subject in order to ensure that there is a stable distinction as well as opposition between man and woman.

As much as saying that one becomes one's gender, Simone de Beauvoir studied 'myths' or in other words the repeated patterns that cultures refer and resort to in their process of gendering an individual.

Supporting this argument, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argues that in order to create the myth of femininity or the idea of a 'true women', a girl is,

filled with the treasures of female wisdom, feminine virtues are presented to her, she is taught cooking, sewing, and housework as well as how to dress, how to take care of her personal appearance, charm, and modesty; she is dressed in uncomfortable and fancy clothes that she has to take care of, her hair is done in complicated styles, posture is imposed on her ... she is told not to look like a tomboy ... in short, she is committed to becoming, like her elders, a servant and an idol. (343)

Thus, instead of affirming herself as the person that she is, the girl is grown into an already existing mesh of meanings and behaviours and so she becomes passive in the process of silently becoming or being made into a woman. As she passively embodies all the assigned parts and duties that are entrusted to her, the only active part of her disposition becomes that of her domestic endeavours. The aforementioned female wisdom and virtue constitutes her insight and later on her experience in steering housework such as cleaning, cooking and taking care of the family members' needs.

Beauvoir's ideas not just show how a woman is educated to grow feminine but her argument also shows how the biological and physical disposition is used as a matter of coding sexual and gender difference. In this respect, biological and anatomical differences were used as pretexts and ways of justification to distinguish between a male sex and a female sex. Hence, rather than being a natural disposition depending on one's sex and body, gender is argued to be an attribution of specific characteristics and limitations and to say that one is a woman goes no more beyond an encoding of the established meanings. These established meanings or representations of the subject as one or the other, as male or female has its roots in the structuralist thought. Structuralism, which Derrida calls as a "system of differences" (2), resulted in a creation of dualities that are dependant opposites, which imply that one cannot exist without the other but within which, one of the opposites is repressed so as to give primacy to the other.

Patriarchy is a system that depends on gender differences, and while it is through the difference between man and woman that one understands and makes sense of the other, within this system man is the one who has a "referential privilege" (Derrida 7). With this respect, the dominance of man in culture has turned into an incontestable idea, leading to a fixation of gender binaries which ensures that man and woman depend on

each other, although man is perceived as the powerful side of the binary and woman as man's dependant, making woman, man's dependant.

This aforementioned gender binary implies a male privileged logic which does not allow any selfhood and freedom to woman. Derrida in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" discusses that throughout the history of Western metaphysics, there has been a center that had different names and man has been one of these names. He continues by stating that,

the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of onto-theology – in other words, through the history of all of his history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. (Derrida 12)

Within the context of a patriarchal society or in a masculinist system of thought, 'man' has always been thought of as the centre, not allowing any free-play to woman as she can be no more or no less than how man defines her. Hence, "'Man' is the being who recognises what is other than, or different from himself in order that he may be the point from which difference is represented, mastered, and contained" (Plain and Sellers 217-218). Within this male privileged logic, woman is never allowed self-definition since gender meant a taking on of a pre-defined set of characteristics that is not only loaded with cultural meanings but also with sanctions (qtd. in Salih 8). In the same line with the system of gender binaries, another starting point for the conceptual background of this dissertation comes from Simone de Beauvoir's statements about woman as man's other when she states, "She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (26). When woman is determined as man's other, man always gets to hold the privileged position(s) not only in the male/female binary but also in the other gender-based dualisms such as active/passive, powerful/powerless, public/private, and mind/body.

In patriarchal societies marriage and familial relationships act as steady structures that maintain the male/female duality and the strict and unbreakable logic that locates man at the centre. A woman is gendered to become the care-giver of the family and the

house and as the union of the binaries, marriage confirms woman of her 'housewifeliness'. In addition, woman's nature, in other words her biology became a pre-cause and a mode of justification for defining her identity as well as for delineating her limits (Beauvoir 25). Thus, just like becoming a woman, the feminine duties have no essence but are rather defined by man with the purpose of limiting a woman's prospects. The study of the heroines will clarify that becoming a woman, has nothing to do with one's free choices but it is rather a process of subjectivation according to the needs of the masculinist codes and norms. Referring to the notion of woman in patriarchal societies, it is stated that,

'Woman' have been invented by men for the specific purpose of keeping women in their place, and in her deconstruction of them she indicates clearly how cultural myth operates in conjunction with economic and social factors to reinforce the oppression of women as a group. (Plain and Sellers 88)

Hence, in male-defined societies, not only the myth or the category of woman is created but also her roles are determined for her. In these societies, woman has been associated with the house rather than with the work outside, pacifying her and locking her into the house with the daily routine of housewifeliness. Beauvoir's standpoint clarifies that a woman is given specific purposes that comprise of keeping her in place and inventing her roles in accordance with the prevailing ideology and hence spatially and socially limiting and oppressing her. Betty Friedan raises a similar question on the implications of space for woman's freedom and autonomy, asking, "forbidden to join men in the world, can women be people? Forbidden independence, they finally are swallowed in an image of such passive dependence that they want men to make the decisions, even in the home" (34). Hence, a woman is destined to be limited as a result of her gender and is never allowed any freedom and autonomy in male defined spaces.

Just like Beauvoir's argument of gender as non-essential, Millett also focuses on the "overwhelmingly *cultural* character of gender" (29) as a study of the male/female binary shows that these are not inherent oppositions but instead they are the constructs of a discourse that centers man and attributes domestic tasks, maternal roles and duties of a wife to woman. It is stated that sexes are stereotyped as follows; "aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue',

and ineffectuality in the female” (Millett 26). Similar to Beauvoir’s arguments, none of these identificatory categories and characteristics take their origin from anatomical differences between man and woman but are rather based on social norms. These dualisms and sexual stereotypes are internalised by the society and pursued through different means of creating a certain female type. The analysis of the novels will provide a close inspection and will also disclose the ways through which these stereotypes are depicted and also problematized by the heroines and the novelists alike.

This dissertation aims to study the cultural character of gender by focusing on space and body as two constructs that culturally define woman, her position, her place and her experiences and that at the same time limit her. As such, Beauvoir says, less freedom means less awareness and the less a woman has freedom, “the less she will dare to affirm herself as subject” (342). Consequently, through a study of woman’s condition in the spaces that they are positioned and allowed in as well as in the bodies that they are kept as captives, the ultimate claim of this dissertation is to show that woman’s sense of self is defined by man, and to develop a self-acclaimed subjectivity, the heroines problematize both the limits of their given spaces and their bodies.

Susan Bordo, with reference to the ideas of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, states that,

The body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body. (165)

The body is both a medium on which culture inscribes itself and a medium that allows the cultural norms to persist through the body’s being a visual, biological and material existence that reflects one’s anatomy and thus one’s sex and gender. However, the theorization of the body carries with it the premise that the body has its language for representing what is being inscribed on it. Hence, the premise is that if the body is a material means or a surface for inscribing and representing the normative, then the same body can use its language to go against and challenge these normative inscriptions.

This study's interest in body as well as in space as the major points of examination comes from the idea that both space and body refer to ways through which woman is located, defined and at the same time controlled within society. Femininity, as Iris Marion Young explains is "a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves" (31). Following this statement, Beauvoir says, "She is treated like a living doll, and freedom is denied her" (342). As Beauvoir marks here, in addition to the role of pleasing others that limits woman's autonomy, woman is equated with her body, a doll-like appearance that is constructed as a beautiful and meek object whose reach can never be beyond what patriarchal society determines on behalf of her. Thus, as chapter four will discuss, gender and the female body are experienced in line with the societal expectations. Beauvoir also explains that "for woman there is from the start, a conflict between her autonomous existence and her 'beingother'; she is taught that to please, she must try to please, must make herself object; she must therefore renounce her autonomy" (342). Hence, in addition to the body as a surface that defines and delimits woman, this idea of Beauvoir explains woman's condition within patriarchal societies, within their families, marriage and relationships, showing her condition as defined by her role in caring for others. As chapter three will scrutinize, this role deems woman to domesticity and traps her into the private sphere. It is clear from Beauvoir's standpoint that woman is a name that is given to a pre-determined set of roles, limitations and bodies, that destine woman as man's other and that never allows her any freedom and autonomy.

## **2.2. Space and Gender**

Being a woman not only determines a woman's roles but also determines her position in society as well as where she belongs to. Consequently, a woman's natural disposition of becoming a mother has long associated her with care-giving and so positioned her in the house and the private sphere. Studying spaces and places that a woman is allowed in discloses the gender ideologies that define and limit women. Both space and place will be the key terms that this study will use but while space is used as a reference to the conceptualisation of social and cultural environments and the

categorisation of different domains as masculine or feminine, place will be used with reference to actual physical spaces.

In his seminal work *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre studied space from three perspectives; the perceived space, representation of space and representational space. Rejecting the fixity of space, according to Lefebvre space is produced as a result of the commingling of these three planes. To be more specific, Lefebvre discusses the aforementioned spaces as; 'perceived space' including spatial practices and the daily routines of a culture which involves traditions as well as modes of production that take place within that place; 'representation of space' referring to maps and finally the 'representational space' referring to space as a site for resistance. Hence, for Lefebvre, space has dynamic connotations and is never only a matter of physical arrangements but is an entanglement of spatial and social practices, conceptualised in accordance with what is being done in a space and the symbolic associations of these practices. In addition to the conceptualisation of space as enmeshed with social meanings and practices, place is described by Lefebvre, as a term that "correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute" (16). Indicating certain uses of spaces, each space and place could be said to express a set of meanings. Thus, similar with the conceptualisation of space, places are not free from carrying social meanings. As such, Doreen Massey defines place as "one way of thinking about place is as particular moments in such intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed" (120). Massey's definition of place refers to social relations and networks which within the context of this study refers to the interrelations and interactions between the two genders as well as the social networks that lead to a marking of places.

Spatial organisation determines spatial practices and relations between individuals in that space. Hence, for Lefebvre, space and social co-exist and "any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships" (82-83). Lefebvre's discussion of spaces as defined by and definitive of social relationships underlines that our experiences are likewise shaped by the spaces that we are located in. Consequently, being a man or a woman, being in the public or the domestic sphere are enmeshed with one another. The significance of space for this study comes from its conceptualization



and how a woman's and a man's place as well as their social condition in those places determine their social position as well.

Lefebvre argues that there exist spatial codes which allow spaces “not only to be ‘read’ but also to be constructed” (7). What is significant about these codes is that they not only define spaces as involving significations but also imply that spaces are not free from ideological codes or constructions. Hence, the production of spaces has been a matter of describing, encoding as well as limiting a spatial field with various meanings and messages. This process of describing and coding of spaces is at the same time based on an “*ideologically* dominant tendency divides space up into parts and parcels in accordance with the social division of labour” (Lefebvre 89-90) and within the context of domestic labour, this social division implies gender based spatial partitions. Furthermore, from the perspective of structuralism and binary thinking, power relations create two distinct social spaces depending on one's gender; creating feminine and masculine spaces within which only the relevant gender is socially fit and acceptable. Extending his argument on space Lefebvre states that “in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (26). Thus, space is the means through which subjects' spatial and social positions are determined, acted upon as well as controlled and similar to gender, space creates definitions and limits and turns these into norms to be followed within that space.

Spaces are at the same time conceptualised based on the gender of an individual, his or her body becoming the determining factor for spatial divisions as well as where that individual belongs to. As such, Lefebvre touches upon the notion of body as a space or rather body as constituting and informing spaces, saying, “The total body constitutes, and produces, the space in which messages, codes, the coded and the decoded – so many choices to be made” (200). Hence, Lefebvre signals that body is a space that is coded socially similar to places and that could at the same time be decoded through many other ways and choices of coding. Within patriarchal societies then, a woman's position in society is never free from her gender, and the spaces that she is located within and allowed inside is a matter of her being a woman. In the same line,

within the selected novels, the spaces that the heroines occupy and the places that they are allowed in are dependent on their being a woman.

What is more significant in Lefebvre's argument is his discussion of space as a social product which emphasizes that spaces, just like gender, are never free from the impact of the prevailing ideologies. Lefebvre states that,

Social space contains and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to – (1) the social *relations of reproduction*, i.e. the biophysiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family; and (2) *the relations of production*, i.e. the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social functions. These two sets of relations, production and reproduction, are inextricably bound up with one another: the division of labour has repercussions upon the family and is of a piece with it; conversely, the organization of the family interferes with the division of labour. (32)

Within a wider context, relations of production determine how a space is mapped and assigns relevant people to appropriate places. These appropriate places are determined as home for woman and the public world for man. As such woman does the housework while man goes to work. Hence, creating the notion of woman's place and man's place as distinct from one another. This in turn creates a hierarchy of relations, indispensably creating similar hierarchical relations within the family. Thus, Lefebvre's statement clarifies that social space or space that is socially structured and coded in line with the dominant ideology maintains the appropriacy of certain spaces to certain social roles.

The relations between the sexes, as Lefebvre calls it, or gender dualism, is contained both in spatial divisions and in places, effecting how the contents of these spaces also function. Lefebvre's reference to the family plays a significant role for the discussion of the spatial encodings within the domestic environment. Family itself is a closed space, designed to function in line with the prevailing ideologies and performing its role by situating its members to certain positions in relation to one another. Family and likewise familial relations within the context of the selected novels, act like institutions that function through the social divisions of labor. Thus, in addition to the hierarchisation of male vs. female, the workings of the family produce the spatial divisions between public and private.

In the same line, Doreen Massey sees the social as constitutive of distinct spaces and of gender distinctions. As concerns, in her work *Space, Place, and Gender* Massey points out that places are bound by dualities that encompass the hierarchies between man and woman, further arguing,

the conceptualization of space and place are also tied up with gender, with the radical polarization into two genders which is typically hegemonic in western societies today, and with the bundles of characteristics typically assigned to each. (6)

The physical characteristics and boundaries that are assigned to man and woman are used to clarify, maintain and most importantly materialise the impermeable binary between the male and the female spaces. Studying the spatial divisions of labour, Massey states that “Most generally, ‘the spatial’ is constituted by the interlocking of ‘stretched-out’ social relations” (22). According to Massey, the spatial is never free from the impact of social relations. Further, her reference to the spatial divisions of labour also encompasses gender roles and the division of labour between man and woman as she states that the structuring of space along the lines of gender “takes its place in principle alongside other divisions” (Massey 182). As will be explained in more detail in the chapter on space, Massey’s reference to ‘other divisions’ indicate the divisions that male/female binary bring about.

Spaces and places reflect gender ideology, i.e. how gender is constituted and preserved while at the same time reflecting the symbolic images such as motherhood and warmth that are associated with woman. As Massey argues,

From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood. (179)

Symbolically, spaces can carry different meanings and home is one such space that is associated with woman (Massey 9). Thereupon, maintaining and stabilising the conventionally male as well as the conventionally female. In this line, for instance, symbolically associating woman with the kitchen ensures that a woman knows her

place. In the same manner, not being man, women in the selected novels are limited to what is socially associated with the feminine and femininity. Henceforth, masculine and feminine places are places of gendered roles and experiences.

Following the theoretical background on space and place, the heroines' condition within their homes as well as the limitations that they are posed with when they desire to be present in the public space will be further scrutinized in Chapter 3.

While space will be discussed as a limiting concept that not only determines a woman's place but also stabilises her social roles as connected with the places that she is associated with, another parallel topic, body, will be studied in Chapter 4, arguing that body is yet another limiting concept that is conceptualised based on gender dualisms and that at the same time determines and limits a woman's social situation.

As a transition between the two concepts, namely space and body, Lefebvre's ideas on the connection between space and body carry significance. He questions the relation between the two concepts as follows,

Can the body, with its capacity for action, and its various energies, be said to create space? ... there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is place and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produced that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space. (Lefebvre 170)

In the same manner, this dissertation will examine body and more specifically the female body as a space that has limits, that determines a woman's place, that is both a material realm and a realm that carries with it symbolic and social meanings, its contours and roles produced in effect of the social meanings but at the same time capable of re-defining its feminine space. To this end, body will follow space as the second concept to study woman's condition by focusing on how a woman is limited within her body and how her experiences are at the same time defined by her body.

### 2.3. Body and Gender

As explored in the theoretical background to how woman is gendered, equally bodies are coded and shaped by culture and by society, and these codes are then embodied by the subject. As explored in the previous sub-heading, body is a signifying medium through which masculinity and femininity are shaped and perpetuated. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir has fervently argued that woman is a cultural construct and so her body is not only sexed but also culturally gendered. The female body according to Beauvoir is constructed to follow a set of pre-defined body types and behaviours. The vital point of Simone de Beauvoir's discussion has been based on the exploitation of sexual differences in claiming a natural sexual disposition to woman with the aim of highlighting her physical differences from man. As such she says,

A man's body had meaning in itself, disregarding the body of the woman, whereas the woman's body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male. Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man. And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called 'the sex', meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being. (Beauvoir 26)

Henceforth, the duality between man and woman prevails mainly in the conceptualisation of her body since woman's body is never seen as an entity of its own but has always been defined in relation with man. Within this duality of man/woman, woman's association with her sex and body rather than with the mind has also created the notion that to be a woman requires to fit into certain bodily standards which at the same time is a pre-cause for controlling woman and even making her docile. In this sense, a woman's body also defines her physical and social position within society.

Seeing woman as a sexed being, accordingly, bodily dispositions such as giving birth or fragility have been used as defining a natural feminine disposition. Therefore, a woman's sexually determined being in the world is used as a pre-cause by man in defining and limiting the female body. Enhanced with the Derridean binarism, women once again turned into the lesser other of man, since her biology and physical qualities made her the weaker side in the male/female duality which then turned into the conventions around masculinity and femininity. As such, the female body has been

constructed as passive and as representing passivity. In addition, the female body in Beauvoir's view is immersed with already established meanings which one assumes through his or her gender thus deeming a woman passive in becoming the feminine body.

In addition to all these critiques' ideas considered in creating a background to the gendered body, Susan Bordo and Elizabeth Grosz's discussions of the female body as a cultural construct provides another foundation for this dissertation's argument on female corporeality that will be discussed in Chapter 4. Bordo and Grosz' ideas also provide a parallel argument with the conceptualisation of space, because their notion of the body's conceptualisation is similarly in tandem with the effect of the social and of gender ideologies and dualisms in defining a woman. To start with, Grosz states that "Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific" (*Volatile Bodies* 19), and that in becoming a subject, a woman is oppressed as the lesser of man in the hierarchized oppositions and restrained by her body as she has no choice but to be named and labelled based on her biology and the attributed roles. This lack of agency in defining who she is and the passive roles that she has within a patriarchal society is expressed by Grosz as,

an idea that women's oppression (in agreement with patriarchs) is a consequence of their containment within an inadequate, i.e., a female or potentially maternal, body (it is not simple the social and historical context of the body, the social restraints imposed on an otherwise autonomous body but the real vulnerability or fragility of the female body that poses the problem of women's social subordination); and a notion that women's oppression is, at least to some extent, biologically justified insofar as women *are* less socially, politically, and intellectually able to participate as men's social equals when they bear or raise children. (*Volatile Bodies* 16)

As the biological differences have been used in order to create an opposition between masculine and feminine, the same biological causes are used to claim that if a woman gives birth to children, then based on the associations of her maternal body, she must also be fragile, vulnerable and restrained by socially becoming a body who has to bear and take care of children and family. Hence, the female body and biology is used as a justification in patriarchal societies for creating a female identity that is encoded as the care-giver and as socially lesser than man. Consequently, female reproductivity,

motherhood and sensitivity are associated with women and with her body, all of which make her weaker in the midst of a male dominated culture.

In this phallogocentric logic, woman and her body are never given priority, and the limits of her body as well as how she lives her body are constructed by man. This complicated upbringing of woman as subject to certain gender norms, bodily appearance and behaviour is elucidated further by Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism Western Culture and the Body*. Susan Bordo, equally claims that our bodies are "constituted by culture" (142) as she states that "[t]he body is not only a *text* of culture. It is also, as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Michel Foucault (among others) have argued, a *practical*, direct locus of social control" (165). Susan Suleiman puts forward a similar argument by stating that our knowledge and the way we perceive the body is bounded to and bounded by "some form of discourse" (*The Female Body* 2). Whether historical, political, cultural or verbal, this discourse controls the way we unravel and understand the body. Hence, the female body is both a ground-text on which patriarchal culture inscribes its norms and expectations but also the means and cause of controlling the individual. The bodily control and expectations also influence the female experience, embodiment, the way a woman is perceived and the way she perceives herself.

Bordo points out that the female sex is almost always associated with a certain female body that is slim and beautiful with certain female dispositions such as passivity and dependency. As such,

preoccupation with fat, diet, and slenderness ... may function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining 'docile bodies' sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of those norms. (Bordo 186)

Similar to defining home as ideally a woman's place, an ideal female figure is established through her body as yet another physical medium that patriarchy intervenes with to meet its own ends. Limited in their bodies, women are never free to determine the contours of their bodies and are made to continually appropriate how they look in order for their bodies to follow the social standards.

As a limiting term, the female body is yet another impediment that the heroines in the selected novels struggle with in order to challenge the accepted views around womanhood and femininity and is also a medium that is used by them in order to re-define and self-define the roles that are attributed to them. While the body is significant in determining the spaces that a woman belongs to based on her biology, likewise, the same body can be significant in defying both the bodily essentialism that she is subject to and the physical spaces that she is made to occupy because of being a woman. Thus, this dissertation will employ food as one means of challenging the male defined contours of the body in studying how the female body can go against the social definitions of a proper feminine body.

#### **2.4. Food and Gender**

Food is a noteworthy topic of culture, and has been studied with respect to foodways, food patterns, the cultural meanings of food as well as food production. Alongside its social implications, food, cooking and eating have also been a significant topic for its biological implications. Consequently, eating is a matter of nutrition and of feeding one's physical hunger, but it is at the same time a social act of marking a gathering of social relations, cooking for social instances or indicating one's social status and roles. While food related activities can have biological as well as cultural implications, food has also been a vital factor for the foundation of gender identities and relations (Counihan, *Food and Gender* 1). The meanings associated with food are not free from ideology since a study of this topic leads to an understanding of "Food and eating practices as always mediated through social relations" (Lupton 6). Showing a parallel with the cultural mediation of gender, food also indicates power relations, forming binaries between who cooks and who eats, or who decides on the portions and who is deprived of eating. As such, men hold the power to control the purchasing of food as well as the power to decide what a woman cooks (Counihan, *The Anthropology of* 11). Gender informs the way that we are associated with food such as being prohibited from eating more than enough so that the female physique can stay within the pre-defined limits or being associated with food and cooking because a woman is associated with care-giving (Counihan, "Gendering Food" 104) specifically with respect to the question of who cooks food and if food effects the body image of the individual.



However, in turn, it is argued that “Women can exert power over men by refusing to cook, cooking food men dislike, or manipulating the status and meaning systems embodied in foods” (Counihan, *The Anthropology of* 11). In the same way, this dissertation focuses on the implications of food for the social and the biological situations that women experience by ways of the cultural mediation of their relationship with food. The heroines are deemed powerless first because of their domestic connection with food and second because their bodies are being controlled by men with regards to eating and not eating. Thereupon, the converging point of space and body is food because while space determines woman’s relationship with cooking, body determines her relationship with eating and in both, this relationship is not a natural formation but is a result of cultural codings.

Food does not merely appear as a nutritive element in the novels under study, instead, any food related element works towards representing as well as problematizing women’s relationship with their roles and their bodies as governed by gender dualisms and the patriarchal societies that they live in. Boyce and Fitzpatrick in their study on the use of food in literature state that, “[t]he use of food in novels ... and other works of literature can help explain the complex relationship between the body, subjectivity and social structures regulating consumption” (3) and also state that food can help in exploring a wide range of issues that also encompass questions of gender. Food therefore, is not simply significant for it is always associated with female duties at home but it is also a significant image that corresponds to women’s objectification as well as consumption. Hence, while discussing woman’s condition, cooking, eating or other ways of consumption, dieting as well as attitudes about food will be scrutinized in discussing and emphasizing the male/female binary and in showing that food can likewise enable a change in the social structures.

Food is a determining element in defining a woman’s physical situatedness as belonging to home or in more general terms the private sphere and in defining a woman’s physical appearance such as the amount of food she is allowed to eat so that she can be called a proper woman. It is argued that “food is merely the most concrete expression of the general rule governing the construction of femininity: that female hunger – for public power, for independence” (Bordo 171). This study equally claims

that food represents the way woman as a category is constructed, the cultural significations that food has regarding gender and the female hunger for more space and for self-ownership of the body. Food, therefore, is a significant element for studying woman, femininity and how a woman experiences her gender. Regarding woman's connection with food, it is stated that,

The recent scholarship on women and food conclusively demonstrates that studying the relationship between women and food can help us understand how women reproduce, resist, and rebel against gender constructions as they are practiced and contested in various sites, as well as illuminate the context in which these struggles are located. (Avakian and Haber 2)

This study likewise claims that while a study of woman's relationship with food can shed light to woman's condition in patriarchal societies, focusing on how the heroines use food can show the way they alter and re-create the symbolic meanings that food has for women. Consequently, the liberating potential of food will also be discussed by focusing on how though eating, not eating and cooking, food enables the heroines to challenge their maternal and housewifely roles and enables them to go beyond the limits of the spaces that they are made to stay within and at the same time to challenge the bodies that are restrained by patriarchal ideology. When the heroines choose to prepare, cook, serve and eat food as they wish, they not only challenge the limiting domestic and spatial roles but they also change the way their bodies are restrained from eating or from expressing their desires. Thus, both the chapter on space and the chapter on body, the prior from a social perspective, the latter from a biological perspective, will claim that food is a matter of questioning who has the power and who is limited or likewise who has the power to upturn gender relations.

## CHAPTER 3

### **WOMAN'S SPACE, WOMAN'S PLACE: CHALLENGING THE BOUNDARIES OF DOMESTIC SPACE IN *THE FAT WOMAN'S JOKE*, *THE EDIBLE WOMAN* AND *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE***

At the core of Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* are spaces that reflect the dominant social discourses and that embody the prevalent gendered oppositions and hierarchies. The physical spaces that the heroines of the selected novels occupy are created in line with masculinist thinking and are coded with the conventional norms of masculine and feminine, creating gendered spatial divisions. As these women struggle their way out of these spaces, they also show to what extent spaces reflect gendered thinking and dualisms. This chapter aims to show and discuss how the novels under study centralise the domestic, i.e. the home and the kitchen as feminine places in order both to divulge in how gender norms prevail and are coded in places, and to discuss how the masculinist coding of gender into places is contested by the heroines of the selected novels.

As much as man is hierarchised over woman within the Derridean binary logic of structuralist thinking, the narratives that this study scrutinizes reveal the spatial hierarchy of the social i.e. the public domain over the domestic i.e. the private realm. This dualism of public/private almost always ensures that the social is a man's space while the domestic is naturally a woman's milieu. Such a conceptualisation and division of spaces is not free from gender essentialism and cultural norms, and does not fail in maintaining as well as reproducing the prevailing hierarchisation of male over female. *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* disclose this parallelism between the working mechanisms of gender ideologies and the social conceptualization of space, revealing space as a ground on which gender

ideologies prevail. Within the context of this dissertation, such spatial divisions and the encoding of gender to spaces do not fail in contributing to the identification of woman as a pre-defined category situated into certain normative places that work in line with and that prevail the conventional patriarchal expectations. In the selected narratives, the aforementioned spatial hierarchization is founded through marriage or male-female relations and configured in line with the social relations and conventions thus presenting the heroines as destined to be housewives stuck in not only their familial affairs but also in places where they have to perform their domestic merits. Consequently, men and the traditional societies frequently remind the heroines of the spatial divides and the dual hierarchisations that they have to align with and the narratives are preconceived with issues of domesticity, married life and care-work, all of which revolve around the home and the kitchen.

Space in each of the selected novel takes different forms, such as workspace, home and open-spaces or rather spaces that imply freedom and escape, and this dissertation will study women's engagement with and situation within these different spaces. The claims of this chapter are centred around the idea that woman's position within a space is perceived as natural even while it is socially constructed and that she is expected to be obedient to the norms of that space. This way, space and place contribute to the creation and endurance of power-dynamics between man and woman. Secondly, the social construction of space and the spatial divisions ensure that what a woman does in her assigned space i.e. at home is always secondary and limited compared to what a man does in the outside world. These claims are observed through the heroines who question their normative and passive roles, as well as the naturalness of their state as they try to juxtapose and trespass their physical limitations within the house and the kitchen. Since this chapter maintains a discussion on space being an active agent in producing, reproducing as well as ensuring gender dualities, the theoretical perspective of the chapter will centre around the notion of space as a social product and as producing the social, while also looking at the intersection between the conceptualisation of places and gender. As one of the foci of this dissertation is to scrutinize the use of food, eating and cooking in order to discuss the heroines' condition, the study of space and place in the selected novels mainly focuses on a discussion of places as signifying domesticity.

### **3.1. Theoretical Background of the Chapter**

Since this dissertation studies novels of three different authors from three different cultures, it is almost impossible to study space and place theories that provide a historico-cultural and contextual lens. Therefore, the selected standpoints will not focus on historical and cultural context and specificity but will rather approach space and place from a conceptual perspective mainly focusing on the working mechanisms of space and its relations with gender. For the purpose of this study, the spatial theories and the critics who have been selected to provide a background for this chapter are particularly those whose approach to space and place is a matter of conceptualising these terms as well as a divulging of spaces' and places' relationship with the social milieu. Within this chapter, 'place' will be studied in order to show the gendered division of physical spaces, while the more abstract concept of 'space' will be used to display the ideological mechanisms of spatial divisions and identification.

Space and place have been studied from the perspective of different disciplines including architecture, area studies, geography and the like, with each having a different focus and agenda. While space and place can be approached from any of these different perspectives, within the context of this dissertation, space and place will be looked at through the lens of Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey and to an extent Linda McDowell in discussing spatial divisions and these divisions' relationship with gender binaries. The discussion of space as a social product will come from Henri Lefebvre while the study of the intersection between space, place and gender will come from Doreen Massey. Thus, as the aim of this chapter is to discuss social divisions of space and the implications of this division with regards to gender, the scope of discussion here is structured by and limited to the theoretical perspectives of Lefebvre and Massey, whose conceptualisation encompass the social and ideological production of space as also aligned with gender oppositions.

Western modernity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a diversion of focus about space as a fixed entity into an analysis of space in continuous change and progress. Rather than being an empty ground on which human actions take place, space has turned into a rich medium and a place of embodiment, of lived experience. Rejecting the Cartesian and

Kantian notions of space as an ‘empty’ vessel and ground for human actions, critics like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Soja and Elisabeth Grosz argued that, “space itself is both a *production*, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world” (Wegner 181). Hence, instead of focusing on space as a fixed entity, a geographical concept or as the stable ground on which human actions take place and which indicates only the location of the individual, the study of critics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on space as a product of social relations and as an active agent in producing these relations. This new spatial perspective ensured that space is created and conceptualised through human activities and in turn influence and direct individuals, and that spaces are never free from power relations and ideology. In their perspective, space became an active force in shaping how and where we exist in the world, including both our physical and metaphorical positions, opening up new directions of discussion on how space can impact our gendered embodiment as well. In line with these discussions, space was understood and studied as a site of space-based experiences of an individual since being grounded on a place determines what one does, how one behaves and one’s interactions and relations with people. As space gained deeper meanings than being a mere stable geometrical concept, discussions of one’s experiences within a given space and one’s spatial position in determining the relations of the subjects and the production of gender binaries emerged. From a feminist perspective our space based being in the world or rather our designated positions have meant a further discussion of a woman’s social situation, her physical surroundings and her body as the medium of her experiences and the medium of connection with the outer world.

Among the aforementioned critics, Henri Lefebvre’s work holds a significant place in theorising space, rejecting the fixity of space and arguing the role of space in the production of the social. *The Production of Space* revolves around three main ideas by Lefebvre. These are; space is a social product (26); space is never a passive medium and is not free from the power relations (10); and the idea that space allocates people to certain places (9). Lefebvre’s main argument is that space can never be an impassive site (11), that space is never a priori nor free from the social, cultural and ideological

relations. Therefore, space is a concept that is enmeshed with networks of relations, appropriating individuals based on the relations of production as well as relations of power. Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, further suggests that spaces are formulated based on the male and the female principles which indicates that spaces are conceptualised as reflecting gender dualisms. A close inspection of spatial roles, woman's spaces and condition will reveal in this chapter that 'domestic' as the opposite of male spaces, is not natural but is rather a social product. Henceforth, within the context of this study, Lefebvre's idea that space is a social construct that is conceptualised in accordance with the prevailing ideology, coincides with the discussion that the domestic space is likewise not free from ideology and that within this gendered space, women are trapped both physically and socially.

In addition to studying the geographical organization of space and the mapping of places, scholarship on space and place also studies the spatial organization of social life and the limits that places pose to individuals. As Massey says: "The spatial organization of society ..., is integral to the production of the social and not merely its results. It is fully implicated in both history and politics" (4). Therefore, the production of spaces and places do not simply influence but directly produce the social. In *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey argues that the way we think about a space is in tandem with and also reflects the social constitution of gender and gender relations. Massey' argument is that,

space, place and gender are interrelated: that is, in their very construction as culturally specific ideas – in terms of both the conceptual nature of that construction and of its substantive content – and in the overlapping and interplaying of the sets of characteristics and connotations with which each is associated. Particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations. (2)

Based on this argument of Massey, one can rightly say that the way spaces and places are organized is in direct association with the social norms, traditions and ideologies around gender, affecting these and in turn affected by each other. Furthermore, according to Massey, the association of certain spaces with woman is also a result of the conventional images of femininity. As Massey argues, "that place called home is

frequently personified by, and partakes of the same characteristics as those assigned to, Woman/Mother/lover” (10). Associating women with these images naturalises her position as well as explains her situatedness within the domestic environment. Additionally, it is clear from Massey’s argument that the places that man and woman occupy are devised in line with gender essentialism. In accordance with Massey’s definition, women in the selected novels are not only associated with home but they are personified with maternal and nurturing roles.

As much as home is a nurturing environment, the novels under study also challenge these assumptions by presenting home as a limiting and oppressive place within which women are confined to their given roles, and most importantly are dominated by men. By representing the domestic as a space of conflict as well as a space of woman’s oppression by the patriarchal ideology, the novels reveal the ideological mechanisms that are at work because “All attempts to institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identity of places, can in this sense therefore be seen to be *attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelops of space-time*” (Massey 5). Hence, the boundaries of the house as well as the kitchen are not inherent nor specific to women only and similar to the construction of gender, patriarchy issues the limits of the specific meanings and experiences associated with places and this way maintains the dominant ideology as well as the masculine/feminine divide.

Studying space and place from a feminist perspective enables a new outlook to the presuppositions about woman’s place in society as much as in which places women are allowed to be present at. Her presence in allowed places opens up a discussion as to the places where woman is absent, un-represented or under-represented. Hence, the spatial presence and absence of woman is a matter of woman’s representation in and allowance to certain parts of social life while more simply it is a matter of woman’s association with places that are equated with the borderlines of her gender. As Massey argues, “spatial form is an important element in the constitution of power itself” (22). Because where one belongs to determines one’s relative position and when a subject is located in a place, the subject also becomes an outsider of the other space, thus creating a power relation between the two spaces. The place that one occupies and the space that one belongs to also determines one’s relation with the others, in this case,



where a woman belongs to determines her relative position and interpersonal relationships with the masculine world which is for her the world of the Other.

Doreen Massey's studies on space, place and gender lead to a discussion of identity formation and if one can form and shape one's identity as the subject of a given space. Her discussions clarify that places have an identity and that this identity is both creating and created by social relations (Massey 121) as well as male/female dualisms (Massey 9). So, to say that a specific physical place is a woman's or a man's place, not only specifies it as a gendered place, but also maintains that whatever happens within that space is in line with being a man or a woman or in other words, spaces also identify subjects as man or woman. Within traditional dualisms, the interior i.e. the domestic space has been feminized (Massey 10). Hence, while women have been restrained to the small space of the kitchen, men had the power to act freely within the public sphere. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, women "were expected to provide bodily care and comfort and the emotional support, ensuring that the home was a 'secure haven' from the pressures of the public sphere" (Lupton 38). Thus, women have been restrained to the small space of home and kitchen, with the presumption that it is only necessary for women to provide comfort for men who are burdened with the public world. Similar to gender essentialism which uses woman's natural disposition of motherhood as an evidence and a cause for relating her with care-work, spatial divides use the same causes to claim that the house or rather the private sphere is naturally associated with woman. This gender essentialism and the assumption that as a mother, a woman belongs to the domestic sphere is used in order to maintain the masculine/feminine divide of and within places. With reference to gender essentialism, Iris Marion Young focuses on the female body as a key determining factor for a woman's spatial position, stating that,

Her specific body lives in a specific context – crowded by other people, ... as a result of culturally specific social processes that make specific requirements on her to access them. All the concrete material relations of a person's bodily existence and her physical and social environment constitute her *facticity*. (16)

Biology positions man and woman as the opposite of one another and determines who belongs to where. This relative position and biological differences result in the

association of home with woman and with feminine qualities such as motherhood and care-work. Such associations do not only create an image that home is fit for woman but also ensure that women stay within the given limits. In this line, the following paragraphs will provide further evidence on the novelists' emphasis on spatial divisions and on women's place in society to better elaborate on the connection between the theoretical background of the chapter with the narratives' major concerns.

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, the authors display how space is conceptualised and how places are allocated through the lens of patriarchy. The novels provide instances in which women's restriction and limited life choices become a significant burden for them as they are physically located at home, dismissed from or disallowed in the public world. Whenever the heroines want to leave the kitchen or their house or likewise when they try to trespass feminine spaces, they are perceived as mad, rebellious and unruly. Hence, women as home-makers and as care-givers are only allowed to be in the spaces that are seen as feminine and domestic. In demonstrating the aforementioned spatial conceptualisations and the physical division of places, the authors frequently refer to marriage and male-female relations in general including male characters' ideas on women, women's duties, the places that women occupy and the roles that they perform within those places. Esther, Marian and Tita's involvement in different social attachments encompassing family, marriage or any relational bond that requires loyalty, affection and domestic care from woman turn out to be key in understanding their physical situation within those spaces, since these familial structures deem them passive and limit their freedom and capacities by locating them to home. As the theoretical background showed the significance of social relations, this study claims that the private sphere not only refers to the physical space of home but also involves family relations. Hence, while studying the novels from the lens of space theories, women's situation within relationships will also be scrutinized in order to provide evidence for the social construction of space.

Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel's interest and focus on the domestic as well as on woman's physical limitations have roots in the context of their narratives. To start with, the historical background of the *The Fat Woman's Joke* and *The Edible Woman* provide a significant testimony of their heroines' condition

regarding domesticity and woman's physical and social place. While the first wave feminism was a fight for women's legal rights, second wave feminism changed the focus towards issues of domesticity. It was realized that even if women gained rights on political grounds, the familial was still a space of inequality. The shift in focus from a concern with attaining equal political rights towards an understanding that the personal is also political, caused critics and authors alike to focus on marriage, the domestic environment, as well as women's duties and roles. At the same time the 1960s saw an emerging number of advertisements and products that were aimed to encourage women and housewives to purchase products for their homes, accentuating also the traditional gender roles and creating an effect that women are naturally born as housewives and that a woman's main duty was to her house and household (Reisman 2). A reaction to this domesticity, was inflamed during the 1960s with women's movements and with writers like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Betty Friedan and Fay Weldon herself. Consequently, a new genre description was used for novels that "describe women's untenable position as housewives and mothers and the social conditions that generate and perpetuate their problems" (Reisman x). And this new type of fiction was called the 'housewife novel'. The reason why there was a need to voice 'woman' from the perspective of the housewife and with a focus on what happens inside the house was to challenge the commonly held views of the time and of the patriarchal thinking in general. Therefore, starting from the 1960s, critics and authors alike put more emphasis on the domestic and the marital to study women's condition. With this respect, the novels that this study scrutinizes have a context that gives attention to women's domestic condition.

It was 1967, the apex of second wave feminism, when Fay Weldon wrote *The Fat Woman's Joke* and consequently in her novel, she voiced most of the issues that were brought up and at the same time were challenged during Women's Liberation Movement. Weldon states that at the time "There was a whole faulty expectation about how women lived and their prime duty being housework, to keep the house clean" (Eagleton 266). Therefore, in Weldon's words, domestic roles and woman's spatial position became faulty expectations and myths. To represent this social expectation that women belong to the house, Fay Weldon targeted certain female characters. Therefore, in her novels "women play subservient roles as ... impoverished mothers;

and betrayed wives” (Roby 3-4), which can be observed in the emotionally impoverished Esther of *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, who is at the same time in a state of tedium with her limited life at home. To provide a contrast with women’s condition, “Weldon’s men, on the other hand, generally practice selfishness and cruelty because of their predominant role in culture ... Men are insensitive fathers and disloyal husbands, leaving domestic concerns to their wives” (Roby 5). The sharp boundary between the genders does not just show itself through the different manners of man and woman but is also prevalent in the decision of who does what in which place. To challenge these boundaries, and to escape from the places and the positions that are pre-defined for her, Weldon’s heroine Esther breaks the rules of femininity; i.e. being a meek wife, a caring mother and a silent woman by her contestation of limiting spaces.

Margaret Atwood published *The Edible Woman* in 1969, in a similar context with Fay Weldon’s novel. Although Atwood does not directly call *The Edible Woman* as an example of feminist fiction, she indicates that her novel is an example of “social realism” (Tolan 2). With reference to her focus on a female character’s condition, Atwood goes on saying “That part of it is simply social reporting” (Tolan 2). Hence, considering the novel’s historical context, the social reporting or in other words the social realism of *The Edible Woman* corresponds to the concerns of second wave feminism. It is likely clear that in her novel, Atwood considers the debates of second wave feminists, encompassing Marian’s concerns with domesticity, her struggles in the workplace that underscores inequality between the genders as well as her right to reject marriage and motherhood. Like Fay Weldon’s representation of man and woman, Margaret Atwood in her novels clearly represents the different and unequal positions that these two genders hold in patriarchal societies since in her novels, she depicts women who are deemed powerless by male hegemony (Howells 61). Margaret Atwood has a self-conscious criticism of gender related topics in specific and topics on society in general. In a much broader sense, her fiction has focused on women’s victimhood, the “social structures as well as Western philosophical dichotomies (binaries) ... recurring themes, including men’s and women’s roles” (Lecker 4). While women’s role as seen in *The Edible Woman* encompasses marriage, motherhood and being a good and caring housewife, Tolan states that “For Atwood, the ‘cozy safe domestic’ realm does not exist” (109). Her heroine Marian likewise has doubts and

worries about the domestic realm which for her is claustrophobic, leading her to losing her sense of self.

At the time of Laura Esquivel's writing, there was a rising feminist interest and an awakening within Latin American women writers as they wanted to provide a close and vital consideration of women's desires, experiences, point of view as well as women's victimization (Pérez 213-219). To disclose the conditions that women suffer from, Esquivel's literary context centred around women's space; "the feminine world as it is represented by the home, which we understand as the place where women make love, give birth, nourish, heal, and die" (Pérez 214). In this way, Esquivel's narrative explored woman by revolving around kitchen as woman's space. It has been claimed that Mexican female writers "focus on the chronicle of 'everyday life', and their narrative is 'history' viewed from the perspective of an individual, a circumscribed group, or a family" (Pérez 210). As seen in *Like Water for Chocolate*, as part of everyday life, the narrative encompasses the history and the domestic rituals of a family narrated through the heroine's experiences in everyday life encompassing cooking. While providing insight into women's lives and centring around the reality of their world, there was also an interest in narrating the reconciling elements of personal history with the broader historico-cultural context. In this manner, Esquivel's narrative took its source from the traditional Mexican rituals that center around home while at the same time she used the Mexican Revolution as the backstory. These two different environments demonstrated the striking dualism between the inside and the outside, between the masculine world and the feminine world while also leading the readers to question their assumptions about woman's place amidst a political-historical background. In the context of such a clear line between the outside and the inside, the heroine Tita struggles between her love of the kitchen which at the same time becomes a symbol of the traditional society that entraps her.

### **3.2. Construction of Social Space**

Following Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey's statements on the construction of space based on a prevailing ideology, this sub-section aims to show that places in the selected novels are coded in line with social and traditional norms that reflect the

male/female duality and that follow patriarchal ideology. The discussion will specifically emphasize that such a division of space is parallel to gender essentialism and binary logic, and entail power relations between man and woman, leading to woman's physical and metaphorical entrapment to home as well as her denunciation from public space.

Historically, spatial organization and the conceptualization of space has been much affected by the material conditions and the conditions of production, defining the hotspots on maps as well as determining who belongs to where with regards to the geographically located means of production (Massey 22). While the spatial division of labour and the material conditions of production have been studied in how space is conceptualized and how places are physically mapped, gender and gender relations also held a significant role in mapping places in line with the sexual division of labour (Massey 95). As of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with industrialization and the need for labour force, man's new milieu became the domain of factories, collieries and other businesses. Hence, men came to be associated with the world that is outside the borders of the house. While men went to work outside home, it turned out to be a woman's toll and lot to remain within the precincts of her house and to fulfil her domestic duties to relieve men from the additional stress of homely duties (Bergeron 181). As a result of this division of labour that perceives man as the breadwinner, woman became associated with a selfless housewife figure. As such it is stated that, "Women serve, nurture, and maintain so that the bodies and souls of men and children gain confidence and expansive subjectivity to make their mark on the world" (Young 123). Stemming from woman's biological pre-destination of giving birth and nursing her baby, the supposition has been that women are natural caregivers, that the work they do is a product of and is driven by natural affection (Bergeron 181). Equally, women's' tasks have been devised as those that are related with nurturing and other housewifely roles and both the house and the kitchen are 'naturally' conceptualised as feminine spaces, resulting in a coding of these aforementioned spaces with the social norms and an imposition of a pre-destined feminine identity enmeshed with familial roles. However domestic work has been considered as inferior and of limited value indicating that "Care work, domestic labor, childrearing are viewed as secondary, quasi-natural activities of little intrinsic merit or social significance" (McNay 1). The ancillary merit

and limited worth of house and care work can likewise be observed through male-female relations in the selected novels.

The novels under study represent the domestic i.e. the home and kitchen as spaces that women are made to occupy either once she gets married or for she has to conform to the conventions around her gender. As women became associated with home through marriage, through their affairs or as a result of the traditions, they were told how to be perfect housewives and were instructed accordingly. The organization of space and the spatial division of labour as public and private not only determine one's physical location but also have implications for one's social position as well as how a woman is perceived by her society which is explained as, "The way a person is positioned in structures is as much a function of how other people treat him or her within various institutional settings as of the attitude a person takes to himself or herself" (Young 21). It is clear that the status of woman is a result of her physical constraints, her relative position to man and the structures that delimit her and that take away her agency from her. Similarly, in discussing the construction of social space, Lefebvre refers to two notions, namely 'demand' and 'command' (116), which is a question of who has agency and power in deciding upon spatial positions and spatial divisions in the production of spaces. Therefore, building spaces from a patriarchal perspective, not only physically limits woman, but also establishes a power relationship between her and man. In the same line, the discussion of the heroines will explore both their physical delimitation and the social limitations that they are trapped with and need to fight against as they try to regain their physical freedom and more importantly their agency.

Against the backdrop of a male-dominated environment and a traditional past that the narratives revolve around, the heroines are expected to act out the role of an angel in the house, concerned only with care work and domestic labour. Thereupon, marriage and family as social institutions are presented in the novels as the core pillars of patriarchy that construct and stabilise the male/female binary by naturalising the division between man's and woman's roles and places, hence, maintaining spatial divisions intact and ensuring that man and woman perform relatively different tasks within different spaces. With this respect, this heading will offer an analysis of the

spatial norms in the selected novels, by analysing the spaces that the heroines are made to occupy along with a discussion of marriage and traditional housewifely roles such as cooking and taking care of the family members, with the aim of discussing how certain patriarchal norms and ideologies such as house-work and care-work are integrated into spaces and how marriage and traditions ensure that a woman stays within the limited space that she is given.

### **3.2.1. Construction of Social Space in *The Fat Woman's Joke***

*The Fat Woman's Joke* is essentially Esther's story and a problematization of her condition as a woman trapped in her marriage and home, feeling weary of her roles. In this novel, the notion of proper femininity is equated with housewifeliness and motherhood, hence, the roles that Esther achieves through marriage, both of which mark Esther's entrapment to her home.

The novel encompasses its protagonist Esther's femaleness as a restraint that is imposed on her since her being a mother associates her with her home. For example, Esther's son Peter tells her, "You just be a nice cozy comfy mum and leave it at that! What more do you want? You've got a nice home and a good husband and I'm no trouble to you, and an easy life" (Weldon 92). Here, Peter voices the common judgement of patriarchy that the limits of femininity cannot extend beyond husband, children and home and that it is unreasonable for any woman to try and go beyond these limitations. Thus, being a mother is presented as an impasse that she cannot change and that makes her a prisoner to her home. This is also reminding of Doreen Massey's explanations of the encoding of domestic spaces as womanly and motherly. It is clear that through Esther's married state and her motherhood, Weldon depicts the social construction of home as a space that is associated with woman but that at the same time delimits woman, leaving her no choice and bereaving her of her individuality except from her wifely and maternal position.

As Esther realises that she is snared into her role of a wife and a mother more and more and that marriage delimits her spatial and social freedom, she realises her disillusionment and frustration. In due respect, in the novel, marriage is frequently



referred to as an institution and a concrete structure that is strict and limiting; an institution that delineates boundaries around woman's freedom. At the very beginning of her narrative Esther relates her feelings towards marriage by drawing connections between marriage and institutions, cities and states, i.e. social spaces that are ideologically conceptualised and that underline the male/female dualism. Esther's remark is as follows;

‘Marriage is too strong an institution for me’, said Esther. ‘It is altogether too heavy and powerful.’ And indeed at that moment she felt her marriage to be a single steady crushing weight, on top of which bore down the entire human edifice of city and state, learning and religion, commerce and law, pomp, passion and reproduction. Beneath this mighty structure the little needles of this feeling which flickered between Alan and her were dreadful in their implication. When she challenged her husband, she challenged the universe. (Weldon 10)

Here, Esther and likewise Fay Weldon criticize male domination and all the man defined cultural institutions like marriage that locate woman neither at the center nor at the top, but at the very bottom of the pillars of patriarchy, oppressing and neglecting her. Esther's remark explains the extent to which a woman feels herself crushed under marriage and the patriarchal system, feeling as powerless and defeated against the power and the stability of male-defined institutions which praises and gives power to the husband. More importantly, Esther's idea of marriage as connected with ‘edifice’, ‘city’ and ‘state’, marks that just like these socio-spatial constructs, marriage or any male-female bond is also a construct that traps woman within male-defined spaces. This contrast between those who remind her of proper femininity and Esther's weariness from being trapped into her married state is later on expressed through her rejection of her condition and leaving of her home which is both a reaction to gender based spatial divisions and a reaction to woman's social position.

In order to emphasize domesticity and women's entrapment, all of the authors have paid attention to the physical description of the houses and the spaces that their heroines occupy. Weldon gives a description of Esther's house: “Esther's living room was filled to the point of obsession with Victoriana ... There was an embroidery frame where it was Esther's habit to sit in the evening ... Everything in the room was dusted, polished and neat” (Weldon 47). In this manner, Fay Weldon also gives a reference to

the Victorian model of female confinement and the entrapped angelic wife figure while the orderliness of the room emphasizes the strictness of the patriarchal social system. Hence, the house acts as a space that normalizes Esther's limited condition.

In this novel the house and the kitchen occupy a central place in the discussion of woman's condition and the division of spaces between man and woman because Esther is generally associated with caring and cooking for her husband. Referring to how she spends her days Esther says "So much of my daily life had been taken up by shopping and cooking, and eating and washing up after cooking" (Weldon 90-91). Esther has a fairly limited role at home and it could be said that she has no merit for her family other than the domestic work that she does. Consequently, as much as being connected with housework, Esther is praised for being a perfect cook and it is clear that all her days are occupied with cooking and planning what to eat. For instance, everyday Esther rings up Alan's office and asks what he wants to eat such as; "Did he want an herb omelette and a tomato, separate, or the tomato cooked in with the omelette?" (Weldon 44). However, Esther's situatedness to her kitchen is presented as artificial and as part of a social duty that she has to fulfil. The artificiality of Esther's association with cooking is pointed out through Susan's questioning. Susan, Alan's secretary, who notices that the only communication between husband and wife is concerned with the meal plan of the day, questions this situation by thinking: "Why was it always dinner?" (Weldon 39). Within the framework of patriarchy and domesticity, the answer to Susan's question is clear as the dialogue between the husband and wife refers to the domestic duties that women have and the demanding character that men present. It is also clear that the only communication that Esther and Alan have is based on food, not allowing Esther to state her opinion on matters that are outside of her social space. In addition, Weldon emphasizes that even when planning what to cook, Esther is not given freedom to think and decide. Something to point out here is that while Alan has his office and his book to write - things that are out of the domestic sphere -, Esther has no other business than being in the house and planning the dinner of the day. Thus, while Alan can be in the public world, Esther's place is always the private domain.

Through the duties that Esther has to fulfil at home, Fay Weldon shows woman's limited spatial position. Similar to Susan's point, Esther also explains that the only role

that she has as an individual has been determined through food and food related things like planning, shopping and cooking as she says,

I am explaining how food set the pattern of our days. All day in his grand office Alan would sip coffee and nibble biscuits and plan his canteen dockets and organize cold chicken and salad and wine for working lunches, and all day at home I would plan food, and buy food, and cook food, and serve food, and nibble and taste and stir and experiment and make sweets and goodies and tasties for Alan to try out when he came home. (Weldon 21)

Hence, the novel clarifies the domestic space as restricting woman by defining woman's roles and setting the pattern of her days. As can be seen with this quote, Esther is always occupied with preparing and planning food which shows that Esther is not given any freedom even at her own home, that home stands for her limited condition. The spatial divisions sub-heading will provide further examples, but here it is clear that Alan has the freedom to go outside the confines of his home, his association with food only encompasses eating while Esther's is a matter of planning, which keeps her stuck at her home.

Esther's limited roles at home become even more clear when Esther and Alan start a diet. With this diet, Esther starts to cook less and realises that her days have been repeating the same pattern of cooking. Even Juliet, the cleaning lady, remarks that without anything to prepare and cook, Esther becomes a useless figure in the house. For instance, Juliet asks Esther: "Why aren't you in the kitchen? ... 'You're always in the kitchen while I polish, cooking'" (Weldon 47). This remark shows that the work regarding housework has been the naturalised duty of Esther and everybody in the house is aware of her association with the kitchen and with cooking. It is clear in the novel that "the sexual division of labor devalues forms of domestic and care work associated with women" (Bergeron 180), and this domestic work is seen "as a natural activity motivated by affection" (Bergeron 180). Therefore, the kitchen is not only the space that Esther is naturally situated in, but also the only social place that she can have in her marriage. With the diet, having nothing to cook and nothing to do, Esther finds herself in a void, feeling bored with her home, realising that until then she had no purpose in life other than looking after and cooking for her family. Consequently, Esther says "Wives are a miserable lot. I shall never be a wife again" (Weldon 101).

There is a sense of consciousness in Esther's realization that wives are a group of women, named as such by patriarchy with no happiness to seek. Her epiphany followed by a rejection of being a wife is at the same time a denial of fitting into the man-made gender descriptions. Thereupon, in the novel, being a wife feminizes home but at the same time defines home as a physical and social barrier for woman, proving Lefebvre and Massey's arguments that spaces are social constructs following the prevalent ideology and mirroring gender dualities.

Esther starts to question her position in her marriage and at home, which not only clarifies her problematisation of the social construction of space but also reveals the ideology of this social construction. Referring to the meaninglessness or the arbitrariness of her feminine duties Esther says,

Running a house is not a sensible occupation for a grown woman. Dusting and sweeping, cooking and washing up – it is work for the sake of work, an eternal circle which lasts from the day you get married until the day you die ... For whose sake did I do it? Not my own, certainly. ... To spend my life waging war against Alan, which was what my housewifeliness amounted to, endeavouring to prove female competence ... Was I to die still polishing and dusting, washing and ironing, seeking to find in this way my fulfilment? Imprisoning Alan as well as myself in this structure of bricks and mortar we called home? ... We would have been freer and more ourselves, let's admit it, in *two* caves. (Weldon 73-74)

While discussing patriarchal societies, it is claimed that by trapping woman,

within the narrow walls of their homes? They have learned to 'adjust' to their biological role. They have become dependent, passive, childlike ... The work they do does not require adult capabilities; it is endless, monotonous, unrewarding. (Friedan 248)

Hence, referring back to the argument on social space, limiting woman to the house, to the domestic duties and to the domestic sphere in more general terms, is an ideological construction and the working mechanism of patriarchy so that woman remains passive, under control and dependent on man for accessing the world that is outside of her domain. Likewise, Esther questions the sensibility and the rationalization of how housework came to be associated with woman. Her words emphasize the lack of freedom that she has in defining herself as her life consists of

how others define her, and her housewifeliness and selfless caring of others, being the core of her femininity. Just like in her criticism of marriage, her reference to home as a structure not only emphasizes home as a physical space but also underlines home as the space that limits her freedom and individuality. Thus, the walls of the house not just refer to the physical limits that a woman faces, but it also conceptually refers to the limits that her gender and that patriarchal logic trusts on her.

In “Wages Against Housework” Silvia Federici argues that being a housewife is naturalized with the aim “to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life” (77). Supporting Federici’s argument, throughout the novel, other characters remind Esther of a woman’s place and her responsibilities, implying that her housewifeliness is her natural role and her married home is the only place that she should seek to be in. Later on in the narrative, when Esther gets a house of her own and starts living alone to escape her marriage, her mother, son and friends pay frequent visits to her, expressing their worry about Esther’s mental health saying, “You’re all right as you are. You’ve got a husband and a son and a house ... What else do you want?” (Weldon 48) and “I think you should see a doctor. It’s not right to think like that. It’s perfectly natural for women to be wives, and to look after husbands” (Weldon 101). Thus, the other characters echo the roles that the masculinist logic assigns to Esther as a wife and at the same time reassure that her rightful place is her married home and that she should not be wanting anything that exceeds the boundaries of the domestic space. At one point in the narrative Esther refers to an instance when she searched for freedom from her spatial roles. She says, “I left Alan once before. That time it was easy. It was a positive act. I wanted sex, and life, and experience. I wanted things. I was young. I could hurt and destroy and not worry” (Weldon 157). While she states that her leaving of Alan was an act of freeing herself, she at the same time refers to the consequences and social implications of this instance as she indicates, “I have been conscious of a sense of sin, not against Alan, but against the whole structure of society” (Weldon 158). When Esther first left Alan, they were not married but they were only a couple. Therefore, even when Esther was not associated with domesticity, she felt that her search for freedom was a socially unacceptable act since by leaving Alan, Esther metaphorically left the social space that is reserved for woman or in other words, woman’s space that is encoded with gender stereotypes. This instance of

challenging her social situation is reminded to her by her mother as a time when Esther was going through a period of psychological crisis which ended when she married Alan (Weldon 160). Referring back to Simone de Beauvoir's idea that in patriarchal societies, marriage is depicted as giving a woman her social status (34), Esther's mother also thinks that once married, Esther gained the dignity that she has lost as a young, unmarried woman who lived as she wanted (Weldon 162-163). Hence, in Esther's society, marriage is presented as an institution that is stabilising the social space reserved for woman. However, contrary to the other characters, Weldon portrays Esther as a character who is aware of the limitations of social spaces since by addressing Phyllis, Esther says "You are not brave enough to be a single woman ... Your home is Gerry's home, bought with Gerry's money. You just don't exist without him" (Weldon 91). Hence, Esther criticises the commonly held view that a single woman is never safe, or that she can never exist without man and it is clear that Esther has realised that accepting to be within the spaces that man devise, means no freedom as well as no agency on behalf of woman.

### **3.2.2. Construction of Social Space in *The Edible Woman***

The construction of social space in *The Edible Woman* is initially clarified through Marian's notion of home as a space that is conceived and controlled by the society and that is at the same time controlling women. Symbolised through the landlady who lives downstairs with her daughter and whom Marian calls as "the lady down below" (Atwood 7), domestic space for Marian is a restrictive space that is regulated by societal rules represented by the landlady. With reference to the landlady, Marian says "she had never specifically forbidden us to do anything ... but this only makes me feel I am actually forbidden to do everything" (Atwood 8). Hence, from the beginning of the narrative, Marian is spatially and socially limited because what she does within the space of her home is always restrained and controlled. For instance, she does not have a separate bathroom and has to make sure that the bathroom is left in an acceptable manner, she walks upstairs to her apartment conscious that the lady is watching at what time she comes and goes home, what she carries in her shopping bags or if she is alone or not. Whenever Marian meets the lady while coming to and leaving the house, she says "I knew I was trapped. It was the lady down below" (Atwood 5), emphasizing

that she is made to experience space as a regulating and a controlling concept and as a concept that determines the limits of a woman's autonomy. The presence of the lady down below indicates that Marian does not have much personal space or spatial freedom, that what she does and how she behaves within the domestic space is always under societal control and that even in the very private space of her home, she has no privacy. Therefore, home in *The Edible Woman* is socially conceptualised as a space of prohibitions. In addition, gender is another significant factor in drawing the boundaries of Marian's home and in emphasizing that the private sphere is socially constructed as a space in which a woman is made to follow the social norms. For instance, referring to the landlady Marian says "when we first considered renting the apartment she made it clear to us, by discreet allusions to previous tenants, that whatever happened, the child's innocence must not be corrupted, and that two young ladies were surely more to be depended upon two young men" (Atwood 7). While the child's innocence stands for the norms that Marian has to follow, mentioning that a woman depends upon a man, underlines the fact that for a woman to position herself in a place she needs a man and likewise, how she dwells in this space should be regulated by man. Thus, Marian learns that places have rules for a woman to conform to and that these rules are defined by the society and are dependent on man, restraining woman from constructing and self-defining her own space.

Similar with *The Fat Woman's Joke*, in *The Edible Woman*, marriage is the key factor in causing woman's limitation and in stabilising the roles that she is defined through. In this novel as well, the notion of proper femininity is equated with housewifeliness and fulfilling the duties that one's male companion requires. Once Marian and Peter announce that they decided to get married, their friends start voicing the patriarchal ideology of marriage as bringing order and as stabilising the individual's place. As such, Marian's friends Clara and Joe believe that marriage will be good for Marian to settle down (Atwood 104), underlining the fact that marriage will not only define Marian's place but will also keep her bound to that space. In addition, once her engagement to Peter is heard, the discussions revolve around "enquiries about the wedding, the future apartment, the possible china and glassware, what would be bought and worn" (Atwood 136), emphasizing that marriage will define her a new space, i.e. the future house and place that Marian will belong to as well as the domestic

concerns that she will have in this new space. Therefore, her prospective marriage starts to trap Marian inside the private sphere. Marian herself starts to think about getting organized discerning “how to run a well-organized marriage. So much of it is a matter of elementary mechanical detail, such as furniture and meals and keeping things in order” (Atwood 124). Henceforth, marriage constructs her social space as a space for settling down, as a space that will occupy and trap her with domestic concerns. In addition to their friends’ implications on marriage as providing a better sense of order, as Marian and Peter get engaged, their relationship further organises and devises their roles within the domestic sphere, leading Marian to immerse herself more into the role of a housewife.

In addition to the landlady who frequently reminds Marian the proper use of spaces, Marian is further limited in her fiancé Peter’s house which embodies gender binaries and perpetuates male hegemony by positioning Marian into this space as the lesser of Peter. Although the narrative of *The Edible Woman* starts when Marian was working as a surveyor in a company that surveyed users about their user experience, showing that Marian is given the freedom of going to the different parts of the city to survey customers, Marian is not fully associated with the public space. On the contrary, her engagement to Peter associates her with the domestic sphere, since in their relationship, Peter assumes that proper femininity is directly proportional with being a considerate housewife. For example, small instances that look like Peter is asking Marian to do him a favour such as ““while you’re up, flip over the record, that’s a good girl.”” (Atwood 257), are actually instances when he commands her to do something along the lines of her duties at home and instances that deem Marian an obedient ‘good girl’ and an acceptable prospective wife. Hence, the domestic space that Peter and Marian share proves to be patriarchal, a space that is not free from power mechanisms, that reflects and perpetuates gender roles by naturalising woman’s association with housework.

*The Edible Woman* mainly revolves around Peter and Marian’s relationship and the new situations that Marian finds herself in as she proceeds towards a married future with Peter. Henceforth, the construction of social space and Marian’s positioning and orientation within the social world is very much dependant on her relative position to



Peter which traps her to the domestic sphere. Even though in her own home, Marian is not so much occupied with completing house chores such as washing the dishes or cleaning the house, she is made to take care of the domestic affairs at Peter's house. For instance, one time when they are having dinner at Peter's house, a dialogue between the two emphasizes Peter's expectations from marriage. Marian remembers the situation as: "We were sitting at the kitchen table, eating frozen peas and smoked meat, the kind you boil for three minutes in the plastic packages" (Atwood 73) during which Peter says "'Why can't you ever *cook* anything?'" (Atwood 73). Peter's attitude shows that even though kitchen is associated with woman, as a place, it is not under woman's control, such as Peter asking why Marian uses pre-prepared food but does not cook instead. Thus, both by being associated with care-giving and by being limited in terms of how she behaves within the given spaces, Marian remains trapped in her relationship. Marian's association with cooking and domestic roles also emphasize the power dynamics between her and Peter, as Peter becomes the one who decides their relative positions in their relationship and who clarifies the outlines of the domestic sphere. Henceforth, Peter's home as the space that they share is constructed through Peter's patriarchal ideology, demanding Marian to be trapped into her care-giving roles in the kitchen.

Furthermore, although compared to the other two novels, Marian is not seen so much as cooking or spending time in the kitchen in her own house, when she goes to Peter's house, she tries to make sure that Peter has something to eat when he comes home. Henceforth, Marian either buys or prepares something for him. For instance, similar to Esther, Marian explains the usual pattern of her days as,

Usually we went out for dinner, but when we didn't the pattern was that I would walk over to Peter's and get something to cook at a store on the way ... I didn't know whether we were going out for dinner or not – Peter had said nothing about it – so I dropped in at the store just to be on the safe side. (Atwood 64)

Hence, from the very beginning, their relationship is established in line with gender norms that domesticates woman and Marian has learned to identify Peter's home as a space that she is naturally assumed to take care of. The emphasis on a 'pattern' that they follow, which reminds of Esther's reference to cooking as a pattern that she has

to follow daily, shows a repetitive cycle as well as a continuation of the same duties on behalf of Marian who is held responsible for planning and cooking as well as care-taking. In addition, food preparation and cooking symbolise her limited social standing in their relationship. In similar other cases when Marian goes to visit Peter, Marian is again held responsible for kitchen related roles as Peter says “Fix yourself a drink. And one for me too” (Atwood 67), “‘I could use another drink’ Peter said; it was his way of asking her to get him one” (Atwood 257) and Marian knows that she needs to remember “not to leave out the twist of lemon-peel Peter likes” (Atwood 67). Hence, giving orders to Marian, expecting her to be responsible for domestic tasks and making sure that she knows his taste in food or that she does not miss out any domestic detail, overall, in her relationship with Peter, Marian is expected to assume the role of a cook and to follow the planning and cooking pattern as a natural feminine duty. A significant moment from the novel is when Peter organizes a party in his house and wants Marian to be there as well. Asking Marian to be the hostess of the party, telling her to “come on out to the kitchen and help me get things ready. Women are so much better at arranging things on plates” (Atwood 286), Peter addresses Marian to the kitchen and once again defines Marian’s roles and position as that of a care-giver in the face of all her friends. Marian cannot make sense of this new housewifely position that she finds herself in, incapable of relating with her presence in Peter’s home, feels impersonal, valueless and almost non-existent (Atwood 306-307), which emphasizes the constructed nature of spaces and of gender roles. It is clear from these examples that the only proper communication between Peter and Marian is based on food related domestic duties that are always imposed on Marian by Peter. These duties continuously limit Marian in her affair, leading her to feel responsible towards her prospective husband and causing her to associate herself with the role of a housewife even as an unmarried woman. Hence, Marian realises that her worth for Peter is merely that of a (house)wife rather than a person.

At this point, the physical description of Peter’s home is likewise important in showing the construction of social space and in supporting the feeling of entrapment that it leads Marian to experience. There is more narrative description of Peter’s home and more specifically of his room compared to Marian’s own home. Just like the physical description of Esther’s house as decorated with Victoriana, the description of Peter’s

house likewise becomes significant. Especially the decoration of Peter's room perpetuates elements of patriarchy such as pistols, manuals, and law books (Atwood 287). The emphasis on manuals and law books shows that his home is organized to represent stability and a structured logic, while objects like pistols highlight the masculinity of his place. In addition, the peculiar choice of objects with connotations of structurality and male power, underline the fact that spaces are constructed and coded by man in accordance with the dominant social discourse. In addition, the description of Peter's room's decoration reflects his mindset and shows that according to him, marriage is a matter of a proper division of roles. As such, Marian gives a description of Peter's room as follows;

She thought of the books and magazines on cameras that were part of the collection on the middle shelf in his room, between the law books and the detective novels. And he always kept the car manual in the glove compartment. So it would be according to his brand logic to go out and buy a book on marriage, now that he was going to get married; one with easy-to-follow diagrams. (Atwood 183)

While his room clarifies man's association with intellect as well as with work, the choice of books in Peter's bookshelf clarifies that Peter follows commonly accepted and followed guidelines to direct his decisions. The implication of these manuals and guidelines is that, marriage should likewise be compliant with certain ways and structures. Henceforth, his house becomes a key place in understanding how spaces are aligned with and devised according to gender norms and the impact of spatial divisions in guiding one's understanding of male-female relations and marriage.

While marriage indicates structure and stability to Peter, it at the same time traps Marian into the private space more and more. Knowing that space is socially produced, woman's place has been closely knit with her likewise socially essentialised dispositions as well as her gender performances. In relation with woman's social duties and social position that also reflects Marian's situation, Betty Friedan states that,

Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him, how to breastfeed children and handle their toilet training, how to cope with sibling rivalry and adolescent rebellion; how to buy a dishwasher, bake bread, cook gourmet snails, and build swimming pool with their own hands; how to dress, look, and act more

feminine and make marriage more exciting ... They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for. ... All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children. (5-6)

The whole ideology behind the sophistication of being a (house)wife with a house, husband and children to care for, was a desire to represent femininity as a disposition fervently to be wished. Hence, from childhood onwards, a girl is taught to grow in line with the demands of both her gender and the places that she can belong to. So, as much as she desires to choose the places that she belongs to and as much as she plans out her future within the private sphere, the essentialist outlook of patriarchy has posed her with certain borderlines, house being the primary space that woman has been associated with. Likewise, home is presented to women as a harmonious, warm and secure space. Therefore, like gender essentialism, places are neither natural nor a priori but are embedded with social meanings and within the context of feminism, women need to adhere to these spaces and to the given spatial norms.

In the same line with Friedan's claims, internalising the ideology of marriage and domesticity and starting to think that it is only natural for her to consider a future as Peter's wife and a mother of their children, Marian states that she has always dreamed of herself getting married one day saying,

Of course I'd always assumed through highschool and college that I was going to marry someone eventually and have children, every-one does. Either two or four .... I've never been silly about marriage .... As Peter says, you can't continue to run around indefinitely; people who aren't married get funny in middle age, embittered or addled or something, I've seen enough of them around the office to realize that. (Atwood 123-124)

Marian's words emphasize woman's condition within social spaces by indicating that if a woman does not marry, she is seen as physically and metaphorically unsettled or as wandering around as 'addled'. Thus, marriage is at the core of defining woman as a wife and a mother and making sure that she knows her place. Marian's words could again be interpreted through Betty Friedan who in *The Feminine Mystique* states that many girls grew up with no future in mind except from getting married, having a nice house and becoming mothers. As Friedan says, "she could never grow up to ask the

simple question, ““Who am I? What do I want?”” (61). Seeing marriage as her only prospect and learning to internalise that social spaces will always deem her as dependent upon man, Marian starts seeing herself only complete with Peter. Thus, another question posed by Betty Friedan bears significance in interpreting Marian’s situation. Friedan asks, “forbidden to join men in the world, can women be people? Forbidden independence, they finally are swallowed in an image of such passive dependence that they want men to make the decisions, even in the home” (34). Friedan’s question of whether women are people is rightly asked in relation with questions around female agency and subjectivity. While this is true for all the heroines that this study examines, it is even more apparent in Marian’s case, who starts leaving all the decisions to Peter. For instance, when Peter asks Marian ““When do you want to get married?”” (Atwood 107), Marian goes on as,

My first impulse was to answer, with the evasive flippancy I’d always used before when he’d asked me serious questions about myself. ... But instead I heard a soft flannelly voice I barely recognized, saying, ‘I’d rather have you decide that. I’d rather leave the big decisions up to you’. I was astounded at myself. I’d never said anything remotely like that to him before. The funny thing was I really meant it. (Atwood 107)

Hence, her engagement and her prospective marriage with Peter, metaphorically traps her and determines her social space as the lesser of Peter, as incapable of making decisions and as someone who is supposed to follow the ideological mechanisms. All in all, in *The Edible Woman*, being a woman, a man’s companion and a prospective wife are presented as naturalising a woman’s domestic duties, as keeping her stuck inside home and as also becoming social impediments, evidencing Lefebvre and Massey’s ideas that spaces are socially constructed by following the dominant ideology and the power relations between man and woman.

### **3.2.3. Construction of Social Space in *Like Water for Chocolate***

Traditionally kitchen has been associated with woman’s toil and her endless hours of unpaid service for her family, including meal preparation, cooking and serving. These food related tasks created the perception that womanhood must be executed in line with these domestic duties. Having to cook for the family members meant being stuck

at home and being denigrated as having no other merit in life. Set amidst the traditional Mexican society within a family ranch that is run by old customs, Laura Esquivel chooses a striking and subtle way in criticising the spatial divides as she presents how woman's condition and the socio-spatial divisions are naturalised in traditional societies. Similar to *The Fat Woman's Joke* in terms of the naturalisation of care-giving and cooking as woman's work but different from the aforementioned novel in terms of emphasizing woman's obligatory domestic roles even outside marriage and motherhood, Laura Esquivel points out the effects of traditions in constructing and coding spaces as woman's or not woman's and in keeping woman within those feminized spaces. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the aforementioned biological pre-destination of a woman's lot as care-work and her place as home is presented through Tita. The novel centralises the kitchen and Tita's connection with the kitchen from the very beginning, through Tita's birth. Her birth is narrated as follows; "Tita made her entrance into this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves and coriander, steamed milk, garlic and, of course, onion" (Esquivel 9). Although this unusual birth of Tita amidst the kitchen and into a scene of different food products is later on naturalised by Esquivel through frequent emphasis on Tita's love of the kitchen and cooking as well as "the sixth sense Tita developed about everything concerning food" (Esquivel 10-11), the magical realist nature of *Like Water for Chocolate* as seen through this instance of Tita's birth opens up a possibility of discussion since as previously indicated, magical realism also brings about and voices the marginalized (D'Haen 200). Read from a feminist perspective with regards to the framework of this study, Tita's birth into the kitchen corresponds to the naturalisation of the domestic as women's place. In addition, Tita's birth indicates a deterministic attitude for her entrapment within the domestic space that she is pre-destined to and the traditions that she needs to abide by, while also being a sardonic attack on the traditional-patriarchal Mexican society that Esquivel alludes to in her novel. Her attack emphasizes the phallogocentric nature of this traditional society, pointing out that identifying a place with woman and keeping her in that space is an ideological mechanism to maintain the male/female binary.

In Esquivel's narrative, spatial organization and what is allowed in a given space is defined by the traditional society and the customs that Tita is subject to. Born into De

la Garza family, and subject to its' traditions, Tita is physically, emotionally and psychologically suppressed into her given space which does not exceed beyond the physical boundaries of the kitchen. Although Tita very much likes being in the kitchen which is labelled as "Tita's world" (Esquivel 11), the narrative signals that placing Tita in this place is Mama Elena's way of entrapping and limiting her youngest girl with the traditions as well as expelling her from anything that has to do with the outside world. For instance, she is "forbidden to play with her sisters in her own world" (Esquivel 12). Although Tita is likely equal with her sisters on the grounds of her gender, her mother's strict prohibition of their comingling emphasizes the traditional divisions and binaries that she attests to. Tita's birth, her natural association with and her love for the kitchen later on turn into a major conflict in the narrative as the kitchen and cooking turn into mediums of Tita's repression and her search for freedom.

*Like Water for Chocolate* is set in a ranch that is the home of Tita and her family and the narrative revolves around the long-held family tradition of De la Garza family that Mama Elena, Tita's mother, tries to follow. This family tradition is a "repression that had flowed over the family" (Esquivel 13) which Tita calls as "an inhuman tradition" (Esquivel 137), a "cursed tradition" (Esquivel 193) and their society is one in which people talk about the "bad things that happen to women who disobey their parents and masters and leave the house" (Esquivel 116). According to this tradition, the youngest daughter can neither marry nor leave her house for she has to look after her mother till the day her mother dies. If she leaves the house, just like Tita's sister Gertrudis does, she is labelled as disobedient. As a consequence of this family tradition Tita is prevented from marrying her love Pedro and has to watch him marry her sister Rosaura instead, all of which imply how Tita's society has constructed spaces as having traditional boundaries that cannot easily be trespassed. As the narrative proceeds and as Tita starts feeling love towards Pedro, she also realises how limiting her situation is, and "the realization of her fate struck her as forcible as her tears struck the table" (Esquivel 14). For Tita, marriage is something that she yearns for throughout the narrative and it could be said that compared to her life with Mama Elena, marriage for Tita represents an escape from her mother's rule, an escape from her traditional roles, and at the same time marriage stands for the fulfilment of her desires which lie beyond the traditions of her mother. Hence, compared to the other two novels, marriage in *Like*

*Water for Chocolate* is not represented as limiting Tita. Instead, it is the traditional family structure that limits Tita and that traps her into her house by preventing her from marriage. Thus, Tita's being in the kitchen, the only place that she is allowed in, starts to represent to her the limiting condition that she has to suffer and the traditions that she has to abide by. As a result, Tita starts to question the originator of this tradition that deems her both as an unmarried housewife and as the care-taker of the household.

Tita is victimized as a result of the old practice that targets women only and that disregards her freedom and agency in choosing and moving between different places. As seen, the kitchen implies woman's entrapment and Esquivel points out the fact that this limiting and feminine space is founded neither naturally, nor instinctually but is rather a product of the social structures. As argued, places assign relevant duties to individuals. Likewise, later on in the narrative, Tita is given the role of the "official ranch cook" (Esquivel 46) who even has to bake the wedding cake of Pedro and Rosaura. Her newly acclaimed title does not give her any privilege or power in her family or in the society because she continues to be held captive by the same traditions. Hence, it could be said that the official title that Tita gains as 'the ranch cook' is a rationalisation of her social roles rather than a privileging of Tita. Although "Tita was the best qualified of all the women in the house to fill the vacant post in the kitchen" (Esquivel 45) and is herself pleased to receive the post, the fact that this is a traditional job and the only thing that she is allowed to, is fitting to the gendered limitations rather than being a praise of her abilities. Henceforth, this romantic description of the kitchen as Tita's world, as well as Tita's acceptance of becoming a cook, are in reality references to her limited condition.

As indicated, the traditional demand of care-work that keeps woman within the house also stabilises her position. In addition to Tita's abilities to cook great meals, the images that she is associated with, especially, her motherly and tender behaviour to her nephew and niece and her obedience to her mother at the beginning of the novel, are all qualities that are traditionally feminine. Likewise, by the very nature of the tradition that her mother follows, Tita also has to fulfil other care-work duties which are composed of but are not limited to cooking, extending to preparing Mama Elena's



ritual-like bath, as well as washing the clothes and cleaning the chickens' lattice (Esquivel 86). These domestic tasks are followed by Tita in a ritualistic manner, emphasizing their constructed nature. If Tita does not fulfil her domestic duties properly or if anything demanded is missing, she is met with Mama Elena's reproaches, her "authoritarian voice" (Esquivel 29) and her mother's frequent reminder "'I won't stand for disobedience'" (Esquivel 28). It is clear that trapping Tita to the ranch and to the kitchen has not only determined her role and her position in her family and in her society but also clarified how others treat her.

In this traditional world that Esquivel depicts, while it looks like Tita is given freedom to prepare and cook any dish that she wants with a variety of ingredients, even when cooking, she is restricted by her mother which resembles the phone calls between Alan and Esther. Throughout the narrative, Tita tries to satisfy her mother and her family, following the long-approved recipes and also making sure that what she cooks fits to the significance of the day or the wishes of her family members. However, similar to the reproaches that Esther is met with, with regards to her domestic work, Tita is also left in vain as it is almost impossible to get her mother's approval. As such, being constantly criticised by her mother Tita says,

That was a familiar feeling; it was like the fear she felt when she was cooking and didn't follow a recipe to the letter. She was always sure when she did it that Mama Elena would find out and, instead of congratulating her on her creativity, give her a terrible tongue-lashing for disobeying the rules. (Esquivel 179)

Tita holds a secondary position even at her home, being aware that it is Mama Elena who makes decisions even when Tita is the official cook. In addition, even though it looks like Tita is given a place of her own to control and to feel a sense of belonging, she is being controlled and restrained within the limited space of the kitchen because even changing the ingredients of a recipe is a decision that Tita must not make on her own. Thus, it could be said that the traditions that keep woman within the domestic environment aim to maintain control by pre-defining and also limiting what a woman does in the given space and it is clear that kitchen as a feminized place is not fully under a woman's control but is very much controlled by the social norms. Later on in the narrative, Tita's leaving with Dr. John becomes a major point in further

scrutinizing the constructed nature of spaces because only when Tita leaves the ranch and starts living with Dr. John, she realises that back at home, she has done nothing except from cooking, knowing that “At her mother’s, what she had to do with her hands was strictly determined, no questions asked” (Esquivel 98). As indicated in the narrative of Tita’s thought process, what she needs to do has always been decided upon by her mother, showing the constructed nature of kitchen and the relative position that it has assigned to Tita as a cook with no control over her decisions, overall leaving her with no agency.

It was stated that spatial divisions also correspond to power relations between genders. Mama Elena, who stands for patriarchy and the customs of her society is the strict, authoritarian, masculine figure who defines but at the same time regulates the limits of her ranch. While the focus here is more on the heroine Tita and the traditions and norms that keep her inside the socially defined spaces, her sisters Rosaura and Gertrudis are likewise bound to the social codings that decide where they can belong to or what happens if they want to go outside these spaces. The de la Garza daughters are not given any freedom of choice and agency. Their mother not only defines where Tita belongs to within the world and within the ranch, but she also defines and proclaims where her daughters belong to in their society since it is also her who decides upon Rosaura’s marriage. While Tita is associated with the kitchen and cooking, Rosaura is associated with becoming a wife and a mother, thus through Tita and Rosaura, Mama Elena encodes the social roles that a woman should follow. Gertrudis, who is not assigned a social space or role is the first one to revolt to her mother. Running away with a man and so leaving her home, she disobeys her mother, who then burns Gertrudis’ birth certificate. Therefore, there is also an implication that when women are not limited with their roles and with feminine spaces like in Tita and Rosaura’s case, it is inevitable for them to be deemed as unruly.

Compared to Weldon and Atwood’s novels, even though it looks like Esquivel’s novel lacks a male character who decides on what a woman needs to do or where a woman belongs to, the traditions and the oppressive approach that Mama Elena purports is no different than the patriarchal state of affairs. Mama Elena’s association with patriarchy is marked by herself as she says “I’ve never needed a man for anything; I’ve done all

right with my ranch and my daughters all by myself. Men aren't that important in this life" (Esquivel 74). While it can be argued that Mama Elena is revolutionary in her statement against men's unimportance, the ideology and the traditions that she stands for replace the missing spot of a male hierarchy in her home. As the matriarch who supports and protects gender-based spatial distributions, her assumption of the masculine behaviour demonstrates the power relations and shows gender dualisms at work. She is the symbol of the masculine world; hence she holds power over who belongs to where. Her position, read as the position of a patriarch, is further clarified through the distance that she places between herself and her daughter Tita. Mama Elena has dissociated herself from food, such as cooking and feeding her family, and from any maternal feeling that food might have. Her only relationship with food and with the kitchen is that of controlling what Tita has done. As she dissociates herself from food, she also attains a masculine role within the household. Laura Esquivel herself emphasizes the role of Mama Elena and how she represents the patriarchal traditions in an interview, saying that,

I choose the mother to represent this hierarchy that you speak of. As the head of the family, she transmits the tradition ... I see the mother as being equal to the masculine world and masculine repression, not feminine. Mama Elena is the one who wants to impose norms and a certain social organization. (Loewenstein 594)

It is clear from Laura Esquivel's statement that Mama Elena stands not only for the world of traditions but also for the male world and patriarchy, imposing a certain organization, following the spatial divisions as the masculine world and the feminine world. Henceforth, standing for patriarchy, she tries to maintain the organization of the two separate worlds that reign in the novel and that perpetuate the binary relationship between man and woman. It is clear that, through the masculine world that Mama Elena stands for, in Esquivel's novel, family plays the role of a patriarchal institution and works to trap women to the domestic environment.

### **3.3. Spatial and Social Divisions**

Spaces and places are embroiled with and apportioned based on social meanings that we attach to them, and as discussed, these meanings are never free from the prevailing

social ideology. In the selected novels, home is naturally seen as a place that a woman should occupy as she is a mother, a partner or conventionally the care-giver in the household. Likewise, the social milieu or work life is seen as unfit for women. The naturalisation of role attribution leads to a discussion of women's spatial position and the relationship between spaces and gender ideologies. Thus, when read from the perspective of gender and dualisms, spaces within the selected novels turn out to have implications beyond their physicality and more significantly reflect the patriarchal ideologies at work in the construction of male spaces and female spaces.

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, women are physically located to the house and the kitchen, and the novels exemplify the aforementioned predisposed share of spaces. This sub-heading will focus on the spatial divisions of public and private sphere including a discussion of the physical spaces, family relations and the freedom and work of man and woman with respect to their relative spaces.

Esther, Marian and Tita's involvement in different social attachments encompassing family, marriage or any relational bond that requires loyalty, affection and domestic care from women turn out to be key in understanding their physical situation within those spaces, since these familial structures deem them passive and limit their freedom and capacities by locating them to home. The novels frequently focus on Esther's family and her always being at home, cooking or organizing; Marian's relationship with Peter within which they never talk about Marian's job, her future plans or interests but only discuss their future marriage while Marian concerns herself with taking better care of Peter and his home; and finally the traditional demands of Tita's mother that encompasses cooking and housework, representing the patriarchal-domestic space within which women are trapped. Hence, while studying the novels from the lens of space theories, women's situation within their relationships is crucial for discussion.

Social spaces are not inclusive sites but are rather sites of exclusion designated as dependant on the individuals that occupy a space. In the division of spaces, gender is one of the major factors in determining whether one is excluded or included in a particular space. As such,

social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. There is a connection between the bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time. While all can, in theory, enter, it is certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the 'natural' occupants of specific positions. Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being 'out of place'. Not being the somatic norms, they are space invaders. (Puwar 8)

One's bodily space, i.e. one's gender, determines the social space and the places that the individual belongs to, and as Puwar states, in patriarchal cultures, women's bodies are politically, historically and socially out of place. Having no right to belong to the male world, woman, as a feminine body, is the natural occupant of the house and her kitchen. Her body is not just a determining factor for her gender and how she should behave in the social world, but her body is also the cause of her positionality.

This rather ideological spatial division is based on gender essentialism and is likewise polarized also informing the power relations between man and woman. As previously stated, one of the main pre-causes of spatial divisions is a woman's biological traits such as child-birth and lactation, that claimed women as natural care-givers, who are meant to be at home and thus inferior to men within the spatial hierarchy (McDowell 44). Linda McDowell - who has worked with Massey towards the same claim that gender roles and spatial divisions are correlated - in her book *Gender, Identity & Place* refers to the binaries as well as "the relationship between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematize their apparent naturalness" (12).

Adding on to Lefebvre and Massey's ideas, McDowell refers to the significance of gender and gender relations in determining spatial divisions by also highlighting how these spatial divisions are coded with and reproduce the dual hierarchized oppositions. As such, McDowell refers to the masculine and the feminine as two oppositional terms with connotations for spatial divisions and provides a list of these associations, indicating that the masculine is related with the following terms including, public, outside, work, independence and power, while the feminine is associated with the opposite terms which are, private, inside, home, dependence and lack of power (12).

The associations that Linda McDowell highlights, reflect, replicate and stabilise the Derridean binaries that structure the Western metaphysics and patriarchal thinking, associating the masculine with the outside world of work, while leaving woman inside, as dependent on man and as powerless against man. Accordingly, domesticity circumscribes not only woman's agency but also limits her social position since she cannot be outside, working, having power or cannot be independent.

Linda McDowell's study of the spatial divisions align with feminist concerns regarding the differences between man and woman and how these differences make woman inferior to man by limiting her to the domestic. As such, Millet argues that "In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male" (26). Hence, Millett claims that the differences between masculine and feminine are used as means for assigning care-work rather than intellectual work of the outside world to woman, which informs spatial divisions by making woman an outsider to the public sphere. The heroines are likewise made dependent on men, associated with home or with care-giving, deemed as outsiders to the public world, not even having much chance to express their ideas regarding discussions on household affairs, hence, they are physically and socially limited.

### **3.3.1. Spatial and Social Divisions in *The Fat Woman's Joke***

As representatives of culture, institutions like family and marriage are ways through which man and woman are spatially situated and are typified in their roles. While these familial relations aim to stabilise the male/female binary and the spatial binaries that it brings about, they also become sites of contestation over who has power and who is inferior. By relating man with the outside world and activity, and woman with domestic leisure and passivity, one of the most basic divides between man and woman is that of the work that they do which becomes the key aspect of discussing spatial divisions in Weldon's novel.

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, following the male/female duality and the spatial distribution of roles, there is a clear distinction between what Esther does as opposed

to what Alan does. In the most basic sense, this role distribution encompasses who goes to work and who stays at home or who does the intellectual work as opposed to who bears the burden of physical, uncultivated work. Alan prides in working in his office and writing a novel as any work that is outside the house is man's realm. As opposed to which Esther is denied knowledge and access to Alan's work and writing and is seen only as "a wonderful cook" (Weldon 22), highlighting the duties and the spatial position that she is associated with. As recounted, in a masculinist society that works through maintaining the masculine/feminine divide by assigning individuals to relative places and positions, the work that a woman does at home, including cooking, has been naturalized as part of the maternal and affective continuum, also making it clear that "housework is not work" (Federici 77). In the same way, throughout *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Alan and Esther discuss each other's work load, clarifying the comparison between public and private spaces. Such a discussion takes place between the two with regards to who should be preparing dinner at home after Alan criticises the pie that Esther has cooked. The dialogue between Esther and Alan goes on as follows as Esther starts by suggesting that Alan can also take the responsibility of cooking saying;

'You could always cook it yourself.'

'Charming! Back from a hard day at the office to cook my own dinner. Why don't you ask me to sweep the floors, too?'

'The more you complain about your hard day at the office, the less plausible it seems. Just sitting at a desk all day, talking, writing, lifting up the telephone, do you call that work?'

'People who never worked in offices have no idea of the tensions, the decisions and the crises which attend one's every hour. I am worn out by mid-day, exhausted by the time I get home.'. (Weldon 94)

Alan's reply gives away the general consensus towards women's' duties at home by implying that cooking is a woman's duty rather than a mutual burden, and that the work that is outside of home is more laborious and more important than a woman's toil. In addition, Alan's ideas show that in patriarchal societies while men have the right to choose the space that they want to belong to, a woman has to stay within her assigned place. Overall, this dialogue clarifies that by naturalising the work that a woman does, spatial divisions also naturalise the notion that a woman's place is her home and her role is to cook, to look after and take care of the house and the family.

Spatial divisions also contribute to and clarify the construction of the category of woman as typically defined in relation with domesticity. As such, Esther's being a perfect housewife is compared with Alan's secretary, who does not fit into the female-housewife stereotype. With reference to her secretary, Alan says "She keeps forgetting that I like plain chocolate biscuits, and dislike milk chocolate biscuits" (Weldon 30) and comparing her with Esther, he continues by saying, "Now you, Esther, never make mistakes like that. You have a clear notion of what is important in life" (Weldon 30). Alan's comparison of the two female characters is significant for not only emphasizing Esther's domestic capacities but also for once again highlighting the notion of social construction by implying that a woman should be aware of her normative spatial roles. Although it could be said that women are given the impression that they are the ones who own the domestic sphere, still they are under control with respect to the physical limitations that they need to abide by. In line with Linda McDowell's study of gender based spatial divisions, limiting woman to the domestic environment deems her powerless and enables man to have more control over woman and over the spaces that she occupies. In addition to the previous example, giving woman the roles of housework and cooking, gives man the opportunity to control woman's actions and to rule over woman. In this manner, Weldon's narrative frequently refers to the patronizing attitude of Alan as he blames Esther whenever he is not satisfied. For instance, Esther indicates that men have the power to criticise even the domestic affairs, draining the "joy from any minimal sense of domestic achievement one may have painfully acquired" (Weldon 94). Hence, the normalisation of woman's position and role as a housewife within domestic places, also stabilises the male/female hierarchy, limits women's prospects by pre-defining and limiting what she does, and so deprives her of developing a sense of fulfilment.

Overall, spatial divisions in *The Fat Woman's Joke* are presented as reflecting a gendered logic which is decided upon by Alan, showing these spatial divides as bound to the social norms. What Alan demands from Esther is a domestic ideal, stability and order, through which he can maintain his dominance, and his statements can be seen as a proof of how he locates himself as the one who belongs to the public world and who has primacy over Esther within the gender based spatial divisions. For instance, Alan says,



I am merely trying to publicly affirm my faith in you, marriage and the established order, and to explain that I am content with my lot. I am a married man and I married of my own free will. I am a city man, and live in the city of my own free will. A company man, also of my own volition. .... Work, home, wife, child – this is my life and I am not aggrieved by it. I chose it. I know my place. I daresay I shall die as happy and fulfilled as most men. (Weldon 31)

Alan's ideas on marriage and his position in society highlights several of the concerns that this study has provided so far. Marriage in Alan's words, is not only a structure that maintains the established order i.e. the male/female binary but is at the same time a structure that gives man access to the public world by relegating woman to the domestic world. Alan's declaration of happiness about his life and the phrases that refer to his willing choice of his place, referring to his social place, are important in showing that spatial divisions provide man with a choice and give him the right to build his (social) world, very much in line with Lefebvre's argument of space as a social construct. Alan's knowing his place neither reflects his obedience, nor is a statement that refers to pre-destination. Rather, it is a reference to his as well as man's central place within the patriarchal society in deciding who belongs to where. His emphasis on the act and ability of choosing also shows that while men have the freedom to choose the life and the places that they can be involved in, women are mere companions and part of man's choice.

Contrary to Alan's visions of marriage as providing stability, the following narrative of Esther's is significant in showing her awareness of spatial divisions and the impact of home and marriage, i.e. the physical and social milieu in not only reflecting spatial divisions but also reflecting her oppressed situation. Esther states,

My home was not comfortable, either. It seemed a cold and chilly place, and I could see no point in the objects that filled it, that had to be eternally dusted and polished and cared for. ... Alan only searched for flaws: if he could not find dirt with which to chide me, if he could not find waste with which to rebuke me, then he was disappointed. (Weldon 73-74)

As it is clear from this long narrative of Esther, contrary to the general assumption that home is a place of warmth, stasis and comfort, home for Esther is almost like a prison that keeps her restrained and disappointed with her gender roles. Hence, home marks her discomfort as it neither gives her the cordiality that she looks for nor does it detain

her from tiring herself endlessly for the sake of others. She realises that her entrapment to the domestic sphere is a selfless choice that she is made to follow without questioning and that does not give her any agency. Hence, declaring her apparent mistrust in her marriage which is the cause of her entrapment to the domestic sphere, Esther says “It is a fearful thing to be a woman in a man’s world accepting masculine values and aping masculinity. It would be perfectly acceptable being a woman if only men didn’t control the world” (Weldon 137). Esther’s references to ‘man’s world’ imply spatial divides, while the phrases ‘masculine values’ and men’s control of the world refer to worldbuilding and the marking of spaces through the predominance of man. Esther clarifies that the spaces that women are allowed in, are also spaces in which they constantly try to make themselves acceptable to men and to the social world of patriarchy. Even while a woman seemingly occupies a space, that is her home, she is outside discourse and she is an outsider to everything that lies beyond the limits of her house. Without having the freedom to choose the space that she belongs to, or likewise without having the right to exit her pre-defined space, woman cannot be said to have a space and place within society neither can she be seen as having agency within the place that she occupies. These words of Esther, indicating her apparent awareness of spatial and social divisions, later on become the causes of her rejection of her roles and of her limited condition.

### **3.3.2. Spatial and Social Divisions in *The Edible Woman***

Different than *The Fat Woman’s Joke* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, in which spaces are coded in accordance with one’s roles in the family and in which places usually encompass one’s home, *The Edible Woman* also involves the public world, in the form of a masculine workspace. The public world as depicted in Atwood’s novel is a space which represents gender ideologies and is a space within which Marian struggles both in understanding the working mechanisms of spatial divisions and in locating herself to this place. Marian’s description of her workspace, the Seymour Surveys and the department that she is working in clarifies the physical and the social separation that is felt not only between the different departments but also between the men and the women who are working in the same company. As such, in describing the organization of the company, Marian says;

I have only hazy notions of the organizational structure of Seymour Surveys ... The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle. On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists – referred to as the men upstairs, since they are all men – who arrange things with the clients; I’ve caught glimpses of their offices, which have carpets and expensive furniture and silk-screen reprints of Group of Seven paintings on the walls. Below us are the machines – mimeo machines, I.B.M. machines for counting and sorting and tabulating the information; I’ve been down there too, into that factory-like clatter where the operatives seem frayed and overworked and have ink on their fingers. Our department is the link between the two: we are supposed to take care of the human elements, the interviewers themselves. As market research is a sort of cottage industry, like a hand-knit sock company, these are all housewives working in their spare time and paid by the piece. (Atwood 13)

The metaphor of an ice cream sandwich brought together implicates spaces’ social construction while this hazy and rather superfluous social assembly of Marian’s workspace aligns and layers places in accordance with the gender of its residents, by implicating that the woman’s department is almost always reflective of their housewifeliness compared to the more intellectual work that man do, and is implying their relative position to men. Hence, both highlighting spatial divisions and gendered binaries and creating a hierarchy between men and women, the company reproduces the socio-spatial gender dualisms.

Although Atwood’s heroine is not fully an outsider to the public world, and she has a seeming position in the masculinist society compared to Esther and Tita’s situation, Marian’s workspace makes a clear distinction between the higher positions that men hold and the layers that women are crushed under, referring to the social pressure that women face in spaces that are dominated by men and indicating that even when women somehow enter this space, they are surely seen as illegitimate visitors and as unfit. Hence, Marian likewise is not given enough access and space in the public world, herself saying “I couldn’t become one of the men upstairs” (Atwood 14). Reminding Esther’s resemblance of her marriage to a concrete structure where she feels herself uncomfortable, Marian’s experience in her workspace is used by Atwood to illustrate woman’s unwanted position in the male world, implying that there are layers to society and to spaces and among these, some spaces are always more privileged and hierarchised, while the others are crushed under or are secondary to the top layers, thus paralleling the male/female binary.

Betty Friedan also points out to this illegitimated spatial condition of woman in the workspace by saying: “Woman remain underrepresented in management positions. Women still assume a greater proportion of housekeeping and childcare duties than their partners” (viii). In Atwood’s novel likewise, while the intellectual work and the management positions certainly belong to man, woman’s association with the workspace is still presented as a matter of demonstrating her housewifeliness, emphasizing the fact that a woman cannot really escape from the norms of domesticity. In this manner, with reference to working with housewives, Marian says,

the best thing was to send them out a form of letter telling them how they must all do their best to better the lot of Womankind – an attempt to appeal, Marian reflected, to the embryonic noble nurse that is supposed to be curled, efficient and self-sacrificing, in the heart of every true woman. (Atwood 132)

Reflecting the aforementioned patriarchal ideology and the spatial-social divides regarding the division of labour, Marian herself ponders about why housewives work in this company and if their role has any significance except from an escape from their home as she says, “They don’t take much, but they like to get out of the house. ... Or maybe they like to have someone to talk to. But I suppose most people are flattered by having their opinions asked” (Atwood 13-14). Marian clarifies that work or the public domain is an escape for housewives, a chance for them to have an opinion of their own and to feel purposeful yet at the same time it is clear that these women can never be like the men in this layered company that follows gender hierarchies. Although it could be said that Marian has internalised the patriarchal ideology by identifying woman’s place as home and their role as housewives, her ideas also hint at the tedium that women feel in their limited space at home as they search for a way to escape their house.

Similar to Marian’s own questioning of the housewives’ place in the company, Marian herself is not seen as a legitimate inhabitant of the public space of Seymour Surveys. Consequently, as Marian’s engagement to Peter is announced, she is expected to have a shift towards a new life, which is not only a reference to her married life but is also a reference to the new space that she is expected to occupy. As such, Marian’s boss Mrs. Bogue announces to the whole office that Marian will soon get married, saying,

“I’ve learned recently through the grapevine that one of our girls will soon be getting married. I’m sure we’ll all wish Marian McAlpin the very best in her new life.” (Atwood 206). Thus, this new life of Marian indicates that she is expected to occupy the private sphere of her married home rather than her workspace. As a consequence of the public and private, work and home, outside and inside divisions, closer to the context of the novels under study, it is argued that the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s have been “an era during which women were fired en masse from the jobs they held during the war and shamelessly propagandized back into full-time job of wife and mother” (Bordo 159). Hence, the demand was that while men are at work, women should take care of the house, children and cooking as their natural but unpaid job and it has been assumed and ideologized that a woman needs be happy if she has a husband, children and a house to care for.

With reference to this condition of woman, Iris Marion Young states that “Her only comfort is to try to derive her satisfaction from being in the home” (130). Marian is likewise aware of this ideology that once she gets married, she will be asked to leave her job and will be left outside of social life. This situation is narrated as,

Mrs. Bogue also stood aside. She had, by the tone of her speech, and by the mere fact of this public announcement coming without warning or prior consultation, made it clear to Marian that she would be expecting her to leave her job whether she wanted to or not. ... Mrs. Bogue preferred her girls to be either unmarried or seasoned veterans with their liability to unpredictable pregnancies well in the past. Newly-weds, she had been heard to say, were inclined to be unstable. (Atwood 207)

Hence, Marian realises that her biology is posing a limitation to her and as a prospective wife, she is naturally assumed to become a mother and to fulfil her domestic duties, hence implying that she no longer has a place in the public domain. The reference to the female staff’s being ‘unpredictable’ and ‘unstable’ not only refer to possible pregnancies but also implies that spatial divisions do not allow woman to occupy both the private space by becoming a wife and the public space by working, that spaces and spatial divisions follow a strict logic of gender dualisms and that the boundaries between the two spaces are not permeable and need to be maintained as stable.

Marian's relationship with Peter also underlines spatial divisions and their reflection of gender ideologies. In addition to the divisions in her workplace and the binaries that her relationship starts to show, the spatial divisions that Marian is captive to are also clarified through the descriptions of her frequent visits to Peter's house. Atwood gives a detailed description to one of the visits that Marian pays to Peter's house which is under scaffolding and although the structure of the building is maintained, Marian has to find her way to Peter's house walking past "piles of concrete blocks ... plaster and ladders and stacks of pipes on the stairway going up" (Atwood 64-65), going past workmen, explaining her reasons for entering the building and climbing up stairs to reach Peter's floor. Hence, Marian comes across and has to cope with various obstacles in order to reach Peter's place, the construction being both a literal and a metaphoric hinderance. Similar to her physical position in her workspace, there is a hierarchical relationship between Peter and Marian as seen through Marian's struggle with reaching her fiancé's house which metaphorically stands for the different spatial positions that they occupy and which later on turns into a hierarchical relationship between the two in their affair. Also, Marian's preoccupation with and her unquestioning attitude when going to Peter's house even when it is under construction shows that she sees caring for her fiancé as a natural role that she should assume, very much in line with the prevailing ideology of being a full-time housewife. Home has been associated with dependence in the list of binaries and spatial divisions provided by McDowell. Similarly, as Marian assumes Peter's house as a place that she needs to be pre-occupied with, Marian also knows that her marriage to Peter will not only cut off her relations with the public world of her work but will also deem her as Peter's dependant. Marian says,

ever since she had become engaged and had known she wasn't going to be there forever (they'd talked about it, Peter said of course she could keep working after the wedding if she wanted to, for a while at least, though she didn't need to financially – he considered it unfair to marry, he said, if you couldn't afford to support your wife). (Atwood 130)

Implying that Marian needs to be financially supported by her husband rather than by herself, Peter carries the ideology that men are the ones who should be working and who should be the breadwinners and women are the ones who wait patiently for their husbands at home. Hence, feeling as an outsider to the public space and knowing that

she is getting closer and closer to being entrapped into the domestic space, Marian starts to run away from Peter, looking for open-places, places that do not signify any limitation which will be discussed under contesting the given spaces.

### **3.3.3. Spatial and Social Divisions in *Like Water for Chocolate***

In line with the patriarchal structural logic, each space has gender-based rules or rather each space is regulated by the male/female division. In addition to the broader public vs. private divide, the division of spaces within the home has also been an ideological move to keep man and woman as distinct gender categories as possible and to ensure that their familial and homely duties are allocated in line with gender dualisms. In the same manner, spatial divisions in *Like Water for Chocolate* can be observed through the physical descriptions of the family ranch and the kitchen.

As discussed so far, *Like Water for Chocolate* codes home and the kitchen as feminized spaces by associating these with Mama Elena and Tita respectively and by including Tita's two other sisters and two other female characters Nacha and Chenchu. However, the narrative clarifies that this feminine space does not provide warmth or freedom to woman and both the ranch and Tita's kitchen are actually limiting social constructs, places within which "discussion was not one of the forms of communication permitted in Mama Elena's household" (Esquivel 14). Hence, the physical space of the ranch is also representative of Elena's social control mechanism. Not having the freedom to marry or to leave her mother's ranch, the kitchen is yet another space that implies social divisions. Although it is clarified that "everything on the kitchen side of that door, on through the door leading to the patio and the kitchen and herb gardens was completely hers – it was Tita's realm" (Esquivel 11) and though Tita loves cooking and having the responsibility of producing the recipes that have been the heritage of her family, the indication of the kitchen as Tita's realm does not have positive connotations. Kitchen is the place within which her mother Mama Elena tries to restrain Tita's freedom of choice by keeping her as distinct from the outside world as possible, thus, stabilising spatial binaries. For instance, Tita thinks that "It wasn't easy for a person whose knowledge of life was based on the kitchen to comprehend the outside world" (Esquivel 11). Therefore, her seclusion to the kitchen implies her lack

of connection with the public world where she can fulfil her wishes and be free from the limitations of both the ranch and her mother.

Although Tita's birth into the kitchen, her instinctual success in cooking and love of preparing dishes for her family is naturalised, as stated previously Esquivel poses this as a question about women's powerless condition within the private sphere. Reflecting the spatial binaries that Linda McDowell has provided, Tita is stuck within inside of her home, dependant on her mother, not allowed to make decisions herself since even when cooking she needs to follow the recipes that her mother accepts. Very similar to Esther's and Marian's questioning of their pre-defined roles, Tita realises that the space that she is trapped in has no explanation other than deeming her obedient. As such, Tita says that she "could never have even the slightest say in the unknown forces that fated Tita to bow before her mother's absurd decision" (Esquivel 14). According to Tita, the absurd decision that her mother gives regarding the tradition of keeping her youngest daughter unmarried, is arbitrary, having no reason behind, except from limiting her daughter and perpetuating the gender binaries. As the narrative proceeds, Tita realises her situation and starts to question her mother and her limited condition which is narrated as follows; "For one thing, she wanted to know who had started this family tradition. ... Had the opinion of the daughter affected by the place ever been taken into account? If she couldn't marry, was she at least allowed to experience love?" (Esquivel 15). This question of Tita is not simply a question about the traditions, but it is also a question about her physical place in society as well as a question about the social limits and permissions she is given as a woman because her desire to experience love is a desire to experience something outside the boundaries of her home. Hence, in the society that Esquivel depicts, women have no freedom to choose the spaces that they want to reside in, neither do they have freedom in the spaces that they occupy. Although, Tita's question remains futile, her search for the origin of the traditions shows the arbitrariness of sexual-spatial divides and dualisms and the essentialism that is observed in the roles and duties that she has been made to assume.

Similar to Fay Weldon's emphasis on the Victorian fashioning of Esther's house, Laura Esquivel's focus on the physical description of Mama Elena's ranch reveals that the kitchen is in one of the least visible parts of the house and that only those who have



a duty visit the kitchen which includes Nacha, the previous cook, and Tita herself. Henceforth, the ranch physically divides spaces between different members of the house, also emphasizing Tita's marginalisation and her social invisibility. The kitchen in *Like Water for Chocolate* is a boundary marker between the feminine and the masculine worlds. Neither Tita can touch her foot outside the kitchen or the ranch, i.e. step into the masculine world, nor can others enter the kitchen. Kitchen as a boundary marking place between the male and female spaces becomes apparent through Tita and Pedro's affair since the narrative provides instances when Tita and Pedro encounter at the kitchen door. One specific example is when Pedro passes by the kitchen, sees Tita and gets inside the kitchen so that he can meet her (Esquivel 62). The kitchen then becomes the place where Tita and Pedro, the female world and the male world meet. However, knowing that Tita and Pedro love each other, Mama Elena tries to maintain the male/female boundary as intact as possible, keeping Tita stuck in the kitchen and Pedro away from her. There are many similar instances in the novel where Tita's mother walks past the kitchen to check if Tita is alone, fulfilling her cooking duties and making sure that Pedro is nowhere close by. One example is Tita's description of her mother's controlling behaviour saying, "Mama Elena's eyes were as sharp as ever and she knew what would happen if Pedro and Tita ever got the chance to be alone" (Esquivel 45) and in another instance, referring to Mama Elena "When she opened the kitchen door, she didn't see anything that wasn't socially acceptable – nothing to make her worry" (Esquivel 71). Thus, in Esquivel's novel, spaces are indicators of social roles and mark territories for individuals who are acceptable in or who violate the given areas and as such, kitchen is both a female territory and a boundary marker between man and woman, the male world and the female world. However, in the sub-heading contesting the given spaces, kitchen will be discussed as a zone of emotional exchange, and a reactionary place.

So far, the discussions on the conceptualization of space and the concretization of place have shown that specifying as well as defining the boundaries of spaces is a process of social construction also following gender binaries. It has been clarified that unable to create and define the space that they occupy and not having any freedom in choosing the spaces that they are identified with, women are born into pre-given, normative, male-dominated and limiting spaces. In the same line, the selected novels

have presented women's places as an impasse. However, the theoretical arguments around space and place, coming from Lefebvre and Massey also signal a possibility of contesting these spaces.

### **3.4. Contesting the Given Spaces**

Until so far, this chapter aimed to discuss the heroines' situation within their marriage and familial relations, as well as their dissatisfaction with gender roles and with gendered spaces that have domestic attributions since the narratives disclose their yearning for things that are outside the only space that they are allowed to experience, i.e. the private sphere. The novels' particular focus on home as a space that is associated with women proves the normative gendered limitations however, while "Home is where a person can be 'herself'" (Young 146), in the novels, home and the domestic space turn into limitations where the heroines can never feel like themselves. The physical spaces and the sense of entrapment in those physical spaces are accompanied with their tedious marriages and relations. As discussed under the previous sub-headings, Esther sees marriage and family like a building that is bleak and limiting; Marian sees her relationship as restraining her into the norms of a wife; Tita feels herself as devoid of freedom in her home as a result of her mother's traditional perspectives. Young states that "If house and home mean the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects, then feminists have good reason to reject home as a value" (123). Likewise, confined to the private sphere for the sake of perpetuating domesticity, traditions and male prospects i.e. gender binaries, similar to Young's statement, the conventional, pre-destined givenness of feminine spaces is questioned and contested by the heroines which will be the focus of this heading.

Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Marian in *The Edible Woman* and Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate*, problematize the so-called naturalness of the aforementioned spatial distributions and place based domestic duties. The heroines' inquiry into how they came to occupy their pre-destined positions not only means questioning the places that they occupy but also questioning their pre-destined identities as lovers, wives, mothers and housewives. As Esther, Marian and Tita feel lost with the domesticity that is attributed to them, they also start exhibiting their discontent with following the norms

and resort to new places where they can be free of their feminine identity, where they can be their own selves without having to conform to social prescriptions and gender roles anymore. Accordingly, they either leave their home, run away from the people that these places are associated with or change the conventional domestic meanings of their kitchen. Hence, the outside world, the world that is outside the house and the kitchen, represents freedom for women and also rebellion to their society. For example, Esther gets a house of her own and starts living alone, does not cook and does not clean. Thus, in her house, she re-defines her domestic roles and the roles associated with care giving. Marian constantly attempts to run away from Peter and his home, searching for places without certain boundaries, places where she can exist without being defined as Peter's prospective wife. Tita also searches for a place where she can fulfil herself without the demand of obeying the rules of her mother and society and hence leaves her mother and the ranch so that she can free herself from the traditions that have trapped her. However, when women in the selected novels want and try to leave their assigned spaces, they are harshly criticised and claimed to be suffering psychological conditions that leads them into making wrong decisions. Likewise, in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, when Esther leaves her home, her family members and friends condemn her for not being a caring mother. In *The Edible Woman*, when Marian tries to run away from her newly attributed roles and from Peter's home, she is criticised for rejecting her femininity. Finally, Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate*, is criticised and called a lunatic by her mother as she leaves her home.

It is clear that space conceptually determines our place in society which in turn literalises the relative roles that one needs to fulfil within the limits of that given place. Therefore, when space is discussed, one's social position(s) is also discussed. Elizabeth Grosz in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, asks the question: "What does the fact that there are always and irreducibly (at least) two sexes have to do with how we understand and live space?" (xix), pointing out the interrelation between space and gender. Grosz further argues: "It would be nice to be able to choose an identity, but in fact it is chosen for us. Our agency comes from how we accept that designated position, and the degree to which we refuse it, the way we live it out" (*Architecture* 23). Hence, as Grosz indicates, one's designated position, which is one's position within gender dualism and one's position in a space, requires

accepting or denying it and is a matter of reflecting one's agency. In the same line, space in the selected novels becomes important for discussing how the heroines question, accept or reject their gender position or rather positionality in the hierarchies that always locate her as the lesser and so space also becomes a matter of gaining agency.

So far, the discussions around the condition of the heroines clarified that one's gender designates one's spatial position, and space affects one's identity and sense of selfhood by defining and limiting one's relational position to the others. Examples as to woman's lack of free-will in what they want to do in their spaces have been analysed under the social construction of spaces and the spatial divisions of domestic labour. Regarding the sense of identity that women develop in the male dominated world, it is claimed that "In the patriarchal gender system, men are the builders and women the nurturers of builders and the ornaments placed within their creations. As homeless themselves, women are deprived of the chance to be subjects for themselves" (Young 130). Not given any chance to choose where they want to belong to or how they want to exist in that space, residing in places with boundaries defined by man, as a result, woman's agency, the capacity and boundaries of her actions have been restrained. To provide a definition "Agency often refers to human action or the capacity and ability to act" (Evans and Williams 7). Henceforth, the heroines, Esther, Marian and Tita are not only in search of spatial and emotional freedom but they are also in search of freedom from their gender roles that have been limited to the private sphere and, leaving their spaces means escaping from patriarchal hegemony and social conventions and also means gaining agency. Thus, this sub-heading will delve into the agency that the heroines gain as they declare their freedom from feminized spaces and roles by escaping into new spaces or by re-defining the characteristics of the spaces that they belong to.

Lefebvre and Massey's arguments of space as socially produced opens up the discussion that spaces can never be fixed and that the identity that we ascribe to spaces very much depends on how we socially identify, distinguish and characterise a particular place. Lefebvre problematizes the naturalisation of spatial divisions by asking, "Is that space natural or cultural? Is it immediate or mediated – and, if the

latter, mediated by whom and to what purpose? Is it a given or is it artificial?” (Lefebvre 83). Lefebvre’s idea indicates that space is not free from ideology, that space is a construct and therefore can be challenged and re-made. In addition, the theoretical background of this chapter showed that if space is a social product, then social space is also always in a process of making and re-making, since the social milieu impacts and alters the process of spatialization. As a consequence, it is possible to say that space and place(s) are apt to contestation, liable to an unfixing of its definitions and open to a re-establishment of its boundaries. If likewise, the domestic space is a product of the prevailing social ideologies, then it means that there is no naturality to those spaces and that the very spaces can also be used to re-produce what the dominant ideologies have claimed as natural or as in line with the male/female division. In *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, leaving normative places challenges and unsettles the construction of these spaces, showing that woman can likewise change, give meaning to or go against the social coding of male and female spaces.

Massey expands Lefebvre’s idea and likewise challenges the view that spaces and places have fixed meanings and identities. She states that space is “the site of social contest, battles over the power to label” (5), label meaning the identities or the boundaries that aim to stabilize the meanings of space. Massey’s argument then, implies that spaces have labels and definitive limits that aim to maintain its boundaries. However, the second implication is a discussion of the likelihood of contesting spaces based on Massey’s reference to space as a ground of ‘social contests’ and ‘battles’ which opens up the possibility of saying that the labelling of a space is always a matter of contestation. Henceforth, by nature of its production, space is a concept that is open to re-labelling and to re-definitions. Supporting this, Massey further states that “the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time” (121) because of the “inherent dynamism” (2) that spaces show. Thus, for Doreen Massey, space is open to re-conceptualisation and re-production because if social relations produce social space, then space is almost always in the process of making as influenced by the changing social relations. In the same line, “[t]he identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple” (Massey 5), which also means that even though places determine social and gender relations and in turn these

social relations effect one's situatedness, place is not a concept that could have fixed definitions. The argument that space and place are dynamic concepts opens up a discussion of spaces and places as arguable sites, within which a challenge of the limits, impositions and the dominant ideologies regarding gender is possible. Likewise, the claim here is that, women can bring a certain dynamism and change to the spaces that they reside in.

Just like space, gender is another concept that the heroines aim to contest through their destabilisation of the domestic. It is argued that,

‘Woman’ have been invented by men for the specific purpose of keeping women in their place, and in her deconstruction of them she indicates clearly how cultural myth operates in conjunction with economic and social factors to reinforce the oppression of women as a group. (Plain and Sellers 88)

Thus, contesting feminized spaces not only discloses space as a social construct, but also clarifies that the gender based spatial division of labour is also an ideological construct, implying that both can be re-conceptualised in order to contest gender norms. As a place of production, consumption and change, overall, as a place that carries qualities of dynamism, kitchen and what the heroines do within the kitchen will be the main focus in the analysis of how the heroines challenge their domestic roles and the private sphere. Consequently, to discuss how spaces and gender is contested and to show the dynamism of both of these concepts, the discussions will also divulge into the use of food by the heroines.

### **3.4.1. Contesting the Given Spaces in *The Fat Woman's Joke***

Masculinist assumptions and the division of gender roles and duties not only identifies women with the household but it also creates a belief that as much as caring for the house, caring for others is naturally a feminine disposition and should be carried out by women. Consequently, *The Fat Woman's Joke*, comes as a criticism towards such feminization of domestic labor and care-work as Esther “gives up all wifely, maternal, and domestic responsibilities” (Eagleton 265). The main issue that Esther tries to fight off and run away from is being defined in relation with the roles that society has

attributed to her since Esther has been immersed in her role(s) as a wife and a mother, always occupied with preparing food for Alan and having no ideal or purpose in life than to maintain a perfect family and house. Even when she meets with her old female friends, it is at her home, in the kitchen, whilst preparing something for her family, and almost the whole narrative takes place in Esther and Alan's married home until the moment when Esther decides to leave in order to start her own life in her own apartment.

Esther's married home is representative of the patriarchal system and of the gender roles, reflecting and perpetuating the hierarchical relationship between herself and her husband and Esther clarifies her wish of liberating herself from this socially limiting condition. Hence, as Reisman states, "Esther escapes the marriage physically and emotionally when she moves out of the house and into a basement apartment. In this new space, Esther can leave behind the confining roles of housewife and mother that were becoming unbearable." (11). Thus, it is only when Esther rents a house for herself that she realizes "This is the only proper holiday, she thought, that I have had for years" (Weldon 8). Her treatment of living alone as a holiday shows that marriage and her duties have limited her and denied her any freedom outside of these roles. In the same way, Esther's narrative frequently emphasizes the freedom that she has achieved by leaving her married home also implying her discontent and sense of emptiness with her domestic situation, a realization that being a (house)wife and a mother gave no satisfaction to her except from making her husband and the patriarchal system content. For instance, she says "I have no intention, ever again, of doing without what I want" (Weldon 23). As she starts to live alone, she also feels a sense of agency in deciding how to lead her life. When relating how she feels after having left her home, Esther says "I can control everything ... I just eat .... But husbands, children – no Phyllis, I am sorry. I am not strong enough for them" (Weldon 11). Compared to Alan's authoritative presence in her life and his presence in all the decision-making processes regarding what she does at home, Esther feels that she has a say in her own life for the first time after years of marriage. The narrative of how she leads her life in her new home also indicates that she is not concerning herself with home related duties anymore. Instead, Esther starts having more options and more things to do that interests her as she narrates, "During the day she would read science fiction novels. In

the evenings she watched television. And she ate, and ate, and drank, and ate” (Weldon 7). Her narrative shows that what she does after she leaves her married home turns into small but liberating acts, none of which have domestic associations. While all of Esther’s days in her married house were defined by being in the kitchen or worrying for her husband and son, when alone, she does not seem to have much to worry about or anyone to take care of and to cook for. Hence, she fills her days with other things to do that go beyond the limits of the kitchen or even while she is in the kitchen, it does not have to do with domestic duties since she becomes the one who consumes the food that she prepares rather than maintaining the role of taking care of others, and this newly found agency is what gives her a sense of freedom. Therefore, leaving her married home is a contestation of not only the domestic space that she is allowed to be in but also of the social roles that she is assigned in her marriage.

The reason why Esther can be called a revolutionary female figure in this novel is because she resists being limited and defined by man as she tries to find a way out of her roles. Alone in her new home and her newly outstated agency, Esther says “I live by myself. Just me. Self-sufficient, wanting no one, no other mind, no other body” (Weldon 34). Esther realises that a woman is in no need of a man and that the male/female binary that pre-defines where a woman should reside in or what she needs to do in this space has been created by patriarchal societies to keep the system stable. It is clear here that Esther has managed to break from the chains of male-female binary by leaving the space that defined her and by founding a space for herself where she can be self-sufficient and free from her relative roles, in no need of the others to define herself. Another reason why leaving her married home is quite revolutionary is because Esther resorts back to her pre-married self and into a state where she does not have to keep track of how she looks and how her husband sees her which will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

### **3.4.2. Contesting the Given Spaces in *The Edible Woman***

Marian problematizes and challenges the given spaces, i.e. Peter’s home as well as any space that reflects domestic ideology and her prospective future as Peter’s wife, by trying to run away from them. Compared to Esther, in Marian’s case, she does not



escape an actual home. What she escapes from is the spaces that denote her relative position to Peter as well as the future entrapment that awaits her with her approaching marriage. Marian is in search of a space where she can be free of her feminine self and of herself as Peter's companion. For instance, as soon as Peter decides that they get married, "He had already assumed impromptu visiting privileges" (Atwood 104), feeling it in his right to come and visit Marian anytime. In addition, he starts calling her when she is at work (Atwood 135), which shows his desire to control what Marian does and to limit her actions in the public world. Henceforth, Marian tries to escape Peter by going to Duncan's house -a man that she met whilst waiting in a laundromat- as of Chapter 16 so as to feel herself freed from Peter's controlling attitude and the patriarchal associations of Peter's house. Duncan's house is presented as always untidy, almost in chaos, with his term papers scattered around, with no proper chair to sit at (Atwood 56), and without bearing any trace of structure, domesticity or any roles that she has to follow. His house frees Marian from her feelings of entrapment, giving her a sense of freedom as well as giving her freedom from an involvement that will locate her as the domestic other of man. As indicated in the theoretical background, spaces reflect the dominant social discourse, hence, running away with Duncan could be read as a contesting of the given spaces since Duncan is not associated with any domestic meaning. A significant instance of Marian running away and problematizing the spaces that she needs to be present in is during the party that Peter gives. After Marian starts to feel dissociated from herself, introduced to Peter's friends as his fiancé and expected to act out the role of a perfect housewife who takes care of the servings and the kitchen, Marian decides to escape the party. Leaving Peter's house, finding Duncan and running away with him, Marian says "I can't go back" (Atwood 326), which shows her wish to leave the private space that she is becoming more and more associated with. As Marian runs away from Peter's home with Duncan, Atwood associates this escape with the peripheries of the city that even Marian cannot name, vast areas such as parks, distant places or "ravines that fissured the city" (Atwood 329) that she runs to. Marian herself describes those places that she flees towards as "nothing she saw around was familiar" (Atwood 329). Although compared to *The Fat Woman's Joke* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, Marian is not so much physically trapped at home, she feels herself metaphorically entrapped and chooses to flee towards open spaces that are not marked by any social signifier and that are

epistemologically unmarked by man or by gender roles. Thereupon, her flights to these unmarked spaces within which there is nothing that she can associate herself with or nothing to label her as a prospective wife, could be seen as a representation of her wish to run away from the roles that are awaiting her.

The first time Marian runs away is after a dinner with Peter during which Peter voraciously relates his hunting experiences to Len, an old friend of Marian. Realizing that “Something inside me started to dash about in dithering mazes of panic” (Atwood 81), Marian feels herself like a prey to Peter that will soon be trapped with marriage and anxiously starts to search for a way out. Marian starts running away; “On the street the air was cooler; there was a light breeze. I let go of Peter’s arm and began to run” (Atwood 83), indicating that “Each lamp post as I passed it became a distance-marker on my course: it seemed an achievement, and accomplishment of some kind to put them one by one behind me” (Atwood 85). Marian shows her desire to escape from marriage and from Peter and with each pace she feels like she is accomplishing more freedom, marking a distance between herself and Peter, and hence between her unmarried free self and the married future that awaits her. As Marian runs, “Peter yelled, ‘Marian! Where the hell do you think you’re going?’” (Atwood 85) and Marian thinks “I could hear the fury in his voice: this was the unforgivable sin, because it was public” (Atwood 85). Not being able to catch her and losing her to the freedom and spaciousness of the unlimited open space, Peter perceives her running away as unfit for a woman. Her sin being public indicates that she has trespassed the boundaries of her social space. Hence, by fleeing Peter and the situations that foreshadow how she will be trapped to her future roles, Marian achieves her aim of transgressing the patriarchal rule and of dissociating herself from spaces that define and limit her. Peter thinks that all this running and hiding away that Marian did was “nonsense” (Atwood 94) and also says “‘Ainsley behaved herself properly, why couldn’t you? The trouble with *you* is’ he said savagely, ‘you’re just rejecting your femininity’” (Atwood 95). Peter cannot make sense of Marian’s desire to free herself away from this limiting relationship, marking that by running away, Marian is going against the roles of womanhood. Hence, Peter’s idea of spaces as associated with proper femininity, which reminds his labelling of Marian as ‘a good girl’ doing house chores at his home, is

challenged by Marian, who shows him that a woman need not limit herself to the places given by man.

Peter catches Marian and on their way to their friend Len's house suggests that they get married. Realising that Peter wants to get married to make sure that Marian knows her spatial limits, that she is kept under control, Marian maintains her wish of creating herself a private space that is free from the social demands, free from the other people in her life. Hence, wanting to escape from Peter and from her friends who also talk about relationships, a strange attempt of Marian's is hiding underneath a bed while they are in Len's house. She describes the situation as,

But the semi-darkness, tinted orange by the filter of the bedspread that curtained me on all four sides, and the coolness and the solitude were pleasant. ... In spite of the narrowness and dust I was glad I didn't have to sit up there in the reverberating hot glare of the room. Though I was only two or three feet lower than the rest of them, I was thinking of the room as 'up there'. I myself was underground, I had dug myself a private burrow. I felt smug. (Atwood 90)

Searching for freedom and an escape from the socially constructed spaces equals to finding places where she can be in 'solitude', in a private hideaway or 'burrow' in her own words where she can feel herself as the self-righteous and self-satisfied owner of that space. Hence, Marian tries to escape from spaces that position her as Peter's prospective wife.

Running away, trying to find or wishing to create herself a space that has no indication of domesticity or roles that are associated with femininity, Marian contests the given spaces in her rather freer attitude which also challenges the social limitations that Peter represents. Showing her unwillingness of conforming to her social roles and to the socially assigned spaces, Marian problematizes the domestic demands and spatial divisions that patriarchal society poses. In addition to these trials of escape, Marian contests the given spaces by juxtaposing her use of and role within her home. Under the construction of social space heading, Marian's domestic duties have been discussed as resulting from her relationship with Peter, arguing that Peter is the one who gives home, kitchen and care-giving related duties to Marian. Henceforth, Marian's roles at home indicated both a perpetuation of patriarchal ideology and a

limitation of her prospects and choices. However, towards the end of the narrative, as Marian realises Peter's aim, that he is trying to limit her into their relationship, Marian alters her relationship with house-chores. As such, Marian starts cleaning her home, mopping the floors and wiping the windows, washing the curtains and doing the dishes, which she had no interest in before (Atwood 349). Hence, she shows a sense of her home as a self-owned space, as a space that is rightly acclaimed by herself, that could not be controlled by man and that cannot limit her to her roles as a (house)wife. It is also in her own house that she willingly bakes a cake for Peter which will be further scrutinized in the discussion of the significance of food. However, her baking is dissociated from the housewife role that Peter has attributed to her and instead, the domestic roles are used by her to challenge her spatial roles and to show that woman can dissociate spaces from their pre-given meanings and can equally re-signify the private sphere as a space of female agency.

### **3.4.3. Contesting the Given Spaces in *Like Water for Chocolate***

Unlike Esther and Marian's boredom with and rejection of their roles as the caregiver of their home, constantly thinking of what to cook and how to plan the dinner, Tita is not against her capacity to cook, neither is she unhappy with being in the kitchen. She contests the domestic space rather with the desire of claiming kitchen as her own and as a feminine space that is not marked ideologically. Following the social ideology and the traditions of her society, the meanings of the kitchen is stabilised in this novel. However, Esquivel also brings about the fact that the kitchen is a creative space and likewise the recipes that Tita uses deny the commonly accepted recipes and so the conventional rules of cooking. Against the demanding nature of her mother and the rigidness of her life, the recipes that Tita creates or that comes naturally to her, represent a freedom and a denial of the strict rules that her society tries to impose on her as well as a juxtaposition of the strict logic that social spaces follow.

Throughout *Like Water for Chocolate*, it could be stated that Esquivel presents women as having courage to challenge and to leave their assigned spaces. Similar to Mama Elena's subversion of masculine/feminine divisions by being the head of the house and following the example of Gertrudis, Tita is ready to contest and trespass the

boundaries of the ranch. Gertrudis proves a revolutionary example for Tita because she manages to reject her fate of staying in her mother's house until marriage by leaving the ranch, running away with a mulatto, working in a brothel, becoming the general of the revolutionary army and hence, moving from the private sphere to the public sphere. Upon her revolt and her running away from the ranch that represents the societal limitations posed on women, Gertrudis is denied by her mother who denounces having such a daughter and burns Gertrudis' birth certificate (Esquivel 55). Even though Gertrudis' revolution is not the main focus of this chapter, Mama Elena's reaction to Gertrudis' revolt clarifies that a shift between male and female spaces and a transgression of spatial roles is also an attempt of performing one's agency that is never allowed within traditional patriarchal societies. Likewise, Tita wants to find a space where she is not bound to the rules of her mother and where she can be aligned with cooking without the restrictions of traditions. Tita wants to escape the ranch to a place "far away ... where there was no Mama" (Esquivel 54). Hence, she wants to run away from any place that is marked by traditions and she wants to find a place that is epistemologically unmarked as limiting, and that has no boundaries. For example, in order to consume her love and to leave the ranch which signifies prevention from marriage, Tita expresses her desire to run away with Pedro, thinking; "If Pedro had asked Tita to run away with him, she wouldn't have hesitated for a moment" (Esquivel 53). However, Pedro hesitates to leave his place, which could be interpreted as a fear to go against the norms of the society and a fear to challenge the authority that Mama Elena stands for. Showing her desire to challenge her spatial position, later on, when Tita leaves for Dr. John's house, she understands that "The only thing she was absolutely sure about was that she did not want to return to the ranch. She never wanted to live near Mama Elena again" (Esquivel 107), echoing Marian's wish of not returning back to Peter's house. For Tita, the ranch represents lack of freedom while Dr. John's house provides her with freedom even while cooking and being in the kitchen. Thus, it is only in this place and in the absence of a patriarchal authority figure that Tita realises that she has been pre-configured for cooking and care-taking only. Her running away is against the norms of her society as "The doctor learned that Mama Elena had forbidden visits to Tita. In the De la Garza family some things could be excused, but not disobedience, not questioning parental authority. Mama Elena would never forgive Tita" (Esquivel 115), which marks how disobedience to gender roles and

a trespassing of gendered spaces is punished by Mama Elena and by the traditional society that she stands for. Hence, when Tita escapes her home, she trespasses not only the physical limits of her house but also the metaphorical social limits that her mother has imposed on her for long.

Similar to Esther's escape to her new home and Marian's search for ideologically free spaces, Dr. John's house becomes a liberating space for Tita. In this new place, Tita gets to see that what she has been told about her naturalised roles in society are actually social constructs. John's house is a freer space that is not marked by gender ideologies and more importantly that represents female freedom through the image of John's grandmother, who has the power to heal people with her remedies and who shows Tita that the kitchen does not have to be a limiting place, that it can be an empowering place providing freedom and agency at the same time. While living in Dr. John's house, as a result of her mother's illness and being the only professional cook around, Tita is called back to the ranch. However, this return is significant because for the first time the domestic space gives Tita the comfort and power that she has searched for since she has gained confidence and became aware of her potential whilst in Dr. John's house.

Her mother's illness juxtaposes their roles and rather than being the one who is dependant, Tita becomes the powerful one who needs to perform her domestic roles not out of duty but this time because Mama Elena is in desperate need of her. For instance, once Tita goes back to her home, she is no more afraid to look directly at her mother's eyes (Esquivel 118-119) and "Tita knew perfectly well that her mother felt profoundly humiliated because not only did she have to allow Tita back into her house again but until she recovered she needed Tita to take care of her" (Esquivel 119). Tita's return scares Mama Elena who thinks that her daughter will add poison to the dishes that she cooks to take her revenge by slowly killing her mother. Knowing how her daughter can add her emotions as an ingredient to any dish that she prepares and knowing the long held strong feelings that Tita has bred towards her mother, Mama Elena's fear can be commented on as her realisation of Tita's power on food and her awareness of Tita's newly found agency that is developed by experiencing a space outside of the ranch.

Laura Esquivel presents Tita's agency and the new power that she has gained as a result of exceeding the spatial boundaries of her home. This awareness and the agency she gained leads Tita to revolt against any voice, feeling and idea that aims to limit her. Referring back to the correlation between the social and space and based on the mutual relationship between spaces and gendered dualities, challenging one also challenges the other. Thence, having realised that she does not have to limit herself within the social norms and that she can both physically and metaphorically leave her limited condition in the ranch, when Pedro protests Tita and John's marriage, for the first time Tita openly voices her feelings and ideas, implying that she is not only challenging spatial limits but also the male/female and powerful/powerless binaries. Tita responds to Pedro's reaction as,

'Pedro, you're hardly the one to tell me what I should or shouldn't do. When you were going to get married, I didn't ask you not to do it, even though your wedding destroyed me. You have your life, now leave me in peace to have mine!'. (Esquivel 136)

Tita's response here is actually a reaction to the decisions that have been made on behalf of her by the society. She underlines the fact that she has the right to make her own decisions regarding her own life and regarding her social standing.

In addition to her realisation of and reaction towards societal limitations as a result of experiencing the outside world in the short period when she left the ranch for Dr. John's house, Tita also becomes aware of the significance of her kitchen in exploring and exposing her feelings, and also in challenging of the traditions that Mama Elena tries to perpetuate. Tita's kitchen is the place where repressed emotions came into being, where even man, who must be the active one, becomes stuck by and pacified with the power that Tita holds. Walking by the kitchen, "Pedro couldn't resist the smells from the kitchen and was heading towards them. But he stopped stock-still in the doorway, transfixed by the sight of Tita ... At once their passionate glances fused" (Esquivel 62). Tita becomes mighty and powerful in this domestic atmosphere and reverses the male/female, active/passive binaries. As such in an interview on her novel, Esquivel is posed with a comment; "you eroticize a place often associated with women's subjugation" (Loewenstein 605). The gendered meanings that are associated

with kitchen have been challenged by Esquivel as she brings to the fore the subjugated energy of women and Esquivel responds to this statement by saying,

I am convinced that cooking to me is an inversion of the couple's sexual role. This nurturing that our essence carries, and that our love carries and all these emotions, where we are all contained – this is how the woman can, in fact, penetrate the man, this is how it converts, and the man is the passive one. (Loewenstein 605)

Hence, cooking in the novel becomes a tool and a metaphor for subverting the gender roles and challenging the boundaries that are attached to the kitchen and that limit women. Instead of providing emotional stability, comfort, nourishment and health, Tita destabilises all of the aforementioned matters as those who eat her dishes either get sick, become emotionally unstable and feel a sense of discomfort with the new emotions that emerge after consuming what Tita has cooked. Hence, *Like Water for Chocolate*, presents the kitchen as prone to change and open to interpretation, through Tita's recipes that help her feelings exceed the physical and the metaphorical boundaries that the traditions and her patriarchal society assigned.

### **3.5. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces**

Within the context of the current study, house and kitchen are centralised because of their representation of the gender ideologies. In the like manner, meal preparation, cooking and serving, in other words, food related tasks are studied as reflecting women's role. Thus, the discussions under this sub-heading will be followed by the use of food metaphor with reference to cooking or not cooking, arguing that woman's relationship with food and cooking is a cultural association more than a natural disposition and that when cooking is used as a subversive tool, the private sphere becomes a place of struggle, a place that can expose the social construction and patriarchal conceptualisation of spaces and can turn into a liberating site.

As discussed, references to food, kitchen, food preparation and cooking in the novels under study connects them with the idea of domesticity since “[w]omen are almost universally in charge of reproduction: cooking, feeding” (Counihan, “Gendering Food” 104). In the same line, when the use of food in the given places is scrutinized,



the notions and divisions of male-spaces and female-spaces come out as a construct that can in fact be challenged. The dynamism that space opens up and allows is cleverly used by the heroines who are dissatisfied with the domestic space and the essentialist gender norms that are attached to the spaces that they are allowed in. Similar to Derridean bricolage, women use what they are given and what they have, the kitchen and the domestic space, and challenge its limits with the intention of re-making and re-marking this feminized space as their own, and this way, they begin a process of self-definition. The kitchen in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* turn into an emancipating space within which women shed their domestic shackles and set themselves free of the gendered spatial codes. In terms of how they employ kitchen, it is possible to say that the heroine's kitchens still bear traces of domesticity as they never retain away from their connection with food and cooking, but their re-coding of the feminine and the domestic bears no trace of the prevailing ideologies. Instead, the way they employ these places challenges the common codings around the private sphere. For instance, when Esther prepares food, she chooses canned foodstuff which bears no signs of domesticity. When Marian bakes a cake, it does not look like a conventional dish but instead stands for herself that is turned into a consumable good. Finally, when Tita cooks, she adds rather unconventional ingredients, her emotions, into her dishes. Therefore, the selected novels not only enable the readers to reconsider the relationship between gender and place but also lead the readers to question their basic assumptions about the constitution of spaces by showing the possibility of alternative modes of constitution and dwelling in those spaces.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that kitchen is the place where a woman learns "patience and passivity" (725), lost within the magic and alchemical process of cooking, knowing that "she is doomed to repetition" (726). Performing her tasks in the kitchen requires a woman to carefully operate the food product and to wait for the end-product of her toil, making her a patient figure who follows the same repetitive cycle of preparation, production and consumption in a selfless manner. In her explication of what a woman experiences in the kitchen, Beauvoir states that a woman experiences the natural-chemical process of ingredients coming together, mixing, swelling and forming a dish that she has to keep an eye on but has no full control over, as each dish

will have a different outcome. Henceforth, it could be claimed that breaking the convention of not having any control over the food that one cooks, is a matter of breaking free from the repetitive cycle of baking and cooking passively and patiently. In addition to the passive and limited being that food related roles define, food is significant for a woman's identification with femininity. It is stated that, being a good woman is associated with having a clean home and offering plentiful food and dishes that are home-made (Avakian and Haber 9). Within such a context in which any nutritive or culinary act depends on or affects woman, *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* question what happens if a woman denies all of the roles that have been attributed to her and what happens if a woman challenges the traditional meanings and significations of food. In food studies, it is stated that "culinary metaphor provides women writers with a discourse of resistance" (Avakian and Haber 19). Henceforth, it could be argued that any use as well as mis-use of food and food related activity becomes a subversive act. In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, rather than cooking to take care of and to feed others, Esther challenges the spatial hierarchies of the kitchen and the roles that are naturally associated with her by simply resorting to eating as much as she wants. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian challenges the assumptions of proper femininity as devised by her relationship with cooking by problematizing cooking for her fiancé out of duty instead of cooking because she wants so. Finally, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita breaks away her passive and repetitive cooking role as she learns to add her emotions as an ingredient to her dishes as a result of which she exceeds the boundaries of her kitchen. That is why, this chapter claims that cooking is a symbol of the cycle that women are trapped inside and not cooking or changing the habitual means of cooking is a matter of getting free from the definitive boundaries and toils of the space that women are assigned to. Hence, the significance of food for space comes from the subversive and the liberating potential that it has.

As related, spatial divisions are reflective of gender ideologies and the essentialist viewpoint, indicating that it is a woman's duty to take care of the household chores and specifically of cooking. Referring to Counihan's work, Avakian and Haber indicate that "women gain influence (private power) through giving even as they may be locked out of coercive (public) power" (8). By giving and being selfless in the private sphere, women remain outsiders to the public world. As previously discussed

through the construction of social space, the heroines lack autonomy and are denied freedom as a result of being socially and physically trapped in the private sphere and symbolically defined within the limits of the roles that the male defined private sphere associates with them. Their sense of femininity is also defined through their role as the providers of food at home because “‘good’ women are defined by a clean house and abundant home-cooked meals” (Avakian and Haber 9). While home traditionally represents the confinement of women and the conventional roles that she has, Young also states that,

Despite the oppressions and privileges the idea historically carries, the idea of home also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values. Some of these can be uncovered by exploring the meaning-making activity most typical of women in domestic work. (Young 124)

The protagonists of *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* show their dissatisfaction with and resistance to the gender codes and to show their frustration, dissatisfaction and feelings of restraint, they challenge the norms of domesticity and of domestic spaces, which in all three novels comes through the use of food. This study argues that the protagonists' subversive use of food could be read as a meaning making attempt to re-create male-attributed meanings. This way, home and the domestic environment gain a liberating potential. Hence, while the kitchen and the domestic environment have been discussed as domains of female subjugation, perpetuating an unequal distribution of gender roles as a result of which women have been confined into home and kitchen, these spaces can also open up a possibility for gaining autonomy, by empowering woman's sense of individuality and subjectivity. Therefore, when they challenge patriarchy from within the private sphere through the use of food, or by not cooking food, they also problematize their limited agency. In discussing the concept of gaining agency within the context of feminism, Bronwyn Davies means having a subject position and having voice but it also means,

a sense of oneself as one who can go beyond the given meanings in any one discourse, and forge something new, through a combination of previously unrelated discourses, through the invention of words and concepts which capture a shift in consciousness that is beginning to occur, or through imagining not what is, but what might be. (Davies 51)

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* the idea of a shift of consciousness seems to be how a denial of the domestic relationship with the kitchen can go against any patriarchal pre-definition of the female roles and can forge a rather freer relationship with cooking and so with the kitchen by challenging the patriarchal conceptualisation of this space. Using food for not what it is but for the other things that it might be, the use of food as a subversive concept comes handy for the heroines to contest spatial divisions and to redefine their womanhood. The reason why food is associated with agency is based on how food loses its significance as a domestic metaphor and instead represents the carelessness, the freedom, realisation and reaction of the heroines.

### **3.5.1. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces in *The Fat Woman's Joke***

Food in Weldon's novel has multiple different roles; first, as a symbol of domesticity, second, as a means towards challenging domestic roles and symbolising female freedom instead. Majority of the narrative is composed of Esther's new life while her life with Alan is only given as her retrospective narration. Esther's excessive eating gains significance when she is not in the presence of or interrupted by Alan, i.e. man, because eating in a female defined space, where she is the sole owner of the house, also marks that she is the decision maker of her own life. In addition, Esther moves away from being a housewife whose concern is feeding her family and friends with home-made food as she becomes a woman whose relationship with food changes from cooking to eating only. As discussed, the kitchen represents the domestic duties that patriarchy determines and attributes to women and in relation with these roles there has been a developing "sense of domestic pride" (Reisman 2) implying "a housewife's resourcefulness in making elegant dishes out of canned products" (Reisman 2). Likewise, cooking according to Esther is associated with the constructed nature of her gender. As such, Esther sees cooking as "a great waste of time and energy, but it keeps women occupied, and that's important" (Weldon 72). Hence, cooking according to Esther is a means to keep women occupied and away from public affairs. However, as her narrative proceeds, food becomes a symbol of freedom rather than an entrapment to the domestic sphere.

The first instance of Esther using food with a subversive twist is during the period of dieting. Throughout their diet, Weldon only depicts one instance of cooking and this instance turns into a scene of gaining power over one another and an instance that shows Esther's determination of gaining power within her home. Food in this scene becomes a significant symbol of power and rebellion as Esther tries to sneak butter into the omelette that she is cooking. As the only power that Esther has, once she suspects Alan of having an affair with his secretary, she wants to take her revenge from Alan by trying to interfere with his diet. Although this looks like a simple act, for Alan, this is a challenging of his power and a challenging of the social roles and as a result, it is indicated that "Alan decided it was time to bring the situation back under his control" (Weldon 51). Expecting Esther to conform to certain domestic expectations and acting like the owner and the controller of the domestic environment, Alan's behaviour, outdone by the diet, leads Esther to notice how limiting her condition is becoming and how dull her life gets without any cooking purpose at home. Realising her limited condition and lack of meaning in her life except from being a housewife, Esther continues with her subversive use of food specifically in her new home, the new space that she gets which at the same time becomes a space that is defined only by herself.

When Esther eats or prepares something alone in her house, the kitchen gains two very different meanings than it had before. The former of these meanings is that the kitchen loses its significance as a domestic metaphor because eating, cooking or any other kitchen related activity turn into daily routines or basic nutritive needs like any other activity. Hence, marking that eating and cooking or food preparation have been domesticized and given a female emphasis by men. The second meaning that kitchen gets is yet more significant as Esther's kitchen becomes a space of resistance to the typical female image or the man-made femininity. When Esther leaves her married home, she also leaves all the domestic, wifely and parental metaphors that are associated with her and with cooking. Rather than cooking elegant dishes, the food that Esther chooses to eat loses any domestic meaning as she resorts to canned and frozen food that need no planning or meticulous preparing. Her new association with food is narrated as follows; "Esther made herself a breakfast of porridge, from a tin, and evaporated milk, kipper from a plastic bag, already buttered, three Heinz tins

called 'Junior Bacon' and Egg Breakfast', toast, butter, marmalade, and coffee" (Weldon 115-116). The reason why, Esther's reaction by eating canned and unprepared food becomes so symbolic is related with the appeal to domestic pride. By eating canned food, Esther rejects any connection of woman with food preparation. In addition, preparing all this foodstuff only for herself, represents how Esther has denied her selflessness in cooking for others, showing how cooking started to represent her individuality rather than her trapped position back at her married home. Food shifts its meaning from being a woman's toll to representing her individuality because Esther also says, "There is nothing, she would think, more delicious or reassuring than the icing of bought chocolate cake, eaten in the silence and privacy of the night" (Weldon 7). The words 'reassurance' and 'privacy' are telling that eating and not having to relate kitchen with domesticity and femininity anymore, makes Esther feels a sense of comfort and a newly found autonomy in using her space as she likes. Hence, food related acts do not seem to carry any domestic meaning anymore and the kitchen is re-constituted as a feminine space that is defined by woman herself. Overall, the kitchen in Esther's newly owned apartment is a self-acclaimed feminine space, an area where she feels confidently herself. It is also the place where she shares her life-story with Phyllis, turning the narrative into her own and metaphorically gaining more space.

### **3.5.2. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces in *The Edible Woman***

At the beginning of the narrative, when the usual pattern of Marian's days is narrated, she is seen in the kitchen only to pack herself a quick breakfast, not so much occupied with cooking. Later on, as a result of her eating disorder and her aversion of food, the kitchen turns into a space where she tests which foods she can eat and which she loathes. Resolving that she cannot eat anything saying "I can't eat anything at all. Not even a glass of orange juice" (Atwood 325), Marian resorts to taking vitamin pills and supplements and so cuts off all her relationship with the kitchen in her own home. Unable to eat, she is dissociated from the kitchen and from the beginning, develops a rather complicated relationship with food. In addition to her complicated relationship with the kitchen, caused by her food aversion, although Marian's relationship with cooking is not so drawn-out as Esther's and Tita's, since compared to them, Marian has a job that she goes to and is not officially entitled as a wife or a cook, when Marian

cooks, it is again a matter of fulfilling her domestic roles as required by Peter. In her relationship, kitchen begins to represent something that she cannot control but something that she is controlled through. As these food preparation scenes gain frequency, and as Marian realises her prospective married role, she responds to and reacts against this domesticity, again by using food as a subversive metaphor.

Marian's rejection of her domestic role and her contestation of kitchen as a domestic space is achieved through baking a cake which is the most apparent instance of the heroine's use of food in this novel. Realising that all she does in her affair is taking care of Peter, Marian conceals her subversive plan under the guise of proper femininity of serving her fiancé a home-cooked dish. The preparation of the cake is done meticulously, with skill and proficiency, and is narrated as follows,

She turned on the oven. ... She tied on an apron and rinsed the new bowls and the other new utensils under the tap ... She dried the things and began to crack and separate the eggs, hardly thinking, concentrating all her attention on the movements of her hands, and then when she was beating and sifting and folding, on the relative times and the textures. Spongecake needed a light hand. She poured the batter into the tin and drew a fork sideways through it to break the large air-bubbles. As she slid the tin into the oven she almost hummed with pleasure. It was a long time since she had made a cake. (Atwood 339-340)

Margaret Atwood describes Marian's cake preparation in fine detail which is a rather sardonic attack on the image of a proper housewife who in her apron is seen as meticulously preparing a dish. However, this time, the minute details that Marian pays attention to in preparing and baking the cake are not instructed by Peter but are completed willingly. Hence, Marian chooses to be in the kitchen herself and willingly spends time cooking, showing that she is trying to change the male defined space of the kitchen into a self-acclaimed space within which she can define the rules, the procedures and the limits. Likewise, to serve this cake, instead of going to Peter's home, like she always does, Marian calls Peter to her own house for the first time. This shows her empowerment and implies that she has freed herself from the associations of the private space by baking when she wants rather than by baking to take care of Peter. Hence, compared to how the food related pattern of their relationship has proceeded so far, the fact that Marian prefers to call Peter to her home is a willing choice of rejecting the domesticity that is associated with Peter's home as well as an

act of self-defining and of changing their roles within her own space. This way, kitchen and the food product which is an outcome of her domestic work, are dissociated from their patriarchal and restricting meanings as Marian cooks without being demanded. Not rejecting cooking, but cooking without any domestic concern of taking care of Peter, by inviting Peter to come over, Marian also aims to show her home and kitchen as self-defined and self-owned spaces. In addition, the cake shows Marian's willing association with the kitchen, which goes against the entrapped situation that she has found herself in, in her relationship.

Preparing a dish that she likes is significant in showing her newly found agency within her kitchen because, throughout their affair, Marian allowed Peter to choose what they will eat saying,

She had fallen into the habit in the last month or so of letting him choose for her. It got rid of the vacillation she had found herself displaying when confronted with a menu: she never knew what she wanted to have. But Peter could make up their minds right away. (Atwood 179-180)

Hence, instead of preparing something that Peter asks for as she always did when visiting him or letting him choose what they will eat, for the first time, Marian chooses what to cook and becomes the one who makes up his mind as well. Empowered through her decision of baking a cake for Peter, the very tool, i.e. cooking, that he tried to subjugate her with becomes her weapon against Peter. At this point, how she serves the cake is also important because Margaret Atwood describes this instance almost like a sardonic attack on the image of a proper housewife. The serving of the cake is described as,

She went into the kitchen and returned, bearing the platter in front of her, carefully and with reverence, as though she was carrying something sacred in a procession, an icon or the crown on a cushion in a play. She knelt, setting the platter on the coffee-table in front of Peter. (Atwood 344)

The processional serving of the cake, signifies its meaning for Marian and for her ultimate aim of challenging Peter and the social norms that he has been leading her towards. What is more significant in her processional serving of the cake is how she uses her home as a reevaluating space by mocking the conventional image of food



serving as a ceremonial and a familial act performed by woman. In her case, food becomes sacred not because it defies her relative social merit, gendered roles and physical place, but because it helps her to re-signify the meanings of home as a liberating place and enables her to show that the limits of the domestic space and what a woman does or how a woman identifies herself with her roles within this space can be defined by a woman herself.

### **3.5.3. Significance of Food in Contesting the Given Spaces in *Like Water for Chocolate***

In *Like Water for Chocolate* food likewise sets the pattern of the days for Tita, whose life is concerned with making the best dishes for de la Garza family. In her case the tradition of cooking for the family, the communal gatherings and the traditional dishes that she has to cook on specific days, represents the customs that she has to live by and relates food with conventional meanings. Laura Esquivel emphasizes the tradition of cooking through the different recipes that she gives at the beginning of each chapter, which is a continuation of the tradition of Mexican women, writing monthly recipe recommendations (Valdés 78). Cookbooks and recipes have been significant in creating “women’s cultural space” (Avakian and Haber 19) and it could be said that this way Esquivel intended to emphasize an already established female culture around kitchen and cooking that also involved woman’s authentic experience.

This authentic experience, then, could be brought up as a challenge against the patriarchal definitions and limitations of kitchen as a restraining female space towards kitchen as a woman’s self-acclaimed space where woman’s experience comes to the fore. Likewise, the recipes of Tita and the cookbook that she leaves as an inheritance for the future female generations of her family reflects her unheard voice.

Writing a cookbook that includes all her subversive recipes enables Tita to live beyond her time as her niece knows that as long as Tita’s recipes are tried and cooked, Tita will also live, saying “Tita, ... will go on living as long as there is someone who cooks her recipes” (Esquivel 220). Hence, through what she cooks, Tita exceeds the spatial as well as the social limits of her kitchen.

Laura Esquivel points out that the kitchen can at the same time be a place where a woman can be perceived as powerful against the traditional image of her passivity as stabilised through her roles in the kitchen. With reference to Esquivel's own experiences in the kitchen, Pérez quotes Esquivel's words as follows,

I almost didn't leave the house, especially the kitchen [ ... ] When I married and had children, I began to realize that the kitchen isn't the place of punishment; it's the most sacred space there is [ ... ] by means of the ritual of the meal, a communion is constructed with all people. I even believe that they reverse gender roles with men: now he has to be passive and the woman is active. (214-215)

In the same manner with Esquivel, it is indicated that "Tita's domain was the kitchen" (Esquivel 10) and this space is at the same time "where she grew vigorously and healthy" (Esquivel 10). However, more importantly, *Like Water for Chocolate*, subverts the usual gender binaries and challenges the usual meanings of the kitchen by associating the kitchen with subversive acts. In the novel, these subversive acts are expressed through the emotions that Tita mixes to her dishes and since emotions are the opposite of the strict rules that Mama Elena presents, her cooking challenges the spatial limitations that her mother has commanded. With respect to food, Tita says "for Tita the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food" (Esquivel 11) and it is through cooking with joy and delight in her kitchen that it is possible to reveal "the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen" (Esquivel 216). Likewise, throughout the narrative, the kitchen and Tita's association with food helps her grow strong, to learn life, her emotions, herself and to challenge the traditional patriarchal meanings that her mother has associated with their family recipes. Against all its domestic and repressive associations, kitchen turns into a comfort zone for Tita where she could freely express her emotions and where she feels herself the most powerful.

Food and the dishes that Tita prepares have connotations of tradition and obligations that she needs to endure as a result of being the official ranch cook. However, Tita disobeys her mother and tries to challenge the limitations that her mother poses by altering the recipes that she follows. Tita thinks, "But she couldn't resist the temptation to violate the oh-so-rigid rules her mother imposed in the kitchen ... and in life" (Esquivel 179). Hence, just like Esquivel's realisation that kitchen can be a place to

reverse customs, realising that she does not have to obey any rule and that she can challenge the recipes by coming up with her own novel ways of cooking which can also include her feelings, the kitchen and food turn into means of communication in Tita's hands. It is argued that "feeding is established psychologically as the locus of love, aggression, pleasure, anxiety, frustration and desire for control. Precisely, in other words, the ingredients of power relations" (Sceats and Cunningham 118). Most of the recipes in the novel involve either an emotion of Tita such as her longing or her anger, or include Tita's tears or blood and these turn into recipes that could surpass the power relations enmeshed in her traditional society. Although the significance of these emotive and bodily materials will be scrutinized in more detail in the chapter on body, considering the spatial divisions and the impermeable boundaries of spaces, mixing something feminine, something personal and unconventional as an ingredient, challenges the limits of kitchen as a traditional patriarchal space. Thus, it is clear that even in the way Tita tries to fulfil a very traditional role, she challenges the limits and the spatial-social meanings that her mother tries to follow.

One of the most significant recipes of Tita that exemplifies how she manages to go beyond the limits of her kitchen is the 'Chabela Wedding Cake', one of the very first dishes that Tita cooks, which is her sister and Pedro's wedding cake. With this recipe Tita manages to go beyond the limits of the kitchen as her teardrops and her feeling of longing for Pedro mix into the cake batter and hence reach out to the whole wedding banquet regardless of the guests' gender or social position, thus, Tita's emotions extend beyond her kitchen into the outside world. The instance is narrated as follows;

The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro, usually so proper, was having trouble holding back his tears. Mama Elena, who hadn't shed a single tear over her husband's death, was sobbing silently. But the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication – an acute attack of pain and frustration – that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and into the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love. Everyone there, every last person, fell under this spell. (Esquivel 39)

Her longing to be with Pedro and her repressed protest against his marriage with Rosaura is transferred through her tears into the cake and finds expression through food. Thus, without realising, Tita shares her limited condition with the guests, who

act out the act of consummation on behalf of Tita. Previously, Mama Elena told Tita not to act like a victim or to cry while taking charge of the wedding preparations (Esquivel 28), but by shedding her emotions into the cake, Tita actually goes against her victimhood. Even Mama Elena sheds tears for her late husband as she eats the cake. Hence, it is clear that while Tita does not yield herself to her mother, she also manages to transfer her emotions beyond the limits of her kitchen, also exceeding the traditions that her mother represents. The wedding becomes a failure for Mama Elena and Rosaura, who is the carrier of traditions on behalf of her mother. However, it could be said that Tita succeeds in trespassing the boundaries set by her family tradition and upsets those who firmly stick to the conventions. With this recipe, Tita proves that the physical limits of the kitchen can be exceeded and food does not have to represent the socially assigned roles that a woman needs to perform. Tita's interaction with the kitchen and food does more than enabling her access to the outside world. Contrary to becoming a subject to the stereotypical image of a cook and to the traditions that her mother limits her with, Tita gains autonomy through her role as the family cook. Interaction with food empowers Tita as she realises that food is the only way through which she can reach out to the members of her family, make her voice heard and challenge the boundaries of the limited social and physical space that she is given. This way, the kitchen truly becomes Tita's domain of expression rather than a place where she is repressed to her fate.

### **3.6. Conclusion to Chapter 3**

As explored in the theoretical background to this chapter, the social produces spaces and spatial divides, causing spaces and places to be bestowed with the social meanings that we attach to them. Spaces and places are never free from being defined by the social and patriarchal ideologies which also correspond to the roles that woman and man should have respectively. Along the lines of gender essentialism, being a woman is used as a justification for dividing spaces as male and female places which reveals space as a social construct following the prevalent ideology and also mirroring gender dualities. The novels also bring about the idea of feminine space as a metaphorical and social milieu that only permits certain roles and that cannot be trespassed, such as Esther's roles as a mother and a (house)wife, Marian's taking on the role of a

housewife in her affair with Peter, and finally Tita's natural engagement with the kitchen and her inability of leaving this space which denies her to be herself. The heroines' fairly limited role in their relationships shows the limited social worth that they are given and also parallel the limited spaces that they are allowed to occupy. Hence, while being a woman seemingly feminizes certain places such as home and the kitchen, at the same time it defines the social roles and barriers that a woman is captive to. As seen through the discussions of *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, home and the domestic environment have been naturalized and associated with women causing the heroines to have no choice but accept being situated in the domestic environment which not only refers to home and kitchen but as indicated in the discussions, encompasses all the relations that causes woman's identification as a wife, a mother or a care-giver, limiting her into the private sphere and deeming her as the spatial other of man.

Overall, in *The Fat Woman's Joke* being a mother, in *The Edible Woman* getting married and in *Like Water for Chocolate* becoming the cook of the ranch are used as the driving elements of the plots but at the same time they are used as obligations that emphasize women's physical and symbolic entrapment to the domestic environment. Especially *The Fat Woman's Joke* and *Like Water for Chocolate* are centred around the house and the kitchen which puts an emphasis on the definitions and restrictions that limiting places place on women. Likewise, although *The Edible Woman* involves the public workspace, Marian is still located inside, i.e. within the private domain, indicating that women are left outside the world of public affairs. The discussions clarified that even when the heroines occupy a space, this space can never be fully under their control. As a result, the heroines show a desire to create self-defined and self-acclaimed spaces that will free them from patriarchal bounds and that will give them agency.

In these novels, home and the kitchen, both of which are associated with woman's entrapment and oppression, turn into spaces of freedom. In the case of Esther, domestic space becomes a space where she rejects her roles and narrates her story. For Marian, kitchen and the domestic metaphor become the sources of her empowerment by providing her with the tools for voicing herself. Finally, for Tita, kitchen starts to

signify a shattering of traditions from within. That is why using and abusing the kitchen and cooking as signs of domesticity to meet their own ends, turns food into a subversive metaphor that challenges the public/private, male/female and active/passive hegemonies. Overall, it is clear that the traditionally conceptualized and feminized places turn into liberating spaces. That is not to say that the private sphere is no longer feminized in the novels but instead, the heroines re-claim and self-define an otherwise male-defined domain with the intention of making this space a truly feminine domain with its borders defined by women themselves which also becomes a matter of declaring their existence and being as free from their affairs, familial relations and social condition.

As indicated in the introduction chapter, the conceptual framework of this dissertation is structured around two major viewpoints which are space as discussed in this chapter, and body, the topic of the following chapter. The novels under study open up two major points of discussion if looked from an essentialist perspective. First, as discussed in this chapter, the heroines of the selected novels problematise the ideological and social construction and division of masculine and feminine places, the taken for granted situatedness of women within certain places based on these gendered-spatial divisions. Becoming aware of their situation within these spaces, Esther, Marian and Tita also realise that their social condition and lot is a matter of their being a woman and so, is stemming from their feminine body. As a continuation of the argument in this chapter, the novels also emphasize that as much as women are located to certain spaces, the body can itself be a space whose limits are likewise defined by the masculinist logic. Henceforth, the following chapter will provide a discussion on the representations of the female body and the somatic and social limitations that it poses to the heroines of the selected novels.

## CHAPTER 4

### **BODY AS A FEMININE PLACE: WOMEN'S BODILY EXPERIENCE AND SUBVERSION OF BODILY ESSENTIALISM**

Femininity is not only limited to serving the household through cooking and housework but it also means learning to look like a woman. Hence, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of the heroines by discussing the similar and different ways through which the female body is presented in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate*. The major discussion point for an association of women and the body comes from the dualistic viewpoint and the association of woman with the body rather than with the mind, which at the same time becomes a physical-biological hinderance for woman. In addition, similar to space, bodies are also social metaphors, shaped by culture and society rather than shaped through the body's biological specificities only. The surface of the female body i.e. the way a woman appears, is configured in a specific way to fit a pre-coded repertoire of meanings associated with femininity including expectations regarding beauty and body size. In turn, these expectations define the experiences of the individual and the demands on women so that she can appropriate her appearance in accordance with the physical expectations of her society. By defining how a woman should exist and how she is perceived by her society, these social meanings that are given to the female body not only limit her in her body but also delimit woman's social position as relative to man. In the same way, as a result of their biological differences and because of being a female body, none of the heroines in the selected novels can live in equal conditions with men and need to live by the biological-physical as well as the social limitations that their bodies pose.

The female body in the selected novels is a key indicator of both the societal depictions of femininity and a determining factor for the way the heroines experience their bodies

and their being woman. Defined through their male partners or through their societies, the bodies of Esther, Marian and Tita are coded by social norms as fitting to the images of motherhood, beauty standards and sexuality. In this way, their bodies become the identifier of who they are, how they should look and behave. As a result of their bodies being defined as outside themselves, the heroines feel that they have no control over their corporeality and identity. Although the focus of this study is on the heroines, to support the argument of how societies code and limit women, other female characters will also be referred to as well in studying the notion of a proper feminine body.

Consequently, a key aspect in the novels under study is the authors' ways of representing and using the female body as indicating what can be named the female type while also showing the struggles that women face as they try to comply with this typical body image and idealised femininity. Among the three novelists, Fay Weldon's portrayal and criticism of the female body encompasses the most archetypical one because in her novel the female body is either associated with motherhood or with male-defined beauty standards regarding slimness and beauty. Hence, *The Fat Woman's Joke* concedes that a woman must be a mother, if not she must be beautiful and Esther revolts against both of these types as she embraces her non-standard fat body image. The female body in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* works as a tool for showing the heroine's dissatisfaction with her sex and with the roles attributed to her. As Marian becomes more and more immersed in her affair with her fiancé, she is drawn away from food, with a desire to diminish and get away from her male-defined body. The denial of her body is also a denial of her sex and femininity. Lastly, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Laura Esquivel challenges the traditional society's prescriptions and limitations of the female body. In her portrayal of Tita, Esquivel empowers the body by giving it the capacity and power to transfer a woman's feelings and desires that go beyond the cultural givens of the body. Thus, in the selected novels, the female body is both presented as a cultural symbol signified in line with patriarchal norms and as a ground for gaining agency.

In their path towards becoming more autonomous by self-acknowledging what it means to be a woman, Esther, Marian and Tita are all involved with food. To self-acknowledge their bodies and to challenge the male attributed meanings of the female



body, Esther eats excessively and Marian starves herself. This way, they challenge the beauty standards and change the typical representations of the female body. In addition, Tita uses food as a tool to transfer her feelings and to voice her body that her traditional society has silenced. Consequently, in these three novels, by using the power of food in altering or in voicing female corporeality, the female body becomes a means through which women's corporealization and othering is criticised.

This chapter aims to discuss how the female body is presented in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* in relation with bodily expectations, and how these bodily expectations are lived by a woman, determining her place within society as well as her position in social relations. The discussion of the novels will also offer a parallel between consumable goods and woman as a prey to male intrusion through ways of restraining and so making vulnerable the female body. This chapter will also discuss how eating and not eating signal obedience or resistance to patriarchal gender norms as the analysis of the female body will focus on the standardised body image that is imposed on the heroines and that is also matter of controlling and restraining their hunger. This analysis of the female body with reference to body image as well as control of what a woman eats and her body fat will reveal the loss of woman's agency as the female body becomes more and more alien to woman herself. However, the claim is that, if women have long been identified through their bodies and if their anatomical difference is made the core of their identity, then not obeying the limitations and man-made definitions of their bodies is also a resistance to their normative identities. Henceforth, it will be discussed that when women shift the way that their bodies are constructed and seen, they also challenge the male defined category of woman. Consequently, the discussion in this chapter will also focus on how the heroines react to these bodily expectations and self-consciously alter or re-create their bodies through their interaction with food in the form of eating, not eating and transference of emotions to food.

#### **4.1. Theoretical Background of the Chapter**

Body is a complex topic that encompasses the corporeal, the psychological, body as opposed to the mind, body as constructed and situated by norms and body as lived by

women. While a study of the female body in this chapter will inevitably touch upon all of these aforementioned aspects, within the context of this dissertation body will be looked at as a social construct since the heroines Esther, Marian, Tita and the other female characters that this dissertation studies are trying to comply with the social expectations around the female body. Henceforth, the theoretical background to this chapter is initially built through the perspectives of Elizabeth Grosz and Susan Bordo who claim that the biological specificity of woman and woman's association with the corporeal within patriarchal societies is a social construct which also parallels the theoretical standpoint of the previous chapter. By nature of the expansive subject of body and the range of examples from the novels that will be studied, this chapter will synthesize ideas from various critics in order to provide an examination of the female body from multiple perspectives. Thus, Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Marion Young's ideas will accompany and support Elizabeth Grosz and Susan Bordo's arguments in providing a background to the constitution of woman within male/female binary while also discussing how woman is associated with her body. This chapter will also look at some of the ways through which the body is socially constructed and then turned into a standardised version of the female form. In this part, the focus will be mainly on the notions of beauty and slimness, or the idealised body image and sexual objectification in general while also studying the heroines' struggle with these idealised images. To this end, here, the ideas on beauty will stem from Naomi Wolf, while the ideal body shape, which will also encompass the pathologies and the discomfort that women develop, will refer to Kim Chernin's ideas in addition to Susan Bordo's.

The body has been a topic of concern within Western thinking, instigated by a fear of the body as an enigmatic, distinct from and as the opposite of the mind. In this somatophobic tradition, the mind is hierarchised as a result of which the body is undermined and has received the subordinate position. The same somatophobic Western tradition that is afraid of the body, associated man with the mind, while woman is coupled with the opposing element of the mind, that is, the body (Threadcraft 207-208). By associating woman with the body rather than with the mind, the common assumption has been that femininity is a matter of the body but not of the mind. Thus, if the body is inferior to the mind, so a woman who is deemed as corporeal, is both inferior and subservient to man. An association of woman with her body, not

only restrained her as a mother and a housewife and positioned her as the Other of patriarchy but also brought about pre-defined bodily expectations that a woman is expected to comply with. Thus, it could be said that woman's body, in its physical and emotional aspects, is not only given a secondary position, but is likewise questioned, made open to intrusion and is kept under control while male corporeality is left unquestioned and untouched (Plain and Sellers 200). A study of feminist scholarship around the period when the selected novels were written, likewise shows that the sexual politics have centred on the sexualisation, feminization and silencing of women's bodies. Hence, in addition to the domestic docility, the female body once again becomes crafted as passive by man, in line with the male/female binary and the gendered hegemonies that follow from this binary.

Woman's being closer to the body because of her natural dispositions such as menstruation, pregnancy and lactation have also been pre-causes of her being man's Other and result in an essentialist point of view that engages her with her body. Woman's alignment with the body caused by her anatomical differences is studied by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* in which she states;

Relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynist thought confines women to the biological requirements of reproduction on the assumption that because of particular biological, physiological, and endocrinological transformations, women are somehow more corporeal, and more natural than men. (14)

These biological differences as well as the tradition of dualities that associated woman with the body, caused woman to be bound to her corporeality. Therefore, the body, which has been perceived as the prison of the soul, is likewise seen as the cause of woman's oppression. Similar to the conceptualisation and the distribution of places, the body, especially the female body is also socially constituted. Grosz states that,

the body is neither brute nor passive but is interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation. On one hand it is a signifying and a signified body; on the other, it is an object of systems of social coercion, legal inscription, and sexual and economic exchange. (*Volatile Bodies* 18)

Thus, the body is argued to be a set of meanings established by culture. Socially, politically and ideologically constructed, the body is never free from the normative and cultural meanings and significations and is an object of social institutions and of discourse. According to Grosz, this false belief of assuming woman as more bodily is a means towards the “social construction of subjectivity” (*Volatile Bodies* 16) because by associating women with their bodies, not only certain standards and corporeal boundaries are determined for women to follow but these standards have turned into a control mechanism and a self-justification method for male hegemony to perpetuate itself. Accordingly, Elizabeth Grosz states that,

Patriarchal oppression, ... justifies itself, at least in part, by connecting women much more closely than men to the body, and, through this identification, restricting women’s social and economic roles to (pseudo) biological terms. (*Volatile Bodies* 14)

Hence, as discussed in the previous chapter, woman’s body is the main determining factor for limiting her and for making her man’s other. Grosz’ idea is also significant for problematizing the naturalness of the female body and discussing woman’s corporeality as a product of culture. In addition, the representation of the female body in social, economic and biological terms became a matter of creating categories of womanhood such as “the stereotypical representation of women as sex object, wife, and mother” (Palmer 14). Consequently, the acculturation of gender and the body as well as the stereotyping of the female body as corresponding to fabricated categories lead to a problematization of the naturalness of sex, supporting the argument that the essential or in other words the natural loses its naturality by being re-defined within culture and as a result, the female body, instead of being natural, becomes enmeshed with the cultural and the ideological meanings.

Similar to Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Bordo also states that the considerations of the female body are more of a product of culture and history rather than a representation of woman’s biological and natural characteristics (41). According to Bordo, there is “no ‘natural’ body ... ‘fundamental’ structures of body experience, are already and always inscribed” (142), meaning that just like spaces, the female body is never free from the social norms and ideologies and that a woman lives her body in line with

these societal inscriptions. To say that the female body is socially produced rather than naturally given means that being a proper woman and a “properly embodied femininity” (Threadcraft 217) is “a feminine body of a certain size and configuration, trained in a repertoire of gestures” (Threadcraft 219) and expected to show “obedience to specific gender ideals” (Threadcraft 219). Such a corporealization of the female body as following standards creates the myth of a proper feminine body, meaning a standard of outward appearance as well as a set of feminine behaviour that the heroines of *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* are constantly made to comply with.

To be a proper woman, means to be compliant with the categories and definitions of femininity. Consequently, Naomi Wolf argues that women need to either fit into the domestic ideal and to the definitions of ‘motherhood’, ‘chastity’ and ‘passivity’ or fit to the “beauty myth” (10) as she names it. Hence, femininity and the female body are defined on a spectrum of a “happy housewife” (Wolf 11), as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, or “beauty-without-intelligence” (Wolf 59), a desirable woman whose sole purpose is to fulfil the ideal feminine self that the patriarchal world imposes. What Naomi Wolf names as the beauty myth is at the same time patriarchy’s way of creating a body type that not only labels certain bodies as appropriate or bodies as obedient to given limits but at the same time expecting woman to embody the norms of beauty ensures that a woman constantly feels herself as incompetent or as in need of the approval of man and of society. The beauty norm objectifies the female body by subjecting the female body to culturally fashioned beauty standards and physical norms, which is also a matter of if a woman is appealing or not. While the beauty myth is mainly a matter of how a woman appears, studying the myth of a beautiful woman, Naomi Wolf points out that this myth comprises both a prescribed appearance and approved behaviour (14). Thus, in addition to the appearance of the female body, bodily practices i.e. proper behaviour has been a major concern in defining femininity. By fashioning and configuring the female body physically and determining the behaviours that the body should embody, the female body loses its naturality, becomes a construct with boundaries permeable, open to male configuration and intrusion, also creating a female anxiety for having to compete with this idealised image.

Through the creation of a myth of beauty, the idea was to create a physical standard based on which women should appropriate themselves and their bodies. Supporting this idea, Iris Marion Young states that women are looked at, their bodily existence watched and evaluated by men and by the society, causing her to also react to and control her corporeal existence and appearance (17). As such, fat is perceived as filthy while slimness means prettiness as well as passivity (Wolf 189). Having to keep up with the male defined standards, a woman's body turns into a medium that is never under her command. Hence, women are controlled, pacified and disciplined towards a certain body supporting the male hegemony which in turn leads women to live with a sense of docility and a sense of their bodies not being enough. Bordo further states that the female body has been "more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes in both forms of cultural manipulation" (143). This vulnerability and feeling of discomfort with their bodies becomes one of the central corporeal experiences that women try to cope with as Elizabeth Grosz states that this identification of women with a secondary social position results from,

containing them within bodies that are represented, even constructed, as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control. Female sexuality and women's powers of reproduction are the defining (cultural) characteristics of women, and, at the same time, these very functions render women vulnerable, in need of protection or special treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy. (*Volatile Bodies* 13-14)

It is clear from Grosz's statement that patriarchy's association of woman with the body is used to rationalise the difference and inequality between the social positions of man and woman. Constructing woman as frail, as unruly and as open to intrusion also stabilises the male/female binary, emphasizing man as the stronger one and woman as the dependant of man. Furthermore, caused by being more corporeal, perceiving the female body as in need of control, appearing feminine, female physicality and woman's body start to reinforce not only the ideal images that a woman has to conform to but also shows woman's oppressed situation as the affiliations of a woman's body makes her passive and lesser than man. Unable to define how her body looks, how her body behaves and overall having no control over her corporeality, women lose autonomy over their bodies.

Building on Susan Bordo's idea that how we live and experience our bodies is always pre-inscribed by society and Elizabeth Grosz's idea that the social inscriptions deem the female body as prone to intervention and control, Iris Marion Young studies the female body in relation with the individual's experiences with and as caused by one's body. According to her,

The lived body is a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body-in-situation. ... The person always faces the material facts of her body and its relation to a given environment. (Young 16)

Thus, the body that is lived and the body that one experiences not only reflects a biological essence but is also fused with social meanings. To say that we live our bodies as located in certain situations and socio-cultural contexts, also opens up a possible claim that our physical, biological, sexual characteristics and differences align us within phallogocentric dualities while at the same time implicate and impact our social position and determine our interactions with the world. Hence, woman's sense of self as implicated by her body, is very much a result of biologically being the female sex and socially being defined and perceived as the feminine body.

Without getting into the depths of the extensive study on the concept of embodiment, this chapter will also offer a brief discussion on the protagonists' experience with and self-realisation of their bodies along with which comes a resistance to the bodily societal norms. Body is the key in understanding woman's experiences and condition as seen through the following definition of embodiment;

Embodiment is a central concern of feminist theory insofar as the body is a site for the symbolic construction of sexual difference, a ground for political exclusion or inclusion, a locus of subjectivity, a prospect for self-realization, and the material focus of many labors that typically fall to women and/or define femininity. (Threadcraft 207)

Consequently, it could be said that while women align their bodies with the norms and expectations, they can likewise, react and so re-mediate and re-define their bodies. Thereupon, one of the claims of this chapter is that, developing bodily self-realisation

and their own sense of embodiment is key for the heroines to reclaim what has been taken away from them by men.

The argument in this chapter follows a common point with the previous chapter in stating that women are entrapped within spatial and physical matter, the boundaries of which are drawn by the patriarchal societies. However, just like spaces, the limits of the body can as well be challenged. Elizabeth Grosz further extends this argument by pointing out that the body is capable of communicating the innermost self as well as the experiences of women who otherwise are left silenced. As Grosz states “the body is commonly considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects)” (*Volatile Bodies* 9). Hence, body is the medium through which the subject experiences the messages from the external world and it is again through the body that the subject’s own experiences can be related to the world. Because of their association with the biological body and their constant struggle in trying to fit their bodies to the standards, women had a much closer relationship with their bodies compared to men. In this regard, the body and especially the female body can be used by women to re-signify what she lives through. Thus, taking and extending Grosz’s argument, the heroines likewise try and manage to translate their personal experiences in their effort of challenging the masculinist norms.

The main focus in this chapter will be on the bodily expectations and how these normative bodily expectations determine woman’s place within society as well as her social relations while also resulting in a sense of alienation from her own self as she tries to comply with the image of proper femininity. The bodily expectations that are put forward and that will be analysed in the novels are namely maternity, physical attractiveness, slimness or maintaining a certain body shape, naivety as well as beauty. As the theoretical background revealed, these expectations create a control mechanism by putting woman under the watchful eye of man who makes it necessary for her to comply with the bodily expectations. Esther, Marian and Tita are faced with each of the aforementioned corporeal expectations. Neither willing to comply with the social encodings, nor allowed to live their bodies as they wish, the heroines are led to develop a complicated relationship with their bodies as they try to live by the societal corporeal



expectations. The novels also centralise the changing attitudes and feelings of Esther, Tita and Marian as their experience with these corporeal attributions shift from being male-attributed to self-defined. In line with the conceptual background that is selected for this chapter, the main argument is that the female body as presented in the novels is defined by masculinist norms and to change the female body in any way possible is not only an attempt to make the body her own but also an attempt to revolt against these masculinist ideals. Hence, when women shift the way that their bodies are constructed and seen, they also challenge the male defined category of woman as Esther, Marian and Tita do so by reacting to the bodily expectations and by altering the representation of their bodies through their interaction with food in the form of eating disorders as well as in the form of their anxieties and feelings transferred to and through food. In order to delve into the authors' exploration of the body, the following paragraphs will provide an overview of how Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel employ body in their narratives.

In her narratives, Fay Weldon depicts a multitude of different versions of the female body with reference to the corporeal experiences that women go through. As such "Weldon unleashes that body into her texts in the form of women who menstruate, conceive, abort, or deliver" (Dowling 74), focusing on women's biological-corporeal experiences in constricting patriarchal societies. Consequently, to depict the female body, it is stated that one of the common motifs of Weldon's fiction is "biological and generic determinism" (Dowling 28). Focusing on women's relationship with their bodies, Weldon's narratives move between societal expectations and her female characters' reaction to these expectations as they try to understand their bodies and locate themselves in society. In this manner, in her novels, women have a complicated and ambivalent relationship with their bodies and with their biology as "Mothering and pregnancy often plague Weldon's women as if they were entrapped by their own biological heritage" (Roby 4). Reflecting the norms around the body, in addition to their anxieties about their sex and their becoming a mother, Weldon's female characters carry "The burden of physical appearance" (Dowling 19). Especially *The Fat Woman's Joke*, is "attempting to deal with body stereotype" (Dowling 44) including both motherhood and beauty norms regarding the slim body ideal. Reflecting the beauty norms, the women that Weldon portrays try to keep up with the body

standards in various ways including a reconstructing of their bodies through surgery, but also end up hating their bodies as they fail to fulfil the standards (Roby 4). Yet at the same time, in her narratives, Fay Weldon's women challenge and reject the stereotypical images of the female body (Dowling 44). These different ways of engagement with the female body and the challenging of the stereotypes and the commonly accepted notions of the female body is apparent in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, through Esther who rejects the idealised slim and beautiful female type as well as through Phyllis and to an extent Susan, who loath their bodies as they realise that their attempts of perfecting their body is never enough to reach male defined body standards.

Margaret Atwood frequently depicts the female body as coded by culture, as a ground of power relations and a cultural medium that at the same time leads to woman's unease and anxieties towards their bodies (Howells 58). Her heroines suffer from diseases, starve themselves or lose their sense of self, distancing from their bodies day after day, showing not only the liminal space that their bodies hold in society but also showing how they are pacified (Howells 58-60). Hence, in her fiction, Atwood depicts the female experience mainly through the body as produced and then consumed by culture and by power structures. At the same time, she focuses on the commodification of the female body (Gorjup 15) and "Woman as appetising and pleasing/visual pleasure for man" (Gorjup 36) suggesting that the female body is shaped and fabricated into a certain body type or types of femininity, which by making the body prey to man, turns woman into a consumable good. Hence, supporting her criticism and stance towards the female body, in her essay "The Female Body" Atwood focuses on the diverse versions of the female body, its different representations and the connotations that the female body has, including a criticism of its adherence to the social norms and the notions around woman's body. In her focus on the body, Atwood shows that the female body is never free from social stigmas and social perceptions, thus representing the preoccupations of the society with certain categories of woman. This also leads the female characters in her novels to develop a fear of their own body (Gorjup 24). However, Atwood's presentation of the female body is not merely based on the powerlessness of woman. Instead, her fiction turns the female body into an active site of articulation of the female experience as her heroines struggle to go against the

norms, and so reclaim and re-write their bodies and identities (Howells 62). The presentation of the female body as a space of commodification, as a consumable good and as a pacified cultural medium is likewise seen through Marian in *The Edible Woman*, who feels repulsion towards her body which she starts to perceive as an object that is distinct from herself. At the same time Atwood presents her heroine in this novel as capable of reclaiming her own body by mocking the cultural construction of the body in the same way that her fiancé tried to create a perfected and consumable image of femininity for her to comply with.

Female corporeality in Laura Esquivel's narratives is likewise explored through the cultural meanings that the female body carries as well as the reactionary potential that it has. Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* is written with reference to a social and cultural context within which women were subject to sexual oppression as well as a repression of the female body (Dobrian 59). In this manner, Esquivel focuses on Tita and her sisters and closely examines their experience with their bodies, their bodily acceptance or rejection by man. While the suppression of woman's body emphasizes male hegemony, contextually, *Like Water for Chocolate* is situated amidst the tradition of Mexican women's writing that is said to show an interest "in desire and the body" (Pérez 212). Laura Esquivel maintains her interest in the female body throughout the narrative focusing on "Tita's tears, breast milk and blood" (Dobrian 60), the body parts and the bodily fluids that define female corporeality and that at the same time voice woman's repressed desires. Henceforth, Esquivel's novel places woman's body at the centre and gives prominence to the female body, as also emphasized by the magical realist characteristics of the narrative. Thus, while the novel focuses on the repression of woman's body in patriarchal societies, the narrative at the same time emphasizes the centrality of the female body in understanding and voicing woman's experience. In Esquivel's fiction, the interest in the female body also coincides with her representation of women as active and men as passive (Pérez 218) which has been a means of creating strong female characters. In the same way, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita's body, which projects the repressed female desire, at the same time expresses itself through and within her recipes which are not just consumed by but also affects men, thus challenging the male/female and active/passive binaries by becoming an effective bodily force.

## 4.2. Social Coding of the Female Body

This sub-heading will focus on how the female body is seen and the bodily norms that the heroines need to comply with in the novels that this dissertation scrutinizes. Starting with a discussion of how the female body is socially coded and then moving on to the notion of proper femininity regarding physical appearance and body shape, the aim of this part is to disclose that the female body is never free from social construction.

Female corporeality has gained central importance for discussion during the 1960s – 1970s in order to evaluate the patriarchal culture that framed the limits and the meanings associated with female body which also strengthened the power relations between man and woman by making woman a subject to man's definition of femininity. Hereafter, the body is not just studied as a biological vessel but is also studied as a cultural medium representing a set of patriarchal assumptions, "already established corporeal styles" (qtd. in Salih 8) as Beauvoir says, and also following certain bodily practices and habits (Bordo 16). These corporeal practices and styles have been limiting female subjectivity and body in all respects while at the same time placing women under acceptable categories and labels such as motherhood, an appealing look or passivity as respectively seen in the novels under discussion. Hence, it could be said that 'woman' is a homogenizing term, resulting from following the norms around female corporeality. Regarding the impact of culture on the production of corporeality Susan Bordo further says,

The body — what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body — is a medium of culture. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body. (Bordo 165)

It is clear from Bordo's statement that, even the most natural and the most essential aspect of a woman, her body, is acculturated. Susan Rubin Suleiman further states: "The cultural significance of the female body is not only (not even first and foremost) that of a flesh-and-blood entity, but that of a *symbolic construct*" (*The Female Body* 2).

Hence, the body as discussed, exists both materially and culturally and in both cases, the body is defined within the context of norms and traditions. This in turn gives men and the patriarchal societies the right to control the female body while women in turn constantly try to shape and adapt their bodies so that it fits to the cultural norms.

*The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman*, *Like Water for Chocolate* all foreground the female body, as the central questions they pose and the main events that take place within the narratives revolve around female corporeality. The female body in the selected novels go beyond being merely biological-physical objects and instead act as vessels that signify the culturally produced meanings of femininity that the heroines should embrace. The bodies of the female characters are acted upon to certain ends and those who try to define the female body in a certain way are either men or the ones who truly support the patriarchal traditions. Hence, this way Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel question the naturality of the body.

This sub-heading will focus on the coding of the female body in line with societal expectations and limitations imposed on the heroines' bodies. After putting forward a discussion of the social construction of the female body in terms of proper behaviour and a proper exhibition of femininity, focusing on the body's social significations, the discussion will then move on to proper femininity and how the female body is appropriated along the lines of societal expectations such as the beauty ideals, a notion of fashion and the slim body image. Overall, the two consecutive sub-headings aim to delve into the stereotypical roles and images that women are associated with as well as the idealised body image that they are made to comply with, showing that the heroines' bodies are socially constructed.

#### **4.2.1. Social Coding of the Female Body in *The Fat Woman's Joke***

As the theoretical background to this chapter delved into, patriarchal ideology pertained the construction of femininity to certain categories that are defined in accordance with woman's body. While this cultural construction of femininity mainly encompasses the appearance of a woman, the way a woman attends to her body as Bordo says is also a matter of embodying certain definitions and associations of the

female body (165). The same ideology that depicted woman as selfless as denying herself and as embodying the role of a nurturer by feeding others to keep up with the ideal mother type (Bordo 118), formulated the female body as a maternal body. Hence, while the norms of femininity in terms of appearance have been based on the ideal of a slim and beautiful physique, a woman at the same time was expected to embody a maternal image. Likewise, in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Esther's corporeality is initially associated with her motherhood. Although being a mother is discussed as related with care-work and domesticity in the previous chapter, this chapter will further discuss motherhood in Fay Weldon's novel as an imposition on the female body that turns a woman's biological disposition into a social norm that she has to be identified through.

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Esther's body, her identity and her social position are defined through her being a mother and Esther is expected to experience and act out her body in line with this cultural labelling. Emphasizing that her corporeality attests to her motherhood, her son Peter says "You just be a nice cozy comfy mum and leave it at that!" (Weldon 92). Hence, in addition to being an obligatory role that she has to fulfil as discussed in the chapter on space, Esther's motherhood is not only a matter of her biology but it is also a social imposition on her regarding how she exhibits her body. Not given any freedom in defining her body or how she experiences her corporeality, Esther's being a mother is clearly a societal expectation that she needs to comply with and that she needs to undertake rather than negotiate, thus, accepting the societal construction as well as the limitations around her body. In addition, Peter refers to his mother's age and her being fat by saying "Why don't you eat? No one cares whether you are fat or thin. Let's face it, you are out of the age group where it matters" (Weldon 92). Peter clarifies that how a woman appears, including her age and size, is key in labelling her and in putting her to a secondary position if her body is not compliant. In a similar way, Esther says "men laugh at them behind their backs, because they're old ... There's more dignity, if one is neither young nor beautiful, in simply giving up" (Weldon 58). It is clear that Esther is seen as socially inferior because of being middle aged and not being slim and overall because she is a woman. By focusing on how Esther's body is socially constructed and perceived, Fay Weldon shows that a woman's body shapes her condition in society. Likewise, Esther knows that as a woman, she is only seen as a body and says, "You're just a female animal

body, fit to bear children and then be thrown away” (Weldon 185). By implying the material reality and biology of woman and at the same time by stating that women are ‘thrown away’ once they fulfil their corporeal duties, Esther emphasizes that the female body is appreciated as long as it fits to and fulfils its duties, except from which it has no merit.

The novel also clarifies that the female body is vulnerable and is a medium that is not only defined by man but also controlled by him in order to maintain the meanings and the images that femininity is associated with. As such, in the novel, femininity and a woman’s body are always defined by man, giving her no autonomy in choosing how she exists. For instance, Alan says “But in general terms, husbands get interested in other women, wives are supposed to be tactful and silent and not make scenes, and put on new corsets and get their hair done, and win their straying spouses back by patient loving endeavour” (Weldon 97). Similar with the significance of male-female relations as discussed in the previous chapter, Alan indicates that a wife or a woman in general has to fashion herself as demanded by her husband and has to comply with the body shape and the proper behaviour such as being silent and tactful, that her husband defines for her. For instance, Esther is continuously policed and criticised by Alan with regards to the amount of food that she consumes, what she wears or her vocality, all of which correspond to a desire of controlling her body. Henceforth, Fay Weldon presents the female body as socially constructed, limited and as always policed by man.

At the same time, it is clear that Esther is aware of the societal standards around the female body as oftentimes she puts forward a criticism towards the way men live in their bodies as opposed to the way women suffer in their bodies. For example, in response to how Alan and patriarchal societies in general perceive the female body, Esther refers to the double standards of the society, marking a comparison between men and women and the way their bodies are constructed differently from one another by saying,

Women have always tried to make themselves attractive to men ... Look around you. All the women nicely groomed and attractive ... and the men ... Unshaved and smelly ... They get away with everything, men. (Weldon 133)

Indicating that the female body is socially constructed along the lines of the stereotypical or rather idealised images of femininity, Esther's remark at the same time shows the corporeal ideals as a means of patriarchal justification for limiting women to their bodies and for maintaining control over woman. In Esther words, by keeping women concerned with their bodies, and with trying to make herself attractive to men, a woman's right to own her body is taken away from her while men are given every right to live and present their bodies as they wish. Henceforth, Esther's words clarify that woman's body positions her as man's inferior and instead of her biology defining her body, it is man who defines female corporeality.

#### **4.2.2. Social Coding of the Female Body in *The Edible Woman***

Similar with *The Fat Woman's Joke*, in *The Edible Woman*, femininity is constructed in line with societal expectations such as motherhood as well as proper feminine behaviour and appearance showing that a woman's body as well as her subjectivity are socially constructed based on male determined standards. These expectations emphasize that in Marian's relationship with Peter and in her society in general, being a woman only means being a body that is configured to comply with social norms. As a result, most of the time, Marian sees the female body as controlled and pacified by her society and by men.

The narrative of Margaret Atwood's novel mainly follows Marian's questions regarding the meanings of the female body as she tries to configure and locate herself in her relationship with Peter. As she tries to make sense of how the society conceives the female body, one of the first images she comes across is that of the maternal body. This maternal image of the female body is brought forward through Marian's friend Clara, causing Marian to realise that her body is likewise conventionally coded as a prospective mother. On a visit to the hospital to congratulate Clara on her newly born baby, Marian starts to realise how her femininity and her body are devised in line with motherhood. For instance, Marian herself says,

Of course it was something she had always planned to do, eventually; and Peter had begun to make remarks with paternal undertones. But in this room with



these white-sheeted outstretched women the possibility was suddenly much too close. (Atwood 156-157)

With its institutional and social connotations, the hospital presents the female body as belonging to the society, leading Marian to realise that her body is likewise fated to become a mother. The idea of woman's biology as constructing and defining the boundaries of female corporeality as maternal, is further reminded to Marian by her friend Ainsley whose sole purpose seems to be getting pregnant. Voicing the general societal consensus that the natural disposition and the ultimate role of the female body is becoming a mother, Ainsley says "'Every woman should have at least one baby.' ... 'It fulfils your deepest femininity'" (Atwood 43). Based on biological determinism and the natural disposition of woman's body, Ainsley's words show that in Marian's society, becoming a mother is a matter of becoming feminine. Thus, similar with Esther's situation, in Marian's society as well motherhood has turned into a corporeal norm that defines and controls the female body. However, this femininity that Ainsley is talking of is one of the initial ideas that leads Marian to question and drift away from her own body as will be further discussed under the disorders that the heroines experience.

As opposed to Ainsley who thinks that the female body gains meaning and purpose through motherhood, Marian sees motherhood as a pacification of the female body again through the example of her friend Clara who has two toddlers and is pregnant to another baby and who is having difficulties with moving her body around. For example, Marian describes Clara's situation as "She simply stood helpless while the tide of dirt rose round her, unable to stop it or evade it. The babies were like that too; her own body seemed somehow beyond her, going its own way without reference to any directions of hers" (Atwood 37). Marian thinks that the maternal female body loses its autonomy, its ability to control itself and its capacity to act. In addition, Marian defines motherhood and the bodily changes as unplanned, fatalistic and uncontrollable. As an example of this image of femininity, Marian relates Clara's life as a mother, telling that "Clara greeted her first pregnancy with astonishment that such a thing could happen to her, and her second with dismay; now, during her third, she had subsided into a grim but inert fatalism" (Atwood 37). This leads Marian to see the female body as a separate existence that goes to its own way or that is defined regardless of any

reference to the woman herself, hence, a body that is defined by social forces and that is outside woman's control. According to Marian, pregnancy and motherhood are societal images causing the female body to turn into "a swollen mesh of flesh with a tiny pinhead ... bulging with the burden of an entire society" (Atwood 139). Therefore, Marian sees the female body and the physical changes that the female body is prone to such as motherhood as carrying the weight of culture as well as of society, clarifying that the female body is constricted, controlled and owned by the society and that the woman herself has no power over her body. Marian's understanding of the female body represented through Clara and her unavoidable and fatalistic pregnancies, leads her to see her own corporeality and being as constituted by others, hence lacking individuality and a self-developed subjectivity.

While Clara showcases the maternal female body, a woman who cannot get up or who cannot do anything herself that Marian is also destined to become once she gets married to Peter, Peter himself defines Marian as a woman who is fit for marriage, almost as his complementary other. Thus, the second socially defined body image that Marian comes across is a matter of acting out pre-coded behaviours. For example, regarding how Marian should appropriate her body Peter says,

he saw me as the kind of girl who wouldn't try to take over his life. He had recently had an unpleasant experience with what he called 'the other kind'. That was the assumption we had been working on, and it had suited me. We had been taking each other at our face values, which meant we had got on very well. Of course I had to adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man. (Atwood 70)

It is clear that there is no deep connection between Peter and Marian and that Peter has a very superficial understanding of Marian as a 'kind', almost defining her and her body and feminine behaviour as categories to fit into. Equally, it is also Marian who has to be compliant with the 'kind' or rather the female type that Peter desires by adjusting herself to his demands and wishes which at the same time maintains the power relation between the two. In addition, Peter's definitions of Marian, focusing on proper femininity and acceptable behaviour, adds another dimension to Marian's understanding of the female body as a symbol of culture since she has to act out this proper feminine endeavour through her body. Another example of how Marian gets to

see the relationship between female body and proper femininity is through her realisation of how Peter perceives her almost like an object without any meaning except from her physical being. Marian says, “Peter smiled at me in the middle of one of his sentences, fondly but from a distance, and then I thought I knew. He was treating me as a stage-prop; silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline” (Atwood 82) and Marian herself feels a “mournful emptiness” (Atwood 109) when with Peter. Hence, Marian’s being is only seen as the physical body that she represents, a solid and empty ‘outline’, almost an object or ‘a prop’ that is meant to represent femininity and the female body but that is devoid of deeper meanings.

In addition to seeing the female body as devoid of meanings, among all the novels under study, *The Edible Woman* most clearly discusses the female body almost as a territory to be marked and as an empty medium that man has to observe so that he can make sense of, define its limits and thus claim her body as belonging to him. As Marian and Peter’s relationship proceeds towards marriage, with reference to how Peter watches her body, Marian says that “Lately he had been watching her more and more” (Atwood 182). The way Peter watches Marian’s body is not a matter of admiring her but is rather an attempt of examining her because,

he would focus his eye on her face, concentrating on her as though if he looked hard enough he would be able to see through her flesh and her skull and into the workings of her brain. She couldn’t tell what he was searching for when he looked at her like that. It made her uneasy. ... Then he would run his hand gently over her skin, without passion, almost clinically, as if he could learn by touch whatever it was that had escaped the probing of his eyes. ... It was when she would begin feeling that she was on a doctor’s examination table that she would take hold of his hand to make him stop. (Atwood 182-183)

Probed by Peter’s looks and examined clinically, almost like in need of treatment and appropriation, Marian’s situation clarifies that the female body is always prone to outside control so that she fulfils proper femininity by aligning herself to patriarchal standards. She herself realises Peter’s purpose by saying, “That must be it. He was sizing her up as he would a new camera, trying to find the central complex of wheels and tiny mechanisms, the possible weak points, the kind of future performance to be expected” (Atwood 183). Marian realizes that she is being propped, defined and arranged by Peter, who through observing Marian, figures out the ‘weak points’ or

rather parts that have to be re-aligned in accordance with societal body norms. Therefore, Marian's understanding of her body or the female body in general is clearly based on a set of pre-given set of performances that a woman is expected to follow or in other words an acting out of her body based on the societal and patriarchal definitions of femininity. Overall, a study of how the female body is coded in *The Edible Woman* shows that Marian's social milieu, her friends and Peter, present the female body as a product of culture rather than as a natural given, coded and defined as a prospective mother, or as a medium that has to be compliant with man and with man's definitions of proper femininity.

#### **4.2.3. Social Coding of the Female Body in *Like Water for Chocolate***

The theoretical background of this chapter and the discussions of Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood's novels showed that the female body is theorised by coding societal expectations and pre-defined corporeal styles. It is also argued that this way, the female body not only becomes a medium of culture but also becomes passive in the creation and exposition of woman's corporeality, supporting the male/female binary and rendering the female body prone to male intrusion. While all three novels embrace a discussion of female corporeality, they also bring into question notions of essentialism and if what is named as the female body is natural or cultural. In the same manner, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the female body is defined and executed by following the traditions and societal demands of de la Garza family, making Tita an obedient body, whose desires and voice is repressed as unfit for the pre-defined corporeal codes.

Women in Esquivel's novel are treated as bodies that could easily be disposed of or decided on behalf, and at the same time their bodies are seen as mediums of "sexual and economic exchange" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 18). Accordingly, the tradition that Mama Elena follows, which has been explored in the previous chapter, renders Tita unmarriageable while her older daughter could be married to a man of Mama Elena's choice, underlining the fact that femininity is coded as a hinderance on how a woman chooses to live her life. Equally, the society that Esquivel depicts turns women and their bodies into a commodity or a medium of exchange. For instance, when Pedro and his father pay a visit to Tita's house to ask for her hand, Mama Elena tells them of

their tradition and says, “if you really want Pedro to get married, allow me to suggest my daughter Rosaura, who’s just two years older than Tita. *She* is one hundred per cent available, and ready for marriage” (Esquivel 16). Nacha comments on this situation as “Isn’t that something? Your ma talks about being ready for marriage like she was dishing up a plate of enchiladas!” (Esquivel 16). Considering the alimentary elements in the novel, it is clear that in this traditional society that Esquivel depicts, women are treated as commodities, as consumable goods to be served and exchanged between families. Hence, the female body in this novel is not only coded through traditions but is also coded as an object with no essence, no freedom or choice.

In Laura Esquivel’s novel, the female body is dissociated from its nature, limited in its capacities and is metaphorically killed by Mama Elena, who does not allow her daughter Tita to live her body as she wishes, thus proving that Tita’s body turns into a symbolic construct, moulded by her mother. To list one of the first physical limitations that Tita experiences; she is prohibited by her mother from experiencing physical love and motherhood and prevented from breast-feeding her niece and nephew, taking them away from her and thus dissociating Tita from her body. Not allowed to go against the limits imposed on her body by being the unmarried daughter of her family, Tita’s direct experience with her corporeality is cut off by Mama Elena. In addition, Tita is silenced, any voice coming from her is marked as a disobedience to the limits of her body. For instance, when she cries, such as during the marriage of Rosaura and Pedro or after the death of her nephew, Tita is silenced by her mother who says “I don’t want any tears” (Esquivel 89), with the intention of preventing her daughter from voicing her emotions which are seen unfit according to her mother. Hence, Tita is not allowed to discover the full potential of her body or to experience the physical and emotional senses coming from her body. Tita’s corporeal autonomy and the natural responses of her body such as crying, are kept under control by her mother, for whom, the body is only a medium of culture rather than self-owned by woman. Autonomy, is being able to act freely outside of the social constraints in full capacity of one’s free-will (McNay 40) but patriarchal cultures and societies deny this freedom to woman (Young 31). As the youngest daughter of a traditional family, Tita’s body and her being a woman becomes the cause of her restraint, taking away her right to live her body. As such, with reference to Mama Elena, Tita thinks that “she had been killing her a little at a time

since she was a child, and she still hadn't quite finished her off" (Esquivel 47). This metaphorical killing of Tita by Mama Elena is telling of how Tita's personality, her emotions and her physical desires are controlled and restrained by her mother from the moment she is born. Hence, anything that is related with Tita's body is silenced, kept under her mother's control and overall Tita's body is pacified.

Tita's body is coded by the traditions of her society and is limited by her mother who does not allow Tita to marry, to experience physical love or to bear children, thus limiting how she lives her body. By keeping Tita unmarried, Mama Elena tries to maintain her devout belief in traditions because for Mama Elena, Tita's body signifies the tradition of the youngest daughter remaining as the untainted caretaker of her mother. As her body is coded as prone to her mother's control and intrusion, Tita is taught that anything that she performs with her body that is against her mother's norms is a violation of the society. Not allowed to consummate her physical and emotional desires, nor allowed to bear children, Tita is at the same time constantly policed by her mother for whom being prudent equates to being a proper woman. Mama Elena, who is concerned with a possible consummation between Pedro and Tita, checks and limits her daughter's encounters with him as exemplified in the previous chapter. As a result of always being under her mother's control, Tita develops an internal voice, which reminds her of the contours of her body as well as how to properly execute her femininity. For instance, after her first sexual encounter with Pedro, Tita suspects that she is pregnant and starts hearing the phantom of her late mother Mama Elena talking to her, saying that she will have a cursed child and reminding her to "behave like a good woman" (Esquivel 179). As mentioned before, Mama Elena stands for traditions, for patriarchy and for masculine authority. Knowing that she has violated the strict corporeal limits that her mother has imposed on her, the visions of Mama Elena that Tita's keeps seeing, imply judgements against her unacceptable bodily behaviour. In one such instance, the vision of her mother tells Tita,

'I told you many times not to go near Pedro. Why did you do it?' ... 'What you have done has no name! You have forgotten all morality, respect and good behaviour. You are worthless, a good-for-nothing who doesn't respect even yourself. You have blackened the name of my entire family, from my ancestors down to this cursed baby you carry in your belly!'. (Esquivel 158)

Having internalised the social teachings that she must protect her body as the youngest daughter who is doomed to remain unmarried, Tita hears her mother's voice with the knowledge that she has permeated and violated the boundaries of her body. In the theoretical background to this chapter it has also been stated that pre-defining femininity and the female body in certain ways creates a control mechanism that leads women to feel under the pressure of societal control, leading them to act and live their bodies in the way that society has pre-defined for them. Afraid that her pregnancy will be met with disapproval from society, Tita's vision is also telling of how much she feels herself repressed in her family and society, never feeling herself and her body in peace. It turns out that Tita is not pregnant but this assumed pregnancy tells two significant things about the female body. Firstly, having had no chance to experience her body, Tita is not aware of how her body acts because with reference to her assumed pregnancy and the changes in her body such as bloating, she thinks that "And so, at last, she said, reluctantly, that perhaps, who knows, probably, most likely, it was because she was a little bit pregnant" (Esquivel 171). Referring to her body as almost outside of herself and her control, Tita sees her body's natural disposition with improbability and with doubt also thinking that "This possibility had not occurred to her as she consummated her love with Pedro" (Esquivel 152). Secondly, her pregnancy, which is a natural feminine bodily disposition, becomes a source of judgement through her mother's focus on morality, respect and good behaviour as the characteristics that a woman should execute with her body. Her mother's behaviour, therefore, shows that female corporeality is not perceived as natural but instead, it is constructed and should be experienced in line with the social expectations and norms. The vision and voice of her mother are the societal norms that Tita tries to live by in shaping and experiencing her body.

As Tita sees the vision of her mother, she also starts to question why she cannot live her body freely. For instance, Tita questions "But what is decent? To deny everything that you really want?" (Esquivel 159). Her question covers all the difficulties that she has been suffering from and all the bodily emotions she is made to repress. One of the most striking questionings that Tita has, is when she resembles her body to the seeds that she sowed. Very much parallel with the feeling of entrapment in the ranch, this metaphor of her body as a seed, shows the extent to which she feels trapped inside the

social body as opposed to the body that she wants to reveal. The narration of this metaphor goes on as follows;

Tita thought of the many times she had germinated kernels or seeds of rice, beans or alfalfa, without giving any thought to how it felt for them to grow and change form so radically. Now she admired the way they opened their skins and allowed the water to penetrate them fully, until they were split asunder to make way for new life. She imagined the pride they felt as the tip of the first root emerged from inside them, the humility with which they accepted the loss of their previous form, the bravery with which they showed the world their new leaves. Tita would love to be a simple seed, not to have to explain to anyone what was growing inside her, to show her fertile belly to the world without laying herself open to society's disapproval. Seeds didn't have that kind of problem, they didn't have a mother to be afraid of or a fear of those who would judge them. (Esquivel 178-179)

Tita admires the freedom that seeds have in sprouting and opening themselves up to the world and at the same time questions why her body cannot be like those seeds. This bravery and freedom are what Tita aspires towards and what she cannot feel due to the limitations over her body as imposed by her mother. Not having any freedom to consummate her love, nor having liberty in nursing her sister's kids, just like the abundance of these seeds, Tita wants to embrace the fertility that is taken away from her. Thus, looking at Tita's thoughts and the parallel that she forms with seeds, it is clear that she knows the potential of her body but all the same, she is made to experience her corporeality as restrained from feeling pride and as proscribed from revealing itself.

In *Like Water for Chocolate* the female body is also presented as a taboo and an enigma, that is both mysterious and attractive. Esquivel represents this paradoxical understanding of the female body through Pedro and his interest in the female body. Pedro is ignorant of the female body yet at the same time tortured by it. It could be said that this way, Esquivel presents the extent to which the traditional Mexican society that she depicts has suppressed woman's physical being, turning the body into a taboo that need not be known and that has to be repressed. As such, the notion of a liberated body is an impossibility in this society and in the de la Garza family. Hence, when Gertrudis runs away, naked, revealing all of her body parts fearlessly, Pedro watches Gertrudis' escape, amazed and shocked at the same time. He watches her from



the ranch “hypnotized by her ample breasts swinging from side to side.” (Esquivel 53) because “He’s never seen a naked woman before” (Esquivel 53). The fact that “He couldn’t get the image of Gertrudis out of his mind, Gertrudis running through the field – completely naked.” (Esquivel 53) is telling of his shock in seeing a free and liberated woman, who is also embracing her body. At the same time Pedro’s lack of knowledge of the female body shows to what extent woman’s body is seen as a taboo and is repressed in this traditional society.

Overall, this sub-heading aimed to discuss how the female body is culturally coded as fitting to the social norms, expectations and definitions of being a woman. Defined by her biology and defined within certain physical boundaries, the female body is further coded in line with its’ physical appearance that is concerned with beauty standards and idealised body images.

#### **4.3. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body**

As discussed in the theoretical background of this chapter, the surface of the female body is configured in a specific way to fit a pre-coded repertoire of meanings associated with femininity. In this manner, the female body is maternal and abundant yet at the same time slim and beautiful, sexually attractive but also silent and passive. Even though they are from different cultures, *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* all highlight that femininity has predefined meanings and criticise the fact that the appearance of the female body is never free from social significations. While it is the heroines that provide the substantive part of the analysis in this chapter, other female characters are also vital in showing and discussing the various different representations of the female body and in supporting the criticism of the unnatural body standards that patriarchy imposes.

While the body and female corporeality in terms of essentialist discussions have been points of concern for feminist criticism, from mid 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, there has been a further interest around the fashioning of the female body as these times brought about a focus on the female body as a commodity, a product of culture, crafted and constantly adjusted according to male defined standards. Atayurt marks that the late 20<sup>th</sup> century

was a time when the focus was on the control of the female body by a culture that not just commodified mass produced products but also women indicating that woman's condition turned into "a constant fixation with ways to look desirable and attractive in the commercial culture of the 1980s, which 'enslaved women by ludicrous beauty standards.'" (Atayurt 42). This was a period that commercialised dieting products and plastic surgery and this commercialisation of a perfect female image is named by Susan Bordo as the cult of beauty and by Kim Chernin as the tyranny of slenderness as well as called by Naomi Wolf as the beauty myth. These cultural norms around femininity defined, idealised and standardised a female body image that is arranged and perfected, creating a cult of beauty or in Susan Bordo's words "homogenizing and 'normalizing images' and ideologies concerning 'femininity' and female beauty" (62) as well as an idea of "impossible to achieve images" (xiv). Size likewise became a great matter for discussing woman's repressed condition with regards to the normalizing images that limits a woman's figure. As such it is stated that "Women are expected to be petite, demure, giving, passive, receptive in the home and, above all, attractive. ... To be unattractive is not to be a woman." (Orbach 128). In cultures where the beauty myth prevails, Susan Bordo refers to "our disgust with bodily bulges" (190) and "fat being perceived as indicative of laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform" (195). Hence, the fat female body is seen as unfit and disobedient for it rejects the standards of proper femininity. It is clear that physical demands including a woman's size and so her relationship with eating, her beauty, her gestures, the way she dresses as well as the way she behaves have been turned into norms or as Bordo states images that normalize a typical female body which conforms to the gender ideals of patriarchy. Likewise, the women that Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel depict are apprehensive of how their bodies appear, their size and looks becoming major concerns for being accepted as proper woman. This commodified and the sexualised, young and beautiful body image that is the norm which women were made to accept and compete for (Wolf 11) also takes away any social as well as personal command (Bordo 22). By sexualising and coding the female body as appealing, women lose power, finding themselves in a state of constant struggle with their bodies so that they can comply with the attractive body image that has been pre-defined for them. In the same line, with reference to this vulnerability, Elizabeth Grosz states that,

The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services. (*Volatile Bodies* 14)

Since it is men and the society that construct the body of women by defining the size, looks and behaviour, men are given the right to have a say on the female body, feeling free to interfere with the appearance of women, thus showing that the homogenising images of the beauty ideals yields women's bodies open to male control and to societal intervention, almost turning them into preys to men. Correspondingly, in these novels, it is frequently men who address the so-called deficiencies of the female body, being fat or not being slim enough, not being beautiful and so on, which also turns into scenes of verbal intrusions and sexual abuse, overall showing that the female body is not only defined by masculinist standards but is also violated by man. As such, in *The Fat Woman's Joke* Esther is made to go on a diet and is referred to an aesthetic surgeon so that her body can be appropriated to the beauty standards. Likewise, Susan and Phyllis are sexually abused by Alan, who sees them almost like a commodity, a flesh that is in his possession. In *The Edible Woman*, Peter reminds Marian that she will be a mother once they get married, thus violating a very personal choice of what she wants to do with her own body and she is likewise propped like a physical object whose appearance should be coiffed, fashioned and perfected so that it can appeal to Peter. Finally, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Pedro's distancing from Rosaura as she gets fat, and the debased condition that she finds herself in shows how she is emotionally abused and made vulnerable in the face of societal standards. Likewise, though there is certainly desire between Tita and Pedro, she is still abused by him as he refers to her body almost like his possession, feeling it in his right to observe, to intrude and even to sexually abuse her.

This sub-heading will focus on the representation of accepted and proper female body images as seen through the heroines and the other female characters in the novels under study. In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, as it is discussed, the female body must be either fitting to the motherly image or to the beauty stereotypes which are presented through Esther, Phyllis and Susan respectively. In *The Edible Woman* the societal bodily norms are seen through Marian's relationship with her body and how she is challenged to

appropriate her body, as well as through her friends from the office who follow the beauty standards. Finally, in *Like Water for Chocolate* the beauty image and the acceptable female physique will be studied through Tita while Rosaura will be studied to show male criticism towards the female body that fails in complying with the ideals.

#### **4.3.1. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body in *The Fat Woman's Joke***

In *The Fat Woman's Joke*, women are associated with their bodies and their affairs with men lack emotional depth, as male-female relations are centered around woman's looks and body weight. Although the major focus of this study is on Esther and how her fat body is perceived by her husband, the two other female characters, Susan and Phyllis provide a contrast with Esther. Susan and Phyllis' portrayal as young, slim, naïve and beautiful, their willingness to fit their bodies into male expectations as well as their relations with men are significant for disclosing the body ideals that Esther is also held responsible for and that Fay Weldon criticizes.

Discussed in relation with Susan Bordo and Naomi Wolf's ideas, the female body is standardised through acceptable images, its boundaries defined by and limited through patriarchal norms of beauty. This standardization of the female body shows itself in the different versions of femininity that Phyllis and Susan try to achieve and, in their wish to look acceptable and desirable to men. To start with, Susan, Alan's secretary, has internalized societal expectations and believes that she can only define herself and her body through man and says "I need men to define me: to give me an idea of what I am. If I didn't have boyfriends, I don't think I would exist" (Weldon 88). Susan's bodily existence is a matter of obeying and serving the male defined standards and thinking back to woman's subjectivity as one of the concerns of this dissertation, it is clear that Susan does not have a self-defined subjectivity since she believes that she can only make meaning of her being and the boundaries of her body through a man. Following the beauty standards, Susan tries to seduce Alan by looking childish, naive and docile, wearing mini skirts and blouses that are tightly fitting her body, using her body as a point of attraction and also in need of approval by man. For instance, Susan says "I young, clever and creative, with depths to plumb, able to take a constructive interest in what really interested him, sitting docile and waiting at his elbow, typing,

and all he's do was let his eyes stray to my legs and back again" (Weldon 39-40). Susan not only means that she is giving the impression of having keen interest in Alan and what he does, but she also emphasizes that she is willingly presenting her body as docile, passive, vulnerable, offering her body and herself as a prey to Alan. Later on, Susan refers to feminine appearance as "pretending to be women" (Atwood 37), implying that being a woman and her femininity is a pretence, a set of physical behaviours that she has assumed in order to be approved as a proper woman. As argued before, the stereotypical images of femininity also serve to present woman as vulnerable. By following male defined body standards of looking attractive but also looking as if she does not have a mind of her own, Susan serves herself merely as a body, as a piece of flesh that is ready to be served to Alan and hence becomes a prey to him. As such, feeling hungry during the diet that he is following, Alan starts an affair with Susan saying "This diet weakens me. You are taking monstrous advantage of a poor weak hungry man" (Weldon 86). Susan is perceived by Alan very much like a prey that he wants to devour as he starts describing Susan's body parts in association with different alimentary matter indicating that her body is "Plump, biteable and ripe" (Weldon 29) and says "The girl takes on flesh and blood" (Weldon 42). Hence, Alan sees women as flesh to be consumed and Susan, who has made herself an appealing prey to Alan, becomes the food that he wants to feed his hunger with.

The naivety of Susan as a stereotypical female character and the normalizing body images that she tries to assume is mocked by Weldon and Esther, who point out the unrealistic expectations of the society since those like Susan, who try to fulfil the demands by fitting into one of the beauty categories are either abandoned by men or are disillusioned for never being enough. Not having any control over herself, not even knowing her worth and her standing in the social world except from satisfying male defined norms of femininity, Susan realises that she has no meaning for Alan, except from representing a beautiful body image in need of his approval to be loved and accepted. Towards the end of the novel, defeated, Susan goes to Esther's house to talk about what has happened between her and Alan and says, "It's terrible to be used like a pound of butter" (Weldon 156). With this realisation of her consumption by Alan, when Susan shares her situation with Esther, between the two women, Fay Weldon mocks Susan's devastated situation, offering a harsh criticism towards the condition

that women find themselves in once they start complying with the norms of a proper female body. At the same time, Weldon shows Esther's awareness of the limiting and secondary position that the standards of proper femininity lead to, saying, "You were a symptom, not a cause" (Weldon 173). Esther basically remarks that Susan has been a representation of Alan's ideals for him, she has been the sign of female beauty and naivety that he has searched for and was unable to find in Esther.

In addition to Susan, Esther's close friend Phyllis also catalogues the stereotypes around the female body mainly encompassing beauty, slimness and again having a meek and appealing look. The first time the reader encounters Phyllis is marked by a description of her appearance; "Phyllis was ...thirty-one and finely boned, beautifully dressed in a red tiny-flowered trouser suit with hat to match-neat, sexy and rich; invincibly lively and invincibly stupid." (Weldon 8) which Esther later on marks as an appearance that looked "just like in the women's magazines" (Weldon 74). Weldon's description of how Phyllis looks and what she wears, her youth, immaturity and her physical appeal in general emphasize Phyllis' preoccupation with her bodily appearance, fitting into the socially defined beauty ideals and proper femininity. Phyllis' case could be explained through Susan Bordo who states that femininity has turned into a term that could be defined through visual representations rather than through woman's biology, since femininity consists of "images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behaviour are required" (Bordo 170). Thus, to say that someone is a woman requires a lot of effort on behalf of not only being that gender but also appropriating to the physical definitions and the limits of that body. Thus, Phyllis' obsession with looking pretty and desirable also highlights the extent to which in the society that Weldon depicts, physicality of the female body is a key aspect of becoming and being a woman who is loved, desired and accepted because Weldon clarifies that Phyllis' relationship with her body and her obsession with how she looks is dependent on both the societal standards and her husband's expectations. In due respect, following the ideal definitions of beauty, Phyllis expresses her concern with how she looks by saying "I have to watch my figure." (Weldon 11) and "I'm so thin ... I can't get fat" (Weldon 29) to which Gerry responds as "Well, you can't spoil that, at least" (Weldon 29). This clarifies that Phyllis' slimness or aesthetic intrusions is a result of her husband's wish to regulate

and fit Phyllis' body to patriarchal norms. Hence, through the characterization of Phyllis, Fay Weldon supports Grosz and Bordo's ideas that the female body is a social construct, and that the beauty norms maintain the oppression of women by giving men the right to control the female body.

Similar with Susan's case, Phyllis is criticized by Esther for prioritizing her looks and for her keen attention towards how she presents herself and her body to her husband. Regarding Phyllis' appearance and her obsession with her size, Esther says,

I suppose you really do believe that your happiness is consequent upon your size? That an inch or two one way or the other would make you truly loved? Equating prettiness with sexuality, and sexuality with happiness? It is a very debased view of femininity you take, Phyllis. (Weldon 11)

In response to Esther, Phyllis says "You don't seem to have to follow the rules" (Weldon 11). The rules that Phyllis mentions here clearly refer to man-made rules around the female body that the society follows in defining and in policing a woman's size and body in general. Compared to Phyllis, Esther is not entrapped into the ideal female type that men have created or at least it could be said that she recognizes that her happiness and her identity are not in due proportion with her size. As a fat woman, who is not willing to follow the physical standards that her society imposes on her, according to Esther, femininity and the female body should not be consequent upon one's size or whether one appears appealing since according to her, being thin means being shallow and being open to male intrusion. Criticising Phyllis for viewing her happiness as caused by complying with the homogenizing images of a slim body, Esther emphasizes that the normalized body images that patriarchal societies perpetuate only disgrace woman and woman's corporeality. This idea will be further scrutinized in discussing Esther's reaction to the physical norms but it is clear that amidst a society of normalizing images, Esther shows her awareness of the constructed nature of the beauty ideals.

Through Phyllis and Susan, Fay Weldon makes clear that beauty standards are determined by man and to show this constructed nature of the female body and the perpetuation of bodily ideals, Alan's ideas also become significant. Alan declares

“Women are what their husbands expect them to be; no more and no less” (Weldon 28). Hence, Alan emphasizes the constructed nature of femininity, indicating that the meanings and the borders of a woman’s body is not a matter of nature and that a woman’s body is almost always outside of herself. Limited by men, to say that someone is a woman requires a lot of effort on behalf of being that gender and one of the main signs of showing that a woman complies with her gender is by means of her appearance. As exemplified, Phyllis has internalised these man-made ideals of beauty, naivety and meekness which Alan also underlines in a conversation with her by saying,

You are gentle and docile and slim and pretty and neat, like a doll. You endure things. You don’t try to be anything, ever, except what you are. You have pretty little eyes that never see more than they should. You are not in the least clever and you never say anything devastating. I should have married you. (Weldon 125)

According to him, these are the definitions of “a proper feminine woman” (Weldon 125) which Phyllis fulfils by taking care of how she appears to men, both in terms of her behaviour and in terms of her physique. These norms have turned into a self-justification to deem women passive, powerless or lesser than men, since through these norms, the female body, that is defined by man, has become physically vulnerable and prone to male intervention and control. An intervention of the female body as seen in the novel shows itself in the form of aesthetic surgery and dieting, which aim to control women’s body and appetite so as to maintain a perfect body figure.

It has been discussed that society creates homogenising images of femininity and women exhaust themselves in trying to fit into these idealised corporeal descriptions. Susan Bordo calls women’s trials of competing with the homogenising images as “attempts at anxious transformation (most frequently, reduction) of our bodies” (66). This reduction shows itself through a craze of dieting but also caused by the same beauty myth, there has been an increasing interest in “cosmetic surgery” (Wolf 10), through which the aforementioned attempts of transformation are practiced. In her dialogues with Esther, Phyllis shows her readiness to be the perfect woman that her husband wants her to be and to satisfy her husband she goes far enough to having aesthetic surgeries such as breast augmentation. She thinks that Esther likewise needs cosmetic surgery to be more presentable to her husband which is essentially a violation



of the female body. When Esther decides to follow Phyllis' advice and goes to an aesthetician, the dialogue that she has with the male aesthetician is significant in showing the degradation that she has to experience as a fat woman. Belittling Esther's fatness, the doctor says "You came because I am a cosmetic doctor and you are fat and you don't want to be fat, otherwise you would have chosen another doctor. You don't have to be fat" (Weldon 117). The dialogue further goes on as follows with Esther saying, "I have always been fat. It hasn't troubled me." (Weldon 117) and the doctor responding as "A fat girl growing up? Untroubled?" (Weldon 117). The doctor is basically questioning how Esther lived with that physical appearance for so long, implying that fat is unacceptable in woman. It is clear that his criticism of Esther's body voices the societal body standards and the need of appropriating the female body while at the same time representing male interference over the female body. Although he tries to convince Esther to go through aesthetic surgery, Esther rejects the operation. Refusing to change her body according to man's wishes and criticising Phyllis for being disgraceful to her body, Esther says, "It was a degrading thing to do. To allow your body to be tampered with by a man, for the gratification of a man, conforming to a wholly masculine notion of what a woman's body ought to be" (Weldon 136). Esther is aware that by turning the female body into an object that can be made and changed with regards to male desire and societal standards, the individuality and subjectivity of a woman is lost.

In a novel in which the main concern is to follow a specific diet, physical appearance becomes a major concern for Esther both for questioning her position in her marriage and for realising what her body socially means and whether she has any freedom in her body or not. Although Esther fulfils the maternal image, her appearance does not conform to the body ideals of slimness and beauty which later on becomes an impediment in her relationship with Alan turning her into a vulnerable body. The diet that Esther and Alan decide to start is the turning point for Esther in realising the way her body is perceived by her husband and her society. For instance, in a scene when Esther and Alan are invited to a dinner in Phyllis and her husband's house, there is so much criticism against women, the female body and the necessity of women's bodies to be physically attractive and appealing to men. Regarding Esther's body image, one dialogue between Alan and her goes on like this; Alan says "I like you fat. I accept

you fat. You are fat.” (Weldon 29) and Esther says “You’ve never said that to me before.” (Weldon 29) to which Alan answers “You’ve never been as fat as this before” (Weldon 29). This shows that Alan has so much concern around the body image and especially with the fatness or the slimness of a woman. Noticing how men view women’s bodies, Esther says “I am not discontented. I just hope Alan isn’t. Who am I to compete with a secretary fresh from a charm school, with a light in her eyes and life in her loins?” (Weldon 30). Happy in her body, Esther’s remark on the other hand also indicates the necessity of appealing to man, having a fresh, young and lively body.

Although Esther is conscious of the body standards and accepts that she does not compete with those standards, as they go on a diet with Alan, the diet instigates her awareness about the beauty norms and she starts to question her body all the same. In one of these dialogues with Alan, Esther says “You don’t find me attractive any more. You’re ashamed to be seen out with me because I’m fat and horrible, and you think people will be sorry for you because you’re married to me” (Weldon 52). What is significant in Weldon’s depiction of her heroine is Esther’s awareness of her society’s beauty ideals and the slim body image that her husband wants her to fit in. Hence, realising how her body is perceived by her society, Esther says,

Either Alan wanted me to be thin because he was fancying his secretary, or he wanted me to be thin because he was ashamed of me the way I was. Either way, he wanted me to be different from what I was, and this to me seemed the most devastating insult. (Weldon 58)

Esther realises that she has been treated simply as a body that Alan wanted to mould and change and liken to his secretary Susan or to their friend Phyllis both of whom are perceived to be reflecting the true feminine physique and beauty. Consequently, Esther realises that she has no autonomy over her body which is made an object to be acted upon according to the masculinist codes. As stated, “women do not choose how they ‘exist’ their bodies ... because their embodiment has been pre-defined by patriarchal society. Woman’s relationship to her body is therefore culturally produced” (Tidd 56). The narrative therefore, clarifies that even though Esther seems confident and happy with herself, she feels that there is social pressure around the way she looks and her body which is being defined and labelled outside of herself.

In addition to Alan, Esther's mother is another significant figure for emphasizing the body standards and criticising Esther for not following these. To start with, Esther refers to how her mother criticised Esther in the past as she was made to worry about lacking femininity or not being a proper woman because she never tried to follow the beauty norms or the slim body ideal. With reference to her memories from the past that centralised on her body, Esther relates her story as follows;

I was a very little dirty girl. My mother used to tell me so. She's a very small neat woman, as you know, and I, by comparison, overflowed. I seemed to have more surfaces than she, and every single one of them picked up dirt. While I was married to Alan I tried very hard to be clean. I dusted and swept and polished. I bathed every day, changed my clothes twice a day, bought new ones perpetually, had everything dry-cleaned ... None of this was my true nature. In trying to be clean I contorted myself. This is what I am really like: I shall pretend no longer. (Weldon 72)

Esther's narrative of how her body has been criticised by her mother, how she has never been the ideal female body type and how she has always tried to contort and limit her body also indicates that Esther has been distanced from her true self and her nature, underlining the claim of this heading by showing that the normative body images are not natural but are rather constructs. However, as will be further discussed later on, by rejecting to pretend being an acceptable woman, Esther also rejects the need of being part of these norms and physical expectations and embraces her fat body and her real self.

#### **4.3.2. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body in *The Edible Woman***

Similar to *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* depicts the male defined categories of femininity such as beautiful women, slim women, those who go to aestheticians to satisfy their husbands, women who are sexually attractive and so on.

Compared to the other two novels, there is not much physical description of Marian. However, Marian tries to conceptualise what a proper female body means through the various women in her life as well as through the re-assurances she gets from Peter regarding her looks.

Marian's friends, the 'office virgins' of the Seymour Surveys as Marian calls them, are representative of the images that a woman needs to fit into. These women turn themselves into objects and value themselves for their appearance as appealing to men, thus, they caricature the normative physical standards of femininity. Marian describes them by focusing on their physical appearances as,

the office virgins. They aren't really very much alike, except that they are all artificial blondes – Emmy, the typist, whisk-tinted and straggly; Lucy, who has a kind of public- relations job, platinum and elegantly coiffured, and Millie, Mrs. Bogue's Australian assistant, brassy from the sun and cropped. (Atwood 16)

Marian's description of these women clarifies that, the office virgins try to fit into the standards of beauty by becoming 'artificial blondes' and starting to look alike in their trials of following the norms. Hence, working in a company that serves the needs of the consumer market, the women working in this space are likewise serving looks that insinuate a fulfilment of the societal expectations such as being blond and dressing beautifully. Surrounded by these women, Marian is constantly reminded of the societal standards and the idea that a woman must always appropriate herself to these images around the female body. In another description of the office virgins as they go out to lunch, Marian focuses on the elaborate dresses that the office virgins wear, the way they do their hair and how they appear in general, specifying that they are following the idealised beauty standards and thinks that "The female form, I thought, is supposed to appeal to men, not to women" (Atwood 112). Knowing that the appearance as well as the behaviour of women is a matter of keeping up with the male defined standards, Marian is aware that women dress and perfect their appeal to construct and to maintain an image.

Similar to Esther's awareness of the societal bodily demands, Marian also considers that these women, the office virgins, are merely objects because as "She examined the women's bodices with interest, critically ... they had just been there like everything else, desks, telephones, chairs, in the space of the office: objects viewed as outline and surface only" (Atwood 205). For Marian, then, the female body is merely an object, a surface that is polished and presented, without any depth or any inherent characteristic. Feeling that 'woman' is a label that puts her into a group of people who are devoid of

identities, who are only substances, i.e. bodies that are identical with one another, Marian thinks,

For an instant she felt them, their identities, almost their substance, pass over her head like a wave. At some time she would be – or no, already she was like that too; she was one of them, her body the same, identical, merged with that other flesh that choked the air in the flowered room with its sweet organic scent; she felt suffocated by this thick sargasso-sea of femininity. She drew a deep breath, clenching her body and her mind back into her self like some tactile sea-creature withdrawing its tentacles; she wanted something solid, clear: a man; she wanted Peter in the room so that she could put her hand out and hold on to him to keep from being sucked down. (Atwood 206)

Stifled with such a limiting and superficial image of femininity and the female body, Marian is left puzzled with the reality of her corporeality. With reference to fitting herself to these images, Marian says: “You were green and then you ripened: became mature. Dressed for the mature figure” (Atwood 205). In trying to understand and cope with the conventional images of the female body that she is posed with, Marian realises that the female body is a product of the society and a norm that a woman needs to grow into but that she has no control over. As a result, Marian starts to question herself and tries to make sense of her body, even perceiving her body as outside herself and in need of Peter’s approval to feel that she is a proper woman. As such, she starts questioning her normalcy by asking “‘am I normal?’”, to which Peter answers as “‘I’d say from my limited experience that you’re marvellously normal, darling.’ She sighed; she didn’t mean it that way” (Atwood 257). The discrepancy between Marian’s understanding of normal and Peter’s understanding of normal shows the difficulty that Marian faces in defining and understanding her body as a feminine body and at the same time shows that in trying to cope with the idealised images, a woman is left powerless even to the point of questioning herself. Consequently, Marian even thinks that she should see a psychiatrist, saying “I want to be adjusted, that’s just it. I don’t see any point in being unstable” (Atwood 332), which voices her anxiety with having to be the appropriate female figure.

In the same manner with the office virgins and their understanding of proper femininity, the constructed and idealised nature of the female body is observed through the images that Marian’s society propagates. As Marian travels between her home and

office, she observes the ads that surround the city such as an ad with a lady wearing a girdle (Atwood 111) and “an advertisement with a picture of a nurse in a white cap and dress. .... The caption said: GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE” (Atwood 121). Noticing that these ads propagate a certain type of femininity and an idealised body image that appeals to man and to male standards, she says “the girdle advertisements on the buses ... Society flaunted these slender laughing rubberized women” (Atwood 141). Fixated to the way a woman looks, whether she represents the perfected slim image, whether she is attractive and desirable or not, overall the impossible and even unreal images of the female body underline the ‘rubberised’ or in other words the artificial and constructed femininity as achieved through the modification of woman’s body. In such a society within which the female body is only a surface of abstractions and idolisation, constructed to be served to men, the female body is clearly deficient of deeper meanings. With reference to the impact of patriarchal culture on the female body, Susan Bordo states that society “sexualizes and commodifies women’s bodies, and offers them little other opportunity for social or personal power” (22). By fashioning and defining the size of the female body, a woman is not only sexualised and commodified, just like in the ads that Marian observes, but she at the same time loses power as she constantly busies herself with the standards that she has to keep up with.

Marian’s preparation to the party that Peter gives is also important in terms of seeing the body image that Marian tries to fit herself into. During her preparation to the party, she takes care of her appearance, what she wears, her makeup and hair, turning herself into one of the images in those ads or to one of the office virgins. At the same time, this image that she tries to carve out of herself or rather the image that she tries to assume is demanded by Peter. Marian describes her preparation to the party as follows,

All at once it was the day of Peter’s final party. Marian had spent the afternoon at the hairdresser’s: Peter had suggested that she might have something done with her hair. He had also hinted that perhaps she should buy a dress that was, as he put it, ‘not quite so mousy’ as any she already owned, and she had duly bought one. It was short, red, and sequined. She didn’t think it was really her. (Atwood 261)

Aware that she does not look like herself, Marian is following the ideal appearance as demanded by Peter. Treating Marian like a doll, and like his belonging and demanding

her to become the female figure that he wants to present to her guests, Peter represents the patriarchal ideology and the norms of beauty that this ideology has created.

In addition to the beauty standards that Peter imposes, Marian's preparation to the party parallels the marketing industry that Marian works for, the office ladies that exemplify the fashioning of the female body and the ads that Marian has observed as reflective of the marketing of women. Referring to Atwood's portrayal of female characters, it is stated that, "Women are more targeted than men by this system because they are defined as objects and their bodies exploited in marketing techniques" (Gorjup 19-20). Likewise, Marian further describes her preparation to the party, by referring to how she had her hair and makeup done almost like talking about an exploitation of the female body, an operation, a procedure that she has to go through so that her body can be altered and marketed.

With reference to the hairdressers, Marian says "They treated your head like a cake: something to be carefully iced and ornamented." (Atwood 261), and "manipulating her features" (Atwood 278) through makeup, implying that a woman needs to be ornamented, fashioned and decorated and her looks altered to be accepted as a woman. She describes the full procedure at the hairdressers as,

Marian had closed her eyes, leaning back against the operating-table, while her scalp was soaped and scraped and rinsed. She thought it would be a good idea if they would give anaesthetics to the patients, just put them to sleep while all the necessary physical details were taken care of; she didn't enjoy feeling like a slab of flesh, an object. (Atwood 262)

Marian's words emphasize that the beauty myth and the fashioning of woman in accordance with the beauty ideals defines her like a flesh and an object. Her descriptions of the preparation process, of turning herself into an acceptable figure can be read as her mockery towards the construction of femininity and the idealised appearances. Thus, just like Esther, Marian is also aware that the fashioning of a woman's body is more than a change of her appearance but is an attempt of operating her and of changing her nature. As such looking at herself, Marian realises "things she wasn't used to – the fingernails, the heavy earrings, the hair, the various parts of her face that Ainsley had added or altered" (Atwood 287) and says,

She held both of her naked arms out towards the mirror. They were the only portion of her flesh that was without a cloth or nylon or leather or varnish covering, but in the glass even they looked fake, like soft pinkish-white rubber or plastic, boneless, flexible. (Atwood 287-288)

Emphasizing the unnatural state that her body is in, focusing on her flesh with a desire for confirmation that it is really herself, Marian's observation of how she looks is telling of how a woman is culturally operated and turned into a female figure which is not herself but a figure that is aligned with the standardised images and that deems her powerless since she has no say over how she looks and how she lives her body. Consequently, it is these idealised images that Marian reacts to as she later on rejects her female body.

#### **4.3.3. The Notion of a Proper Feminine Body in *Like Water for Chocolate***

Similar with *The Fat Woman's Joke* and *The Edible Woman*, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, a proper and acceptable female body means a beautiful, attractive and slim body which will be discussed through the different bodies that Tita and her sister Rosaura represent. Esquivel characterised Mama Elena to retain patriarchal restrictions on woman's body, and Pedro to maintain the idealised images of female beauty. Both of these characters show the extent to which the female body becomes a limitation for women by denying them a chance of self-definition and autonomy towards their bodies. This way, it will be emphasized that in this narrative as well, the female body is seen as necessitated to follow accepted standards.

Overall, proper femininity in Esquivel's novel is mainly related with a female body that looks appealing to man but it could also be claimed that this proper femininity turns woman into an object. The imposition of beauty standards positions woman into certain categories of beauty and sexuality, demanding woman to fit into these and creating a hierarchical relationship between man and woman by giving man the power to observe and approve if a woman appropriates to the given beauty standards (Wolf 12) which in turn makes woman "vulnerable to outside approval" (Wolf 14). In addition to the coding of her body as prudent and as aligned with the traditions, Tita's body is also conceptualised along the lines of beauty, youth and appeal. Although



relative to the other two novels, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita does not concern herself with fitting into the beauty standards or does not try to look more appealing to Pedro, mostly her body is described by Pedro rather than by herself. For instance, in one instance when Tita is taking shower, the narrative focuses on a description of Tita's body parts in a rather eroticised manner, focusing on Tita's breasts, her legs, her feet and overall her skin, also marking that her body causes the water drops to evaporate (Esquivel 140). This description of her body parts ends up with Tita realising that she has been watched by Pedro as she was taking shower (Esquivel 140). While the novel provides striking instances of the love between Tita and Pedro, focusing on the descriptions of Tita's body parts as observed and as desired by Pedro who is tortured with Tita's love and with his wish of achieving physical connection with Tita, the detailed physical descriptions of Tita's body also connotes different ideas in addition to Pedro's appreciation of her beauty and body. In addition to Esquivel's focus on the idea of female beauty or Pedro's appreciation of Tita, instances when Pedro observes his lover's body could also be seen as a matter of turning Tita into a target, implying Pedro's approval and at times turning into a means of objectification of the female body. Another such instance is when Pedro watches Tita's body, which is narrated as "He wanted to study, examine, investigate every last inch of skin on her lovely, monumental body" (Esquivel 53). Equally, Pedro constantly keeps an eye on Tita whilst she is cooking or taking care of Pedro's children. The way he watches her intently in long, erotic gazes is narrated as follows;

the look Pedro gave her ... That look! She had been walking to the table carrying a tray of egg-yolk candies when she first felt his hot gaze burning her skin. She turned her head, and her eyes met Pedro's. It was then she understood how dough feels when it is plunged into boiling oil. The heat that invaded her body was so real she was afraid she would start to bubble – her face, her stomach, her heart, her breasts – like batter, and unable to endure this gaze she lowered her eyes and hastily crossed the room. (Esquivel 18-19)

The scene is eroticised as well as mixed with magical realist elements with an emphasis on Tita's burning skin, focusing on her attractive and youthful body parts as well as emphasizing the desire that she and Pedro cannot overcome. Even though Pedro loves Tita and appreciates her beauty, read from a feminist perspective, Pedro's interest in and descriptions of Tita's body very much brings into mind that Tita's body

is a prey, a consumable good, described almost like food for Pedro. As Pedro's gaze intrudes Tita's skin, he also invades every part of her body with his look, commodifying her body as his own. Tita is also sexually manipulated by Pedro. For instance, Esquivel narrates a moment when Pedro cannot suppress his feelings towards Tita anymore and almost rapes her; "Pedro went to her, extinguished the lamp, pulled her to a brass bed that had once belonged to her sister Gertrudis, and throwing himself upon her, caused her to lose her virginity and learn true love" (Esquivel 144). Later on, towards the end of the novel, in a similar situation, Pedro explains his motives to Tita saying, "Of course. I don't want to die without making you mine." (Esquivel 213). Overall, in Tita's case, although her looks, youth and beauty fit into the idealised image of femininity, these two instances clarify that her representing the ideal female form makes her a prey and a body that Pedro wants to possess and control. In a society where the female body is a cultural construct that is repressed, that is not known and that is constantly kept under control, Pedro's reference to Tita's skin not only emphasizes the love and the idealised beauty image that he finds in her, but also represents her body as a territory to be examined.

It could be argued that, Laura Esquivel also depicts different cultural categories as well as stereotypes around the female body through Tita and Rosaura. These sisters' experience within their bodies as well as how they are perceived by their society is defined through how their bodies look and how they behave their bodies. Within the context of criticism that focuses on the body, Naomi Wolf states that beauty is associated with virginity and by relation, innocence (Wolf 14). As explained, Tita is beautiful, embodying virginity, overall, representing a body that is appealing to man. The fact that Pedro observes, yearns for and describes Tita's body rather than her wife Rosaura's is also telling of the beauty standards that dominate their culture since instead of Rosaura, it is Tita who fits into the physical norms of beauty and virginity as she is later on described as "Tita looked splendid. ... At thirty-nine she was still as sharp and fresh as a cucumber that had just been cut" (Esquivel 213). In comparison, Rosaura is marriageable, a body that can bear children for Pedro's generation to continue and thus, her body is a medium of economic and social exchange. However, in addition to appropriating to acceptable bodily behaviour, Rosaura's femininity is problematized as she is perceived as foul and unwanted. Moreover, throughout the

narrative, Pedro's comparison of Tita and Rosaura's bodies indicate that a lovable woman should at the same time embody an acceptable body since Pedro is tortured with the image of Tita's body (Esquivel 53), rather than with the image of Rosaura. For instance, Rosaura's physical appearance, how her body looks, whether she is beautiful or not are never openly referred to by Pedro, neither does he or the other characters focus on her emotional state. Hence, her body is never seen and appreciated in full, except from its capacity to give birth. As such, seeing Tita as the proper female image, Pedro does not show any physical interest towards Rosaura and "[d]uring his relations with Rosaura, he'd never had any desire to see her body or caress it. ... But it was different with Tita, and he longed to gaze at her that way, without any clothes on" (Esquivel 53). It could be said that male-female relations in general and the female body in particular are institutionalised towards consummation while the female body has turned into a medium that is acceptable only if it is beautiful in the society that Esquivel depicts. Although Rosaura can be criticized for marrying Tita's lover, she has been deemed to the role of a piece of flesh by the traditional society that she is abiding by. Not only for becoming the body that is institutionalised for marriage and consummation but also for being categorised as the marriageable body, Rosaura can be seen as the scapegoat of this novel because it is through her that Esquivel shows the secondary position that women are doomed to have if they do not empower their bodies.

Rosaura is denied by Pedro more and more, specifically after giving birth to their daughter. With the complications during this birth, Rosaura loses any chance of future pregnancies. Thus, her body, that has been culturally coded with motherhood, not in the emotional but in the biological sense, is seen as useless and in effect Rosaura's body literally starts to rot which could be read as Esquivel's criticism of the rather vulgar way of objectifying the female body. Towards the end of the novel, Rosaura experiences physical complications such as a foul breath and digestion problems, which are caused by her pregnancies and difficult births. Esquivel presents Rosaura as bodily vulnerable as well as bodily undesirable as she goes through stages of obesity, difficulty with breastfeeding her babies, painful births and flatulence. Thus, her physical experiences serve the idea that her corporeality is not in line with acceptable norms and so she turns into an unwanted figure. Referring to Rosaura; "For some

weeks now, she had been having serious digestive problems, she suffered from flatulence and bad breath” (Esquivel 154). So, they separated their bedrooms with Pedro so that “she could pass gas as she pleased” (Esquivel 155) and indicating “her excessive bulk” (Esquivel 155), “It took an enormous effort for her to set her voluminous, gelatinous body in motion” (Esquivel 155). Her situation is narrated almost like a process of decomposition, which causes Pedro to distance himself from his wife. For instance, it is stated that, “All these ills carried with them an infinity of problems, the worst being that every day Pedro moved farther and farther away from her.” (Esquivel 155), and “it had been several months since Pedro had approached her with amorous intentions. He practically avoided her” (Esquivel 155). Rosaura’s undesirability is emphasized through her marriage with Pedro who sleeps in a separate bedroom and who only gets close to Rosaura in order for procreation that will serve God’s command (Esquivel 40). This shows that if a woman is not physically desirable, then she is not seen as truly feminine and is denied any love and interest. Rosaura eventually dies, “Her burial was very poorly attended, because the disagreeable odour Rosaura’s body gave off got worse after her death.” (Esther 210). Even her death shows the physical undesirability that she has faced.

The decomposition of Rosaura’s body and Pedro’s aversion of her are all telling of the two important ideas around female corporeality. The first one is about the beauty ideals and the idea that if a woman does not fit into the beauty norms, then she is left on her own to decay physically and metaphorically. Secondly, the mere fact that Rosaura cannot stop her physical changes such as bloating, pairs her lack of autonomy since she has relinquished her body to patriarchal control for so long, by accepting to follow her mother’s traditions and by becoming a body that serves Pedro.

As clarified, the female body is a matter of obeying the male-defined corporeal norms which encompass how a woman behaves and looks. However, this image of constructed and proper femininity is at the same time a burden on the heroines, who suffer from the body that they cannot feel in full control of and that they slowly start feeling distanced from. Hence, Esther, Marian and Tita start developing signs of physical disorders that show the discontent between the bodies they want to be and the bodies that society wants them to be.

#### 4.4. Bodily Disorders

The idealised image of femininity leads women to feel a sense of insufficiency with their physical bodies since their natural being is never seen enough or never seen compatible with the accepted standards. Associated with the body, so continually made to struggle with following corporeal norms but not allowed to experience their bodies as they wish, as a result, Bordo states that, in most cases women feel themselves as prisoners and as trapped in their bodies (147). Such disciplining and fashioning of the female body in accordance with norms also leads to bodily distresses which Kim Chernin in her works *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating & Identity* and *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, remarks as a discontinuity between the societal demands and women's real experience within their bodies. Therefore, this dissertation claims that the bodily distress that the heroines feel is a continuation and a symptom of proper femininity, resulting from the feeling of discomfort that the heroines experience in trying to become the socially imposed ideal body.

As women try to be compliant with male defined norms of beauty and appearance in identifying and restraining themselves as woman, they lose a sense of their true selves and become alien to their own bodies. As such, Iris Marion Young says,

She tries to take her subjectivity from her being-for-him. She tries to envelop herself with decoration. She covers herself with jewellery, makeup, clothing, in the attempt to make an envelope, to give herself a place. But in the end she is left homeless, derelict, with no room of her own, since he makes room for himself by using her as his envelope. (130)

Thus, the female body turns into a 'being-for-him', that is a body fashioned for men, that by fashioning makes her accepted but that at the same time becomes distant from herself, 'homeless' even, having nothing left of herself that she could claim as solely her own. As such, in *The Fat Woman's Joke* Esther notices the increasing intrusion towards her body through the remarks on her body fat, starts feeling tired of being a woman and having to cope with her social body which continually restrains her looks and defines her position in her marriage; in *The Edible Woman* Marian feels physically and mentally distressed when she notices that she is turning into the type that Peter wants her to be and that she cannot fully own or control her body; and finally, Tita

gets depressed and fed up with having to comply with the traditions that continually repress her body and that do not allow her to experience her body as she wishes. Hence, it is clear that all three protagonists struggle with their femininity and with their bodies which becomes an impediment for them. This sub-heading will then look at bodily distress in terms of how women experience their corporeality and the complications that they develop towards their bodies.

The disorders and the distress that is experienced by women are mostly centred around their material body as a medium that shows signs of their obedience or disobedience to the standardised female image. In her book *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo refers to bodily distress as a product of the attempts that aim to homogenize female corporeality. Stating that,

it becomes possible to see the degree to which femininity itself required the holding of breath, the loss of air, the choking down of anger and desire, the relinquishing of voice, the denial of appetite, the constriction of body. (Bordo 50)

This ‘holding of breath’ and ‘choking down of anger’, ‘relinquishing of voice’ and ‘denial of appetite’ that Bordo mentions, are all seen in *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* in which the heroines either physically constrain their bodies by repressing their anger, by surrendering themselves in a state of silence or by not eating. For example, Esther refrains herself from fighting with Alan over her appearance, in other words, she chokes down her emotions and becomes emotionally hungry. Marian, on the other hand suffers from refusal of food or in other words refusal of her own body. Lastly, Tita loses her appetite and voice as her body is suppressed day after day.

In addition to the aforementioned reactions, one of the most significant ways of showing physical and psychological distress is labelled by Kim Chernin and Susan Bordo as eating disorders or rather the pathologies that women develop with regards to their form and body image which also parallels this dissertation’s interest in woman’s relationship with food. Kim Chernin argues that “a troubled relation to food is one of the principal ways the problems of female being come to expression in women’s lives”

(*The Hungry Self* xi). Instigated by the cultural norms and beliefs around the female body, propagating that a woman must be slim and fit to emphasize her beauty and femininity, these normative assumptions which Kim Chernin names as the “Tyranny of Slenderness” (*The Obsession* xix) have led woman to develop bodily reactions including a rejection of her body or complicated pathologies towards her body image. Further, Susan Bordo argues that these disorders are not simply biological but instead, just like the body, they should again be acknowledged within their cultural construction (xix). In patriarchal cultures, female hunger is oftentimes associated with female desire, both of which are restrained, resulting in woman’s embarrassment with her appetite, because inability to control one’s hunger meant an inability of regulating oneself (Bordo 68). Hence, controlling one’s appetite and so one’s body shape means acceptance of the social standards and in the same line, the disorders are reflective of woman’s societal condition. Discussing the distress that the heroines experience with their bodies is significant to support the argument that their bodies are never experienced naturally, that their bodies have been subject to and an object of social control. In the same line, obesity in *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, anorexia in *The Edible Woman* and rejection of food in *Like Water for Chocolate* are significant for studying the heroines’ distress and the alienation they feel towards their bodies while arguably the same disorders underline the heroines’ realisation of their bodily condition and condition as woman.

#### **4.4.1. Bodily Disorders in *The Fat Woman’s Joke***

*The Fat Woman’s Joke* focuses on Esther’s story, her experiences as well as her struggles in her marriage including why she left her husband and ended up eating in large amounts. Her story could be read as essentially related with her corporeal being since throughout her marriage, Esther’s body is the centre of criticism because of being a fat woman who is unfit to the norms of proper female physique as related in the previous parts. Echoing both the idea of vulnerability, that the physical standards gives man the right to criticise a woman’s body as well as related with Bordo’s emphasis on the necessity of limiting woman’s hunger as essential for regulating the female self and body (68), Alan says “You have no self-control. You are despicable. You can’t even stop eating a couple of weeks. You have to nibble, and cheat” (Weldon 180).

Criticised and disgraced for having no control over her appetite and body and aware that her husband sees her as unfit to the norms of a proper female form, Esther says “All these years of marriage, I could see, he had been laughing at me” (Weldon 75). Thus, feeling it necessary to take on a diet with her husband, Esther says “I am really going through with it for my husband’s sake” (Weldon 48). Esther feels social pressure around the way she looks and her body and knowing that as a fat woman she does not conform to the social standards, she feels that the diet is a necessity to follow. However, feeling that her body is never free from being an object of scorn and control and realising that her physical form is becoming an impediment in her marriage, Esther expresses her psychological and physical distress by saying “My troubles are not outside me ... they are inside me” (Weldon 92). Her sense of entrapment is not only a metaphorical feeling but is also accompanied with the diet that Alan has imposed, which literally traps her by limiting the physical boundaries of her body and by imposing the ideal body image on her. Susan Bordo states that obesity is deemed unwanted and humiliated to a point of leading the individual to feel a sense of self-hatred (Bordo 203-204). In the same manner, conscious of the fact that her fat body is perceived as unwanted and internalising the troubles with her body, Esther expresses her distress by saying, “I wish I had been born a man.” (Weldon 97) and “I don’t know what I want, but it’s not this. I don’t want to be this person, I don’t want to be trapped in this body” (Weldon 99). Her statement clarifies that as a woman in a masculinist society, Esther feels herself trapped within the contours of her body and feels uncomfortable with being a fat woman. Hence, she is in search of a way out of her man-defined body and self and is in need of an identity that can go beyond the body which defines her as a fat woman and which continually restricts her position in society. As a result, she resorts to eating in order to challenge the limits of her body and of her society.

Esther’s eating complication starts once she realises that her marriage is breaking down, that Alan has an affair with his secretary Susan and that Esther has never been given enough worth in her marriage at all. Her compulsive eating is not only a reaction towards the image of proper femininity, but also a reflection of her psychological state, her hunger for love and understanding from Alan, and a desire for expressing her distress through her body. As such, Esther tells Alan “I have nothing else to do but eat.



What else have I got? You give me nothing. No love, no affection” (Weldon 180). Henceforth, Esther’s bodily disorder is first and foremost a psychological necessity towards fulfilling her hunger. To fulfil this hunger, the amount of food that she eats during this pathological condition is narrated with reference to a time she feels sick,

Esther was very sick at about four in the morning. A great mass of undigested food poured back out of her mouth into the lavatory basin: she could taste the different flavors as it passed. The soup, the toast, the curry, the cake, the nuts, the eggs, the fish sticks the butter, the jam, the beans, the cake – the whole evening’s intake reappeared in a spasmodic flow. She had not realized that her stomach could contain so much. (Weldon 113)

As the example of her eating disorder has shown, Esther eats to the point of making herself sick and nauseous which at the same time shows that her hunger cannot be fulfilled. Not thinking about what she eats or how much she eats, Esther refers to her condition by saying, “It has nothing to do with hunger” (Weldon 72), meaning that her hunger has nothing to do with physical hunger, that it has to do with the emotional void that she has been suffering for all these years. Reflecting the words of Chernin’s patients who explain their excessive eating as “What I wanted from food was companionship, comfort, reassurance, a sense of warmth and well-being that was hard for me to find in my own life, even in my home” (*The Obsession* 11). Likewise, Esther finds comfort and reassurance through food, realizing that her own life should be in her own hands, that she has been physically and psychologically limiting and appropriating herself so that she can be and become the woman that Alan and her society desires and finds acceptable. Kim Chernin also claims that pathologies and eating disorders observed in women are significant for implying “an association between eating and the struggle for identity” (*The Hungry Self* XI). Similarly, the eating disorder that Esther develops and the hunger she shows later on becomes her means of reclaiming the body and the identity that has been taken away from her and that has been controlled by her society.

#### **4.4.2. Bodily Disorders in *The Edible Woman***

Among the three novels studied in this dissertation, Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* provides the most extensive focus on woman’s complicated condition with her

body as observed through the psychological and physical disorders that Marian reflects. The majority of the narrative in *The Edible Woman* revolves around Marian's questioning of her relationship and of her future. As Marian merges into her role as Peter's prospective wife, observing how Peter treats her and realising that her married condition will be limiting her life and her body just like the example of her friend Clara's fragile and immobile pregnant body, Marian shows her distress with her female corporeality through developing a sense of alienation from her own body as well as through anorexia.

The first instance of bodily alienation occurs after meeting Clara when Marian has a dream which she describes as "a dream in which I had looked down and seen my feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly ... my fingers turning transparent" (Atwood 47). Having developed an unconscious aversion towards Clara's pregnant and maternal body, the unavoidability of her femininity and the lack of control that she has over her being a woman becomes more apparent to her. Clara's pregnancy also causes Marian to become aware of the societal expectations that she will be met with once she gets married. Especially as she and Peter start their wedding arrangements, Marian keeps imagining her body as distant, alien and as drifting away from herself. For instance, she says "Somewhere else, arrangements were being gradually made ... it was all being taken care of, there was nothing for her to do. She was floating, letting the current hold her up, trusting to it to take her where she was going" (Atwood 139). Her becoming a wife, which is taken care of outside herself, almost like a social procession that she has to follow, also underlines her inability to control herself and the new roles that she is assuming, marking that she does not own her body but that her body belongs to the society. Furthermore, discussed in relation with proper femininity, Marian's understanding of womanhood is also defined alongside the advertisements that commodify women and the office virgins each of whom stand for one aspect of proper femininity. Trying to identify herself with these perfected images that she is posed with but realising that she is not compatible with any of these versions of the female body, Marian realises that her body is made up of social meanings and layers and once again thinks, "she was afraid that she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer" (Atwood 274). Thus, realising that being a woman is a matter of

conforming her body to the societal standards, Marian feels her body as separate from herself and as out of her control.

As Marian's life moves from being centred around herself towards becoming Peter's fiancé, she develops anorexia which further emphasizes the distress that she is going through. Consequently, in addition to feeling her body as dissolving, as turning into something that she cannot control and as almost outside herself, Marian starts to reject her body by rejecting food. At the beginning of the novel, Marian is described as having a normal breakfast habit (Atwood 47), even taste testing food at work (Atwood 11) which later on turns into an aversion of certain foods, mainly meat, as triggered after the dinner with Peter. Having been to a luxurious cafe with her fiancé Peter, seeing that Peter is carving, cutting, adjusting and voraciously eating a piece of meat (Atwood 186), Marian struggles with her food which is narrated as,

She looked down at her own half-eaten steak and suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle. Blood red. ... In the supermarket they had it all pre-packaged in cellophane, with name-labels and price-labels stuck on it ... and even when you went into a butcher shop they wrapped it up so efficiently and quickly it was made clean, official. But now it was suddenly there in front of her with no intervening paper, it was flesh and blood, rare, and she had been devouring it. (Atwood 185)

Instead of simply seeing the steak as a dish that she has ordered, Marian starts to see the steak as flesh that is ready to be devoured which causes her to notice that she is getting closer to being consumed with the same appetite. As a result, her body starts rejecting food by "dividing the non-devourable from the devourable" (Atwood 187). Marian says that her body's food rejection has a stance and is towards foods that could be considered as living, as she says with reference to her body, "the stand it had taken was an ethical one: it simply refused to eat anything that had once been, or ... might still be living" (Atwood 220). Naomi Wolf indicates that societal expectations around the female body turn her into a commodified figure (Wolf 11). Hence, the metaphor of the female body as a prey, food or overall, a commodity that man owns is further emphasized by the notion of consuming living things which Marian is unable to perform as soon as she realizes that her condition within her relationship is no different than being a consumable product. Further, it is stated that *The Edible Woman* engages

in a “concern with the predatory nature of gender politics – something that is vividly illustrated by Marian’s fiancé repeatedly imagined as a hunter in the novel” (McWilliams 81). Consequently, Marian considers her body as the target of Peter. Her physical response in the form of anorexia, is described as a psychological reaction; “anorexia nervosa, which often manifests itself after an episode of sexual abuse and humiliation, can be seen at least in part a defence against the ‘femaleness’ of the body” (Bordo 8). Henceforth, it is only meaningful that Marian develops anorexia as a reaction against her condition, observing that Peter will devour her in their marriage, just like he violently devours the steak that he has ordered.

In a society where not eating is associated with the excitement that Marian feels towards her marriage such as when Marian says, “Her mother had set her strange loss of appetite down to overexcitement.” (Atwood 215), or is seen as being an “invalid” (Atwood 220) by Peter who associates not eating with sickness, losing her appetite actually shows the distress that Marian is experiencing in her feminine body. Anorexia is studied as a representation of woman’s experience through physically making apparent what she cannot otherwise verbalise (Bordo 176). Hence, Marian’s slimming down of her body and her inability to eat, marks her dissociation from her physical body and shows the limited and restrained position that she has found herself in. While anorexia physically represents Marian’s situation, it also accentuates the liminal space and position that her body and being has in her relationship, and this idea is also accompanied with a shift from first person narrative to third person narrative. When Marian starts to see her body as outside of herself, she also starts to talk about her body as impersonal and as out of control. Losing her appetite, then, both shows her distress and shows that she has lost control over her body and over herself. It is claimed that women suffering from pathological conditions almost always believed their bodies to be outside the self, their bodies wanting or rejecting food on its own, without her having any control over her sensations and over this bodily food regulation (Bordo 146-147). Similarly, as Marian’s body denies certain foods, Marian thinks,

She was becoming more and more irritated by her body’s decision to reject certain foods. She had tried to reason with it, had accused it of having frivolous whims, had coaxed with it and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled. (Atwood 219)

Her third person narrative is indicative of the body that she cannot fully own and which she has to re-own since Chernin says that the body is reflective of a woman's anxieties and what she is most concerned about in relation with her physical being (*The Obsession 2*). Talking about her body as a separate entity and an existence that she has no control over, that makes decisions on its own and that cannot be reasoned with, both indicates that the female body does not belong to woman but rather belongs to culture and also shows Marian's distancing from the feminine body that she is. Not eating at the same time foreshadows the power of her body which she will realise and use later on.

#### **4.4.3. Bodily Disorders in *Like Water for Chocolate***

Similar with *The Fat Woman's Joke* and *The Edible Woman*, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita experiences bodily distress as caused by her need to comply with the body that her mother imposed on her. As a result of the traditional limitations that she is posed with, Tita is made to repress her emotions and so is consumed day by day. She is first driven to madness since she starts to stay with the hens in the ranch, then reaches a point of silence and finally stops eating.

The significance of the disorders or physical reactions that Tita shows could be explained through Susan Bordo who states that "In the medical model, the body of the subject is the passive tablet on which disorder is inscribed. Deciphering that inscription is usually seen as a matter of determining the 'cause' of the disorder" (67). In the same way, Tita's muteness and her rejection of eating can be deciphered as representing her suffering with having to be the obedient daughter of de la Garza family and her reactions to her socially coded body. As indicated, Tita's experience of bodily distress is observed in two different ways; remaining silent and rejecting food, both of which are pathological responses to the restrictions imposed on her body.

Not eating and not speaking reflect the emotional condition that Tita is going through but at the same time these are attempts of escaping her body. Hence, when Dr. John takes her to his home to relieve her of her repressed condition, Tita stops speaking and thinks "she wanted to escape from herself, didn't want to think about making a choice,

didn't want to talk again. She didn't want words to shriek her pain" (Esquivel 99). Believing that her body is the cause of her pain and limitation, not eating and talking could also be seen as her attempts of self-contemplation since through them Tita tries to make sense of the body which she has been dissociated from. Accordingly, Tita thinks that this state of silence is not only an escape from her body but it is also a way to understand herself and to contemplate upon her situation since she thinks,

Some day, when she felt like talking, she would tell John that; but now, she preferred silence. There were many things she needed to work out in her mind, and she could not find the words to express the feelings seething inside her since she left the ranch. (Esquivel 98)

The distress that shows itself through her silence, underlines the fact that she has not been given any voice and her body has been long kept silenced. Having lived her body in line with the societal expectations, cultural significations and the taboos, Tita needs to work out many things in her mind in order to understand herself and her experiences and in doing so, she mirrors a similar type of pathology, that is remaining silent. However, it is also clear that Tita willingly cuts herself off from the outside world and for the first time tries to locate her body as freed from the traditions of her home and her mother. In other words, her disorders could be identified as an "embodied protest" (Bordo 175). Another parallel instance from the novel is related as follows, "Instead of eating, she would stare at her hands" (Esquivel 98). Being a silent and an almost non-existent figure at her mother's home, Tita could be said as having no knowledge about her body except from guiding her body for following the traditions and her cooking duties. However, this state of starving her body at the same time gives her a chance to work out herself and her condition. For instance, when she examines her hands, she ponders "Now, seeing her hands no longer at her mother's command, she didn't know what to ask them to do, she had never decided for herself before" (Esquivel 99). As Tita tries to think of the different uses that her hands have except from cooking, she also underlines the fact that she has been distanced from her own body, not knowing how to live her body outside of the given norms. Although compared with Esther and Marian's experiences, Tita's bodily suffering occupies a rather smaller portion of the narrative, her experience reveals how she lived her body in her mother's home while at the same time leads her to realise herself. After her state

of silence and food rejection, when she goes back to the ranch, her manner changes, she fearlessly voices her opinion and feels herself as present in the ranch, knowing that she has figured out the contours of her body.

This study also claims that the bodily discomfort that the heroines experience leads them to question their condition as woman and as trapped in a feminine body which they can never fully own. Studying the significance of body and how through her body a woman can signify her physical, psychological and social state, Kim Chernin says,

The body holds meaning. A woman obsessed with the size of her body, wishing to make her breasts and thighs and hips and belly smaller and less apparent, may be expressing the fact that she feels uncomfortable being female in this culture. A woman obsessed with the size of her appetite wishing to control her hungers and urges, may be expressing the fact that she has been taught to regard her emotional life, her passions and 'appetites' as dangerous, requiring control and careful monitoring. A woman obsessed with the reduction of her flesh may be revealing the fact that she is alienated from a natural source of female power and has not been allowed to develop a reverential feeling for her body. (*The Obsession 2*)

Kim Chernin's statement clarifies that the physical reactions that women develop are at the same time a reflection of their anxieties with their bodies. While it is through her body that a woman experiences social suppression and anxieties about her corporeality, it is through the same body that she reflects it and that she can overcome it. In the same manner, Esther, Marian and Tita, not only experience physical distress but also by physically reflecting their suffering, get into a process of voicing their bodies.

#### **4.5. Disobedient Bodies and Reaction to Proper Femininity**

The previous chapter on space and place has explored the heroines' domestic roles and limited conditions at home, putting forward the argument that the heroines' boredom and distress stems from a desire to break free from the physical and the metaphorical boundaries that delimit them. Similarly, the heroines' bodies are presented as another means of boundary-marking and just like their desire for changing the limits of the domestic space, the heroines also want to free themselves from the corporeal limits

that patriarchy has imposed on them and salvage what has been their own. In the theoretical background to this chapter, it has been discussed that women are appropriated in accordance with male desires, a woman's biology, her anatomy and corporeality have been made the core of her identity, keeping her a prisoner of cultural norms and biological givens. In turn, these norms around the female body not only regulate femininity and the female form but also turn into a feeling of discomfort in their bodies as women try to comply with the standard images of femininity, which not only refers to appearance but as discussed, is also reflective of a woman's appropriating of herself as behaviourally compliant. Since, body is the medium of one's sex and the ground on which cultural appearances and personal experiences are written, it at the same time causes the individual to experience the world as dependant on her bodily appropriation. Indicating that women and the female body have long been the product of male imagination and creation Susan Suleiman states that,

Women, who for centuries had been the *objects* of male theorizing, male desires, male fears and male representations, had to discover and reappropriate themselves as *subjects*; the obvious place to begin was the silent place to which they had been assigned again and again, that dark continent which had ever provoked assault and puzzlement. (“(Re)Writing the Body” 43)

Suleiman argues that the silenced medium, i.e. the female body that is socially constructed has to be voiced, has to be reclaimed by women whose bodies have been defined in accordance with the masculinist culture and its representations of and expectations from women. Hence, while the female body is perceived as a matter of following and exhibiting pre-defined physical and social norms and its boundaries defined as violable or not (Bordo 16), the body is also seen as “a site of political struggle” (Bordo 16) or in other words, “[t]he *physical* body can, however, be an instrument and medium of power” (Bordo 143). Hence, according to Suleiman and Bordo, if the body is a constitution, the same body can be a medium of struggle and expression, as well as a ground open to re-creation and a reactionary agent for struggle that could re-appropriate the same norms in revolting against its cultural construction and oppression. Extending the discussion from this point, learning what is violable with regards to the norms around the female body, is a resistance towards the normative identities and can challenge and alter the social construction and standardisation of the female form.



The body image, which is mainly about but is not limited to size, shape and appearance of woman, is one of the main constituents that reflects the constructedness of woman as this chapter has argued. Hence, it could be stated that if female corporeality is mediated by culture in terms of physical appearance or proper bodily behaviour, then any body that defies or challenges the aforementioned cultural encodings and the contours of the body can be named as a disobedient body. This way, rather than being subjects to a body that has been seized away from her own self, a woman can rescue her body and so her subjecthood because it is stated that “In much of the Western feminist tradition, bodily self-realization is associated with liberation” (Threadcraft 220). Likewise, when the heroines realise that their bodies correspond to cultural demands rather than represent their innermost selves, they challenge and change the cultural meanings that construct the female body and so become disobedient bodies and disobedient women in re-defining the boundaries of their bodies as well as in voicing and reclaiming their-selves. The claim then, is that the body is not only a medium of repression but is also a tool for voicing what has been silenced.

#### **4.5.1. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity**

As discussed under the previous heading, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel underline their heroines’ realisation of and desire to break free from their corporeal limits through a sense of bodily discomfort, emphasizing that their bodies are reflective of their condition. Hence, the heroines voice and react to their situation again through their bodies. In addition, the main focus in this part of the dissertation is to show that food becomes essential for accompanying the heroines’ reaction to and alteration of the limits of their bodies as idealised by the patriarchal societies because this way they aim to re-define the contours of their bodies themselves. Counihan says: “Food can be used metaphorically to convey just about any imaginable condition, thought, or emotion” (*The Anthropology of* 21). Therefore, the point when food becomes important for a discussion of the disobedient female body, is how the protagonists subvert the customary uses of these nutritive images to express their condition and to challenge the limits of their bodies. As indicated both in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4, women’s attitude towards food and eating has been pre-determined

since women are related with nurturing rather than with eating through the image of “the feeding mother and the starving female body” (Sceats 127-128). Thus, in addition to starving their bodies to keep up with the ideal housewife figure, Bordo states that women have been condemned from food and eating from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards (110) not only for maintaining the ideal image but also to reflect the social status and worth of woman, attesting to her inferiority in society (Wolf 189). Therefore, in a patriarchal context, the limitation of woman’s food intake has strengthened the restrictions over her body, emphasizing her limited worth within her society.

Since the body is a crucial factor in defining woman and femininity, woman’s connection with food tells a lot about the female experience and the way woman’s body is regulated by the society. Likewise, food is a significant element for discussing how the heroines put an end to the distress that they feel in their bodies and challenge the limits of their bodies since it is claimed that, “Food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self, and our experience of embodiment, or the ways that we live in and through our bodies, which itself is inextricably linked with subjectivity” (Lupton 1). Referring to the previously mentioned bodily self-realisation and regaining a sense of subjectivity, eating more than a woman is allowed to eat as in Esther’s case or limiting one’s food intake in Marian’s case, can point out and challenge the limiting bodily appropriation. Food is also the outlet for women to represent themselves and to give voice to their bodies which has been silenced. In *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, Sarah Sceats mentions woman’s body’s communicative inclination with reference to a woman’s biological-reproductive characteristics (63). When this “communicative body” (Sceats 63) is met with food, which is likewise communicative of feelings, sensations, traditions and customs while also marking cultural boundaries (Lupton 1), eating and cooking gain significance for meaning making or for creating meanings anew by going against limits. Accordingly, the cake that Marian bakes or the food that Tita cooks communicates and brings forward their bodies. In Marian’s case she uses cooking to caricature and mock the idealised images of femininity. In Tita’s case, each dish that she cooks turns into a literal representation of her body by transferring not only bodily fluids, such as her tears and blood, but also her emotions to the food and through the food to the other characters which also voices her body. Consequently, “using control over food as a

means of constructing subjectivity and controlling the bodies” (Lupton 14) is what the heroines try to achieve.

When the narratives are closely inspected, it can be seen that, the heroines feel much more empowered as they start expressing their bodies freely. Henceforth, by using and abusing their bodies, the heroines mock, replicate, and challenge the social construction of female corporeality as well as its’ limits and while doing this, food aids them in gaining freedom, power and autonomy in problematizing the normative limits of their bodies and in re-defining the limits of their bodies themselves.

#### **4.5.1.1. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity in *The Fat Woman’s Joke***

Food and Esther’s continual need of food, becomes significant not only in showing her social and psychological condition but also in voicing her reaction. It is argued that, femininity has been constructed to deem woman as responsible for feeding and taking care of the others rather than feeding herself, and women were taught that nurturing the self is gluttonous and disproportionate with femininity (Bordo 171). Just like the limitations that kept her within her house, Esther’s maternal body also deemed her as the one who needs to feed the others rather than the one who also feels physical hunger. Henceforward, as a reaction to this situation, in her new home, Esther keeps filling the fridge and the cupboards with foodstuff and continuously consumes food even while not feeling hungry which is narrated as follows;

She ate frozen chips and peas and hamburgers, and sliced bread with bought jam and fishpaste, and baked beans and instant puddings, and tinned porridge and tinned suet pudding, and cakes and biscuits from packets. She drank sweet coffee, sweet tea, sweet cocoa and sweet sherry. (Weldon 8)

As indicated while discussing her bodily distress, it is clear that Esther is not physically hungry but she is also emotionally hungry, because all those years in her marriage, she never had a chance to live her body as she wanted. However, eating as she wants, without restraining herself and her body is a way out of the limiting condition that her being a woman causes. Referring to this idea and implying that her eating disorder is

also a means of rebellion, Esther says, “I don’t really eat ... I scavenge. I am trying to clear up the mess that surrounds me” (Weldon 108). The mess that surrounds her could be read as the social world and the social body that defines her which she tries to express and resist by going against the images that normalised slimness. Henceforth, her uncontrollable hunger is a hunger towards feeling free in her body and having command of her own body while it is also a reflection of her desire for fulfilling herself and for re-creating her corporeal limits without having to consider social norms.

Although Esther’s compulsive eating and obesity are initially read as reflections of the discomfort that she feels in her body, at the same time Esther challenges the male defined ideal body type through excessive eating which she consciously performs to show that she has the right to experience her body as she wants. Esther has been marginalized because of her body and restrained through the diet that she is made to follow as well as by all the interventions towards her body, such as her mother’s criticism of her body fat or Phyllis’ reference to an aesthetician, Susan’s definitions of the beautiful and slim body ideal, all of which were directed at changing her body. However, reacting against the norms of proper female physique and embracing her fat body are ways to defy the ideal body shape and the limits and the boundaries that her culture has drawn. For instance, when Esther starts eating as she wants, she also says, “I have no intention, ever again, of doing without what I want” (Weldon 23). This is not just a statement in which she refers to ending the diet and doing without the food that she wants to eat but this is also a statement related with her life in which she was limited with the gendered choices and roles that she had, which she denies by deciding to fulfil both her appetite and her emotional void. Hence, food and altering the female body through food is a reactionary tool in *The Fat Woman’s Joke*. As Esther rejects the diet that Alan has imposed on her, eats in large amounts and gains weight, without feeling the need to pay attention to how she looks or what Alan will say of her, she transgresses the boundaries of her limited body, gains more physical space and it could be said that she is not passive anymore as she empowers herself and her body by defying the norms. As the title suggests, Weldon and Esther make fun of ideal womanliness by not following the ideal body image and by showing that if the body is a social construct, then likewise a woman can re-construct the same body as she wants, since by getting fat, Esther plays with the contours and the boundaries of her

body and her femininity. Her fat body, though it initially looks powerless and prone to intrusion, turns into a site of power, showing that to feel herself happy, she does not need to appropriate her body to the norms. What is more important, it is only when she starts eating without limiting her portions that she narrates her story and her experiences because the retrospective narrative of her marriage and her experiences as a woman are provided at moments she binges on a different types of food, which indicates that food gives her freedom from the limits of her being a woman.

The importance of becoming fat and denying to be slim and invisible has to do with the male/female, powerful/powerless binaries of the masculinist system as “women are produced as passive and feminine and men as active and masculine” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 16). Therefore, Esther’s eating and her gaining corporeal power, challenges the male/female binary by juxtaposing the gender dualities and the powerless female body notion. Man and woman’s relationship with eating and food have likewise been defined in relation with gender dualities, for instance, “Men are *supposed* to have hearty, even voracious, appetites. It is a mark of the manly to eat spontaneously and expansively” (Bordo 108). However, as Kim Chernin states, obesity expresses woman’s uncontrollable appetite (*The Obsession* 2). The fact that Esther keeps eating and keeps filling herself with food is significant as she maximises her bodily space, her space of signification and her visibility within a society in which men want women to be slim and to be invisible. There has been so much going on in the novel in terms of categorising women and seeing women as something insignificant, invisible or something that can be devoured easily especially with reference to Susan and Phyllis. This is one of the reasons why when Esther eats without the fear of getting fat, she challenges the power relations between man and woman, because this way, she actually challenges the aforementioned idea of female invisibility as her fat body makes her more and more visible. From a similar perspective, in discussing *The Fat Woman’s Joke*, critics stated that,

By gaining weight, Esther retaliates against the institution that has been weighing on her. ... In contemporary society the fat, especially women, are laughable and pathetic, whereas the thin are prized and desirable. ... Rather than trying to achieve a thin, socially valued body, she chooses to eat and grow fatter, rebelling against the idealization of the thin female body, an image she recognizes as an empty one. (Roby 12-13)

On the contrary to characters like Susan, who prefer being attractive preys to man, through eating as she wants, Esther's body becomes her own, not food for man. By rejecting the idealised slim female image, Esther also rejects passivity. Therefore, when Esther eats larger amounts of food, she exceeds the limitations of her body and at the same time challenges the gender-based binaries. This in turn is enough to bring Alan back to her at the end of the narrative, since Alan pays a visit to Esther's house, calling her back to her married home, marking that through altering her body, Esther has achieved power in her marriage and has managed to redefine herself against patriarchal norms.

#### **4.5.1.2. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity in *The Edible Woman***

The idea of a disobedient body in *The Edible Woman* could initially be discussed with regards to Marian's anorexia as reflecting a conscious reaction to her situation but more importantly, in Atwood's novel, bodily limits are challenged through a re-creation of the female body in showing the constructed nature of woman's bodies. When Marian challenges the pre-defined notions around the female body, she does so by using the aid of food, specifically with the cake that she bakes, to mirror the social constitution of the beauty standards, to represent how she has been made to disown her body by turning it into a social product in serving it to Peter, and finally to emphasize that she can likewise have power in designing, defining and controlling her body.

To start with, Marian's initial reaction to the societal bodily norms has been through anorexia, which could be read as Marian's conscious way of going against her body. Food refusal has been culturally coded as attesting to a woman's limited space and as demanding a regulation of woman's appetite (Bordo 68). Likewise, although in her society not eating is associated with the excitement that Marian feels towards her marriage such as when Marian says, "Her mother had set her strange loss of appetite down to overexcitement." (Atwood 215), or is seen as being an "invalid" (Atwood 220) by Peter who associates not eating with sickness, food refusal is used by Atwood, rather as a reaction to societal expectations since Marian does not refuse food to

conform to the physical ideals in order to be like the office virgins but refuses food as a reflection of her dissatisfaction with the social norms and with her being a woman. Her limited appetite reflects her entrapment into her body but as Marian stops eating, it could be said that she showcases and reacts against the societal control that she is experiencing in her body. For instance, Duncan comments on Marian's eating disorders "You're probably representative of modern youth, rebelling against the system; though it isn't considered orthodox to begin with the digestive system" (Atwood 236). Duncan sees Marian's anorexia as a rebellion against the system that commodifies women and as a mode of voicing the distress that a woman goes through. Hence, instead of viewing anorexia as a means of conforming to the conventional slim image or instead of seeing it as a self-destructive act, it could also be seen as a way through which a woman gains control over her body and voices with it what she has been going through. More important for this study is how Marian ends her anorexia with again willingly choosing to eat and by willingly gaining control over her own body.

It is claimed that "Atwood's women fight to reclaim authorship of their own identities via a rewriting and reclaiming of their bodies and of the old codes" (Howells 62). Correspondingly, baking and delicately decorating a woman shaped cake is not just significant for showing how Peter has long seen her as fashioned for his tastes and ready to be eaten and finished up at any moment but also because the cake is a direct representation of the construction of proper femininity. However, by means of shaping, sizing up and fashioning the female body, Marian also metaphorically becomes the author of her own identity and body. Thus, the preparation of the cake is significant for showing how she uses food to challenge the body stereotypes. To start with, Marian plans every detail of how she will construct the cake and what she will buy, thinking, "Her image was taking shape. ... Sugar, icing-sugar, vanilla, salt, food-colouring. She wanted everything new, she didn't want to use anything that was already in the house" (Atwood 339). As her thought process reveals, she wants to construct the image of this woman by meticulously choosing the ingredients, indicating that the female form that she is creating will be a form that defies the old ingredients, i.e. the old means of constructing femininity and the female body.

Marian goes on to decorate the cake and this decoration process shows that she is constructing the cake and the female body as she wants, without relying on the old and the traditional constituents, which at the same time shows Marian's capability of going against the norms and of re-defining her body since this dissertation argues that the cake stands for Marian's body. Margaret Atwood in her essay titled "The Female Body" describes women's body -both in the sense of the corporeal and with reference to how the body is accessorised i.e. dressed up- in such a way that it is seen as mechanic, constructed, assembled even to the point of looking artificial and parodic. Such a description of the female body as assembled coincides with her heroine Marian's artificial construction of the she-cake. For instance, when she starts working on the body of the cake,

She set about clothing it, filling the cake-decorator with bright pink icing. First she gave it a bikini, but that was too sparse. She filled in the midriff. Now it had an ordinary bathing-suit, but that still wasn't exactly what she wanted. She kept extending, adding to top and bottom, until she had a dress of sorts. ... She made a smiling lush-lipped pink mouth and pink toes to match. Finally she put five pink fingernails on each of the amorphous hands. (Atwood 341-342)

The body that Marian bakes and constructs is a representation and a caricaturing of the female body that is constituted by society; not natural, but artificially coloured and decorated, meticulously constituted to fulfil male tastes and desires. Dressing up, bejewelling, colouring the eyes, the eyelashes and the nails, are direct attacks on the image of femininity that man have turned into norms of ideal beauty, reminding of the ads that commercialised woman and the ideal female figure that Marian was made to conform to as she prepared herself presentable to Peter.

The cake could be said to serve as a mirror of her body which has been consumed by Peter as a result of his constant demands regarding how Marian should behave or what should become of her body. As such, referring to the cake, Marian says, "You look very delicious" she told her. "Very appetizing. And that's what will happen to you; that's what you get for being food" (Atwood 342). Thus, the very logic behind expressing herself and her condition in the form of a cake is a metaphoric representation of how woman as a concept is created to be appreciated by men, to respond to the tastes of men and more importantly to show that she is always seen as



a prey, as something to be consumed. The purpose of Marian could be commented on as, if the body is constituted by different systems of signification then it is also a medium through which women can re-create themselves and the meanings of their bodies. It is stated that “food has become the principal expressive vocabulary” (Chernin, *The Hungry Self* 172). In the same manner, with this recreation of the female body, as Marian serves the cake to Peter, she also regains her appetite and starts speaking in first person singular, indicating that food enabled her to discover and express what her body has been going through. This also shows that as she creates, assembles and brings together the cake, she also feels herself in command of the female body, realising that she can guide how her body looks or how it is coded. Therefore, she re-claims the body that has been propped and fashioned based on certain images by her society and by Peter.

Just like the subversion of the active/passive, powerful/powerless binaries in the case of Esther, Marian’s use of food likewise subverts the gender binaries between her and Peter. As she serves the cake to Peter, Marian says, “‘You’ve been trying to destroy me ... ‘You’ve been trying to assimilate me. But I’ve made you a substitute, something you’ll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn’t it?’” (Atwood 344). Serving the cake with these words, Marian shows her awareness of the working mechanisms of patriarchal ideology that turns woman into a vulnerable body by the very means of controlling and crafting her according to male-defined norms. Food in this novel then, symbolises both how a woman’s body appears and aids in expressing this realisation. In addition, instead of Peter, Marian herself consumes the cake, which is significant in marking her power in the ownership of her body. As Peter leaves Marian’s home, also leaving the cake untouched, Marian feels a great sense of hunger. Her situation is narrated as follows,

Suddenly she was hungry. Extremely hungry. The cake after all was only a cake. She picked up the platter, carried it to the kitchen table and located a fork. ... She considered the first mouthful. It seemed odd but most pleasant to be actually tasting and chewing and swallowing. (Atwood 344)

In this respect, the significance of food here is also about the act of eating in turning the binaries upside down since Peter becomes the one who cannot consume anymore.

It is marked that “Marian has learned assertiveness, that sexual politics means ‘eat or be eaten’” (Sceats 99). Through the means of food, Marian re-creates the consumer-consumed relationship and boldly states that she is not weaker and edible anymore. Consequently, compared to Peter’s consumption of the steak that has previously been exemplified, in this scene, Marian’s hunger and her devouring of the cake does not only end her anorexia and lead her to regaining the control of her body but is also a metaphorical way of gaining power in the eyes of patriarchy by showing her resistance to the body norms and to the societal standards.

#### **4.5.1.3. Disobedient Bodies and Significance of Food for Reacting Against Proper Femininity in *Like Water for Chocolate***

As discussed in the theoretical background of this chapter, the female body is constricted to certain norms that include both physical standards and proper behaviour and keeping the body intact and untainted is of utmost significance in the traditional patriarchal societies such as the one that Esquivel depicts. So far, the discussions on Tita focused on the idea that the female body is silenced, objectified, pacified and made the target of male domination and societal traditions which Tita suffered from. However, although set amidst a traditional society, bound to traditions and a patriarchal set of rules, compared to the other two novels that this study analyses, from the beginning of the narrative, *Like Water for Chocolate* presents the female body as energetic and powerful, which, mixed with food, becomes even more subversive in terms of implying the challenge that the female body could pose to patriarchy.

To start with, oftentimes in the novel, also as stemming from the magical realist aspect of mixing the real with the unreal (Carpentier 85), Tita’s body and emotions are paralleled with the dishes that she prepares. For instance, Tita’s temper is described as “Tita was literally ‘like water for hot chocolate’ – she was on the verge of boiling over” (Esquivel 138). Thus, food is a direct correspondent of Tita’s body. Likewise, when she is torn with her desire for Pedro she says “She felt completely empty, like a platter that held only crumbs, all that was left of a marvellous pastry” (Esquivel 189). Hence, Laura Esquivel draws parallels between Tita’s body and food, showing that her body and what she cooks are in direct correlation and this is what enables Tita to

transgress the boundaries of her body. This parallel between what a woman does in the kitchen and her body is explained as,

Culinary activity involves not just the combination of prescribed ingredients, but something personal and creative emanating from the cook, a magical quality which transforms the food and grants it powerful properties that go beyond physical satisfaction to provide spiritual nourishment as well. (Dobrian 60)

In the same way, when Tita cooks, it is a matter of mixing her emotions and herself into her dishes and food becomes a tool for mirroring and voicing what goes on in her body which as stated, is also a characteristic of the magical realist aspect of this novel. Food is what Tita resorts to in order to voice herself, and it is stated by Fernández-Levin that,

Each recipe points to a significant event in her life and to fundamental changes in her persona. Tita grows gradually from dutiful daughter to undisputed ruler of the household, from passive to aggressive entity, from loving innocence to manipulative hate ... And each time she substitutes a particular ingredient in a recipe, which has remained virtually unchanged for generations, a subversion of the social order ensues. (Fernández-Levin 111)

As indicated, as Tita grows and experiences different things, she also changes some of the ingredients in the family recipes which corresponds to both a changing of the society's norms, since these recipes are the heritage of her family, and a mixture of herself into the food that she cooks. Tita substitutes the usual ingredients with the rather unusual ingredients such as with her tears that mix into the cake batter, the blood that gets into the quail dish or her voice when she sings that mixes into and rises the dough. These voices, senses and bodily fluids add a magical touch to the food she prepares which is how Tita gains corporeal power and how she gains power over other characters and her society.

Although all of the dishes that Tita cooks are significant in representing her emotional state and in aiding her reaction against the traditional limitations over her body, two of these dishes are representatives of the significance of food for voicing Tita's body and in showing that Tita's body is active in the sense that it emits energy and emotions that are enough to change characters' behaviour and the flow of events.

The first instance of showing the power that Tita's body holds and the subversive potential that it has, is observed through how Tita influences Gertrudis' rebellion. Through Gertrudis and Tita's impact on Gertrudis, Esquivel represents the bodily freedom that women are in search of and at the same time shows that the repressed body can be the source of freedom by providing an escape from the socially defined corporeal limitations. From the first introduction of Gertrudis, although there is an emphasis on her movement, energy and bodily freedom stating "she always showed where rhythm, movement or music were involved" (Esquivel 11), just like Tita, Gertrudis has been kept under control by her mother. However, eventually, the desire burning inside her, the sensations that she repressed and her wish for a freer expression of herself finds voice in her body by the aid of Tita and the dish that she has prepared. The dish is named by Tita as 'Quail in Rose Petal Sauce' that is a mixture of quail, petals of the roses that Pedro has given to Tita and the blood shed by Tita as she pressed the roses to her chest. As Gertrudis eats this dish, Tita's unvoiced desire for Pedro finds voice in Gertrudis' body who starts burning with desire that she cannot stay at the dinner table, tries to take a bath but even the water drops burn her skin and evaporate (Esquivel 51). As a result, Gertrudis runs out of the ranch, to the open fields, searching for a way to extinguish this burning fire coming from inside her body. The narrative of Gertrudis' escape from the ranch highlights her unsilenced body and autonomy as Gertrudis runs away naked, overflowing with energy, her hair falling down, her body giving away the scent of rose such that this scent coming from her draws Juan, a soldier, towards her. The power and the potential of the female body when it is unrepressed is presented clearly through Gertrudis, but more importantly, Esquivel shows that Tita's body has the power of defying boundaries that are set by her mother, since it is Tita's long repressed feelings towards Pedro that finds voice in Gertrudis and that causes her to rebel. Furthermore, as seen in this example, food is a significant element in voicing Tita's repressed feelings. Hence, Tita's cooking not only challenges the limitations that are imposed on her in her home as indicated in Chapter 3, but cooking also empowers her body.

By transferring her emotions to food and so to her sister's body, Tita not only voices the feelings that she has been made to repress but also manages to transgress the socially imposed limits of the female body by using food as a way to intrude the male

body. The rose petal quail dish, that has an aphrodisiac effect on Gertrudis also turns into a means of communicating the desire between Tita and Pedro. This transition of emotions between the two is narrated as follows;

It was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce, in the tender flesh of the quails, in the wine, in every one of the meal's aromas. That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot, voluptuous, totally sensuous. (Esquivel 49)

Tita's whole being, emotions and body dissolves into food and then becomes part of Pedro's body as Pedro consumes the rose-quail dish. In this scene "Pedro didn't offer any resistance. He let Tita penetrate to the farthest corners of his being" (Esquivel 49). Being an ingredient of the dish, Tita leaves Pedro no chance to deny her emotions and it is through this dish that Pedro realises the burning desire inside Tita not only as reflected on Gertrudis' body but also as experienced and digested by him. Thereupon, what is significant in this scene is how Tita breaches into the male body, henceforth gaining power over Pedro. Esquivel herself describes her intention in this novel as a reversal of gender roles, saying that cooking gives power to woman so that she not only nurtures but also enters the body of man, hence taking control of him and gaining power (Loewenstein 605). Overall, it is clear from this instance that food empowers Tita's body.

Another significant alimentary instance for voicing Tita's body is when she cooks 'Chiles in Walnut Sauce' for her niece's wedding. Mirroring the wedding banquet of Pedro and Rosaura, what Tita prepares for the wedding of her niece has the power of not only exceeding the spatial boundaries but this time, what she cooks also brings out the feelings that she has repressed. The wedding proves successful and merry for all the guests who "tasting these chiles in walnut sauce ... experienced a sensation like the one Gertrudis had when she ate the quails in rose sauce" (Esquivel 217). The guests and Tita and Pedro likewise are taken away by desire as affected by the chiles in walnut sauce that carries the long-repressed feelings of Tita. Once and for all openly showing her feelings for Pedro, which she has restrained during his marriage with Rosaura and consummating their love, Tita frees and lives her body as she wishes, denying and going against the traditions and the norms that her mother has followed in defining the

contours of her body. It is after this instance that Tita dies and the novel ends but just like her previous associations with food, this final recipe marks that, through food, Tita has not only managed to voice her emotions but also managed to free her body from the limits of her traditional society.

Overall, food has been used by Esther, Marian and Tita as a powerful tool to subvert gender-based dualisms and to express their bodies that have been silenced, pacified and defined within normative boundaries.

#### **4.6. Conclusion to Chapter 4**

In conclusion, this chapter aimed to discuss how the female body is presented in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* by focusing on the way woman is perceived as a social category in direct proportion with her body, how she looks, her size and how she acts. The focus of this chapter has been on the constructed nature of the female body, discussing how the selected novels centralise woman's corporeality as a cause of woman's entrapment by social norms and imposed standards, also making them a prey to the intrusion of man and of society. However, as this chapter showed, it is through this repressed and silenced body that women can react to and can alter the subject/object, male/female and active/passive binary as she takes over the duty of self-defining her body.

One of the main arguments of this chapter has been to show how women in the selected novels use their bodies as a medium of resistance to patriarchy. To say that the body is disobedient means that the subject no longer obeys to bodily standards nor does follow the normative physical boundaries. The subversive power of the female body in these novels is that the heroines reject the standards regarding female beauty and the slim body ideal or the social construction of the female body in general. As they voice their bodies, they also break down the pillars of male hegemony. Since body is a matter of one's self-involvement and is associated with one's direct physical and social experiences, achieving bodily control as well as being in charge of one's body is a major step towards re-defining female subjecthood. Hence, when a woman goes against, denies or plays with the normative ways of expression that are deemed right

and acceptable for the female body, she arguably challenges the masculinist norms and the construction of the female body. When the heroines re-present their bodies, it is oftentimes different than the usual manner, that is patriarchy's construction of an image of femininity as a mother, a care-giver, a beautiful and sexually appealing lover, hence a body who is fit for the male ideology. As the heroines struggle to re-claim their bodies back from the hands of the traditions and socially assigned meanings, they also show to what extent bodies reflect gender essentialism, underlining the fact that bodies are social constructs.

Food, which was initially a parallel to women's consumption by men, turns into a vehicle of empowerment and of re-claiming the bodies that they have not had any control over. Through food, eating, not eating, challenging conventions through the unconventional ingredients added to food, women re-inscribe the meanings of feminine appearance by changing their body size or by bringing out the body that has been silenced. Thus, food enables them to end their bodily distress and gives them a chance to re-signify the meanings of the female body and to re-claim their identity as distinct from the identity that men have attributed to them. Thus, their bodies, into which women have been confined and have felt themselves as trapped, turns into a space of liberation, a space of their very own.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to provide a comparative analysis of Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* with the purpose of discussing how the heroines Esther, Marian and Tita try to challenge and change their male defined femininity and womanhood while at the same time questioning the spaces that they are allowed in and the bodies that they can never fully be in command of. The feminist perspective of this study has throughout claimed that the social, physical and somatic or biological boundaries that a woman is subject to, outlines her experiences and delimits her gendered behaviour by always defining her through man and as man's other. Hence, a woman is socially constructed through the male-determined standards that define femininity in all the aforementioned respects. Consequently, the conceptual framework of this study that encompasses space and body and their social and gendered significations, has enabled a more comprehensive understanding of woman's condition and her identity as a social construct since in most cases, the heroines Esther, Marian and Tita's condition is a matter of their association with the domestic sphere and the roles that they are given within that space as well as a matter of their bodies being under constant control and surveillance so that they can fit to the definitions of normative corporeality. Another key argument of this dissertation has been centred around the significance of food in the selected novels. Mediated by the roles regarding the act of cooking, food has been integral in understanding what a woman does in feminized spaces, while food at the same time has been essential in delving into the cultural demands around the female body with respect to a woman's relationship with eating and dieting. However, this study has claimed that food not only shows a woman's relationship with domestic space and limitations of a woman's body through idealised images of the female form, but food also aids the heroines Esther, Tita and Marian, both in questioning their



naturalised-essentialised female disposition and in gaining agency so that they can reclaim their identities and womanhood back from men and can themselves re-define their situation in spaces, in their bodies and in the male/female binary. Hence, this dissertation has aimed to study how the heroines call the male defined discourses of femininity, space and body into question and how by challenging these, they attempt to overthrow male hegemony, re-define themselves and acclaim their subjectivity themselves.

This study mainly revolved around the claim that ‘woman’ is a category and a homogenising term that is based on woman’s biological and natural dispositions but that is at the same time a cultural construct which defines the limits of femininity. Consequently, who does what, who belongs to where and who behaves how is a matter of gender dualisms and in most cases these dualisms ensure that man holds the privileged position and has the right to answer the aforementioned questions both on behalf of himself and on behalf of woman. Whereas, a woman suffers from the social boundaries that she cannot trespass as well as the gendered identity and the male-fashioned corporeality that she has to maintain but that she cannot define for herself. The claim has been that a woman’s sense of identity is lost since she is made to deny herself through housework and through the demand that she always needs to be suitable to the ideals of slimness and beauty. In addition, it has been argued that while her being a woman determines her physical and social space as well as pre-defines her body, it also limits her agency, since she has no say over her female identity, her physicality and her positionality. In the same manner, in all these selected novels, the examples chosen aimed to focus on issues like domesticity, family, male-female relations and social norms in order to divulge into the fact that women have pre-determined roles and that they are trapped in these roles and in the institutions that perpetuate patriarchy such as marriage and family. All three protagonists are made to become the epitome of perfect domesticity, their days marked with cooking, organising the house, nurturing their companions and families. Likewise, they have been made to embody the idealised body images such as slimness and an appealing look which restrained them from eating, made them follow the desired appearance as commanded by their male companions or deemed them as unwanted if they are physically unfit.

A woman's assumed essence and the maternal, nurturing and corporeal qualities that are associated with her, determined her experiences and delimited her capacities, thus posing her being as leading to social, biological, physical and spatial restrictions. As such, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, each looked at the social and patriarchal norms that define the limits of a woman's place and a woman's body with the aim of showing that the heroines Esther, Marian and Tita are defined in line with social and patriarchal expectations and are denied agency. As a result, the examples in this study aimed to show that the heroines suffer from a sense of imprisonment and discomfort in their homes and in their bodies both of which are owned, defined and controlled by man and by the traditional societies that they belong to. The chapters then moved on to a discussion of how the heroines challenge their situations and try to escape from their pre-defined womanhood towards a sense of self that denies any patriarchal restriction or that tries to define the limits of the self by woman herself. Finally, the aforementioned chapters delved into the significance of food as an aid towards the heroines' liberation since by using the very means that they are given, that is food, the kitchen loses its domestic meaning and the pre-defined female corporeality is challenged by changing, playing with and expanding the boundaries of their bodies. The claim for both chapters has been to show that through the use of food, the domestic space that Esther, Marian and Tita are limited to, the housewifely roles that they are associated with and the very bodies that they experienced as a hinderance of idealised images, are re-defined as the heroines escaped the social norms, the physical and somatic limits and moved towards self-liberation. While the selected novels include multiple female characters, except for the discussion of proper femininity which aimed to provide an outlook on the general norms of female bodily form, the analysis of the novels have mainly focused on the heroines and their situation with respect to space, body, their condition within familial relations, with special reference to male-female relations, and finally their interaction with food. The purpose of focusing on the heroines has been to provide a more focused interpretation of the novels from the selected perspectives and with awareness that the heroines have parallel experiences with space and body and parallel means of reacting to the gender norms.

In planning the framework of this study, space and body have been selected as the two concepts that the analysis of the novels revolved around. Initially, Simone de Beauvoir

and Jacques Derrida's theoretical perspectives aided as foundations of this study in examining woman as a construct of patriarchy and woman as always the other of man in the male/female binary. Taking the discussion from this point onwards, this dissertation aimed to analyse how Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel's selected novels have projected this social construction and male/female binary and the other binaries such as powerful and powerless that follow from the aforementioned gender dualism. Considering the main points that this study has intended to explore, specifically the social construction of woman as a category and the delimitations that a woman is prone to, a single theoretical strand would have been limiting to cover all the desired points of discussion. A reading of the novels revealed that the heroines mostly struggle with their roles at home or in their marriage and constantly try to repress their bodies and bodily desires, which leads them to question their corporeality as well. Therefore, concepts that could cover the aforementioned topical concerns and that parallel the idea of social construction in effect of patriarchal ideology have been identified. In this line, space and body have been selected as the main concepts and discussion points for this dissertation for two reasons. The first one being that both space and body are social constructs, created through and creating socially acceptable patriarchal norms and limits which make a woman inferior to man and to the patriarchal system. The second overlapping point for space and body has been that they both determine one's social position and standing, how one lives and behaves, as well as one's interaction with and experiences within the world from the place that she is allowed to occupy or the body that she has to configure in accordance with the norms as well as in accordance with the male/female binary. Furthermore, the selected theoretical standpoints that are used in discussing space and body revealed that just like gender, both space and body are social constructs and both follow the dominant patriarchal order and so limit woman with definitions and boundaries that she has no control over.

To support the aforementioned overlapping ideas and perspectives in the chapter on space and place, Henri Lefebvre's discussions on space as a product of social relations, Doreen Massey's ideas on space as enmeshed with gender ideologies and finally Linda McDowell's statements on spaces as devised into places in accordance with gender dualisms, have all provided a theoretical background for Chapter 3. In the following

chapter on body, the idea that the female body is a social construct is explored through the theoretical standpoint of Elizabeth Grosz and Susan Bordo, whose statements aimed to clarify that the female body is a medium of social significations and is configured by patriarchy based on the presumption that a woman is more corporeal. In addition to these two perspectives, the theoretical background on body has also been supported with Naomi Wolf and Kim Chernin's ideas whose respective statements on idealised beauty and woman's suffering as a result of these idealisations supported the standpoint that a woman is not allowed to be in control of her body. For both chapters, Simone de Beauvoir's discussions on the social construction of woman, Betty Friedan's claims on the idealised domestic female figure and Iris Marian Young's ideas on a woman's social position have been referred to in discussing the roles that the heroines have in their familial relations.

The aim of Chapter 3 has been to discuss how space and place and more specifically domestic space represent gender essentialism by contributing to the creation and endurance of power dynamics within the masculinist discourse, while arguing how the heroines try and challenge their normative situatedness in the house and the kitchen, showing their empowerment through a problematization of their given spaces. In this chapter on space, the argument has been to clarify woman's situated being in the house and the kitchen through the examples that focus on Esther's marriage and her daily cooking duties, Marian's relationship with Peter and her preoccupation with taking care of him as well as her banishment from the public sphere, and finally Tita's naturalised-traditional position in her mother's home and the kitchen. These examples all aimed to show that women's physical situatedness in a seemingly feminized space is not simply a result of her biological differences but is rather the result of an ideological positioning of women in the private sphere that also makes her an outsider to the public world. Hence, it has been argued that women are not only gendered but are also ideologically placed in certain spaces so as to maintain the male/female binary and to keep her within pre-established gendered boundaries. Henceforth, the theoretical standpoint aided in providing evidence for showing the social construction and gendered meaning of spaces. The main claim of this chapter has been that, in these novels the borders of the kitchen and home or the domestic sphere in general are not based on their physical specifications, instead, the social and the gendered boundaries

of the domestic space have been used to create a seemingly feminine territory which both aimed to entrap woman and to exclude her from the social space. The chapter also aimed to show how the traditional-conventional gendered meaning of the kitchen as a feminine space loses its meaning once the stabilised and male-defined spatial binaries and boundaries are challenged by women through food which includes not cooking for men but cooking for herself in Esther's case, cooking with the aim of criticising her companion's limiting attitude in Marian's case and cooking to transfer female emotions and so to exceed the boundaries of one's home in Tita's case. Overall, Chapter 3 aimed to show how the heroines turn the domestic space into a liberating space and this way how they also alter their roles and their condition as women in patriarchal-traditional societies.

The aim of Chapter 4 has been to discuss the female body and corporeality as a product of social encodings and significations that aim to control women's bodies by idealising and perpetuating the notion of a beautiful, slim, appealing and passive female body. This way, traditional and patriarchal societies that the heroines live in, aimed to position them as the lesser of men and as under constant surveillance which lead the heroines to feel their bodies as a separate entity, as something that they cannot control. In this line, the examples have first focused on the social construction of the female body naturally as a mother but also as a body that is not fit to the beauty norms because of being fat in the case of Esther; as a prospective mother and a proper wife in Marian's case who is also expected by her society to fashion her body in line with the commodified images of femininity; and as a chaste but appealing figure in the case of Tita whose proper femininity and corporeality is a matter of following the bodily rules that her mother devises. At the same time, the examples provided a focus on the other female characters in order to show the common perspectives and the propagated images of femininity that the heroines' societies disseminate. As such, in Weldon's novel, Phyllis and Susan have been studied as women who obey the male defined beauty norms but are at the same time criticised for becoming preys to men. In Atwood's novel, Marian's friends and the office virgins have been studied with the aim of showing how her society propagates a fashioning of the female body according to male standards. Finally, in Esquivel's novel, Tita's sister Rosaura has been studied in showing that a woman is socially unacceptable if she is bodily undesirable. A

problematization of the dietary demands, of the beauty standards and the cultural coding of the female body as a maternal and care-taker body, lead the heroines to realise that their biology has been used as a justification for their being woman and being man's inferior. In addition, this chapter also studied how the female characters have turned into sexual objects and preys to male gaze since the definition and constitution of the female body by men has given men the right to have a say and control over the female body. Realising that they cannot act, behave or feel as they wish, this chapter also aimed to show how the heroines attempt to shatter the idealised images of femininity by problematizing, voicing, re-creating the definitions and the boundaries of their bodies themselves as they resort to obesity, anorexia, voicing of the female body and transference of emotions all of which are different ways to defy the pre-defined female body.

Following the conceptual framework, this study has first looked at the heroines' condition within the domestic space or the private sphere in general by looking at the roles that they are given and made to follow. After the discussion of woman's condition in the private sphere, this study has focused on woman's condition and limitation in their bodies by concentrating on the social norms that defined a certain body type and a notion of proper femininity for women. The logic for starting with space as the first discussion chapter and body as the following discussion chapter has been based on the order of events in the selected novels as it is by realising their limited condition in their relationships in the private sphere that Esther, Marian and Tita become aware of their femininity and so their body as a key determining factor of their social position and their oppression by patriarchy. Hence, once they become aware of their social and physical condition, they also start to question their somatic condition and distance themselves from their bodies, realising that their corporeality have equally been a product of culture, produced and owned by patriarchy. Both space and spatial divisions, body and bodily ideals are examined as means towards creating a regulation mechanism which means that women constantly try to keep up with the patriarchal demands. As a result, as it has been analysed through the heroines that women lose a sense of their identity, feel alienated from their bodies and their self. For instance, the examples showed that Esther realises that she wants something different than being a wife, Marian loses connection with her body and notices that her

prospective marriage is already consuming her and Tita experiences a state of delirium as a result of which she both questions what it means to be a proper woman and realises that she will not keep up with the demands of the traditions that she follows.

The merging point of Chapter 3 and 4 has been based on how the heroines react to their limited condition as imposed through feminized spaces and the female body. Overall, it has been clarified that the heroines have no right to experience spaces that are outside of their domains and likewise they could experience their bodies only as perceived by others. Hence, their identity has been enmeshed with pre-coded social meanings and it is a matter of constant trials to fit into this identity. To this end, food has been the unifying element between these chapters because in these three novels, food comes in as a tool for subverting male defined spaces and bodies and at the same time is an outlet for women to voice what they have been made to repress. Food signifies production and consumption, since it is a woman who produces food in the private sphere but who cannot consume food in order to maintain her body image. Henceforth, food is studied as an example that can reflect the heroines' experiences and the relevant examples under each heading are selected accordingly.

This study has also attempted to show a conscious transformation of the male-defined spaces, male-defined bodies and overall, male-defined subjectivity on behalf of the heroines and this transformation has been a product of the heroines' realisation of their condition as essentialised but at the same time as socially produced. Based on the selected theoretical standpoints of Chapter 3 and 4, the idea that space and body are two concepts that are socially constructed, also supported the argument of this dissertation that women can re-gain their identity, meaning that they can go through a process of self-discovery and self-representation through an awareness of the social construction of space and body. Thus, saying that space and body are social constructs, has enabled a discussion of both of these concepts as open to contestation and re-definition since their mere construction underlines an understanding that they can likewise be reconstructed, that their definitions are not fixed and that re-defining the limits of these two concepts can also enable a redefinition of the individual's position in society. Likewise, if spaces and bodies reflect and perpetuate the male/female binary, challenging the definition of these two concepts also challenges the same

gender binary and the examples that this study explored, aimed to show that women are equally powerful in deciding how to use spaces and how to structure their bodies.

Food, is again referred to as the tool that connects the two chapters by showing how it aids the heroines in revealing and challenging the social constitution of space and of body. As the only power that the heroines have, the examples related with the subversive power of food have been particularly selected to support the aforementioned claim. As such, Esther by not cooking, by resorting to consumption of canned food and by eating rather than by serving food to others, Marian by baking an unacceptable and a rather grotesque cake that is aimed to criticise patriarchy and Tita by cooking food that voices her domestic condition and the traditional limitations that she had to suffer, challenge the limiting meanings of the kitchen, upset patriarchal definitions and destabilise the power relations that male/female binary establishes. Thus, in their changed relationship with food, they also change the associations of the kitchen with domesticity and re-define their roles within the domestic space. The subversive power of food has also provided a connection between the discussion points of the two chapters, namely between space and body. To this end, the chapter on body focused on food through a study of consuming, dieting or using food to voice a woman's body. The examples revealed that it is with their bodies, and through eating in Esther's case, not eating as well as re-creating her body in Marian's case or through mixing the bodily fluids and emotions with food in Tita's case that the heroines try to go against the socially-defined limitations of their bodies. The discussions aimed to clarify that as Esther gains weight, she shows that the bodily ideals can be challenged and can be owned by a woman herself while gaining weight also gives her power in her marriage. As Marian stops eating, she shows a conscious control of the limits of her corporeality and likewise when she constructs the female shaped cake, she mocks the social construction of the female body. Finally, when Tita mixes her senses with food, she voices the repressed female body. Henceforth, the standardised body image and the domestic connotations of the heroines' household or to use a more general term, the care-work duties that their familial relations naturally associated with them are challenged by engaging with food in ways they like, such as by rejecting the role of a nurturer, changing it with the role of a woman who is hungry for more space and a freer body. The claim of this study has been that, a realisation of their social



limitations and a protest to this by their own subversive ways such as with the aid of food is what leads Esther, Marian and Tita to develop a new and much freer sense of self that is re-defined outside social impositions and interventions. As such, the more Esther eats, the more she represents herself and her story. The less Marian eats, the more she becomes aware of her controlled condition. The more Tita represents herself through food, the more she becomes aware of the strength of the emotions that she has. Thus, Esther, Marian and Tita are claimed to reject their docility and become powerful within the social constructs that deemed them powerless.

The choice of these three novels was based on the similarities in their approach to as well as their conscious criticism of women's condition, regarding the limits imposed on women that takes away their right to socialise, to work, to reject marriage and being a mother, to voice themselves and to live as they wish. Not only revealing the social, physical and somatic limitations that their heroines have to abide by but also criticising these social and gender based constructs in a rather unusual way by using food as a tool for subversion, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Laura Esquivel similarly reflect their feminist stance. Emphasizing women's condition through the narratives of their heroines, these feminist accounts voice a woman's condition as directly experienced by herself. While food is usually only related with a woman's domestic condition and her body, Weldon, Atwood and Esquivel's use of food as a symbol that brings woman's experience to the fore and that at the same time challenges patriarchy from within by subverting the social limitations around domestic spaces and the female body has been another significant reason for why these novels stood out and were brought together for a comparative study. It has been with these reasons in mind that a comparative study between *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* and *Like Water for Chocolate* has been done with the purpose of showing the authors' direct attack to phallogocentric system through an account of their heroines' subversive attitude.

The purpose of this study has been to discuss how the heroines of the selected novels re-define themselves and so subvert patriarchy from within as they go against the normative and fixed limits and definitions. To this end, the choice of food, space and body has not only been based on their implications for the social limits that are posed

to women but also for their anti-Cartesian characteristics. Since these concepts yield themselves to a re-definition or rather re-constitution, their unfixity enabled the heroines to allocate new resonances to the domestic sphere and to their bodies that freed them from normative definitions and gave them a chance to exceed the limits of their femininity and to define woman in their own way. This study achieves the conclusion that the heroines do not only reverse the binaries including man/woman, public/private, dependent/independent and active/passive but they also go one step further and create an alternative site within which a woman can be the one who defines herself. As the heroines challenge phallogocentrism from within, by going through a process of altering the phallogocentric limits of spaces and of their bodies, they also open up and create themselves a new space of existence which subverts the constructed nature of their being a woman. Overall, it could be said that Esther, Marian and Tita move their existence from a Cartesian to an anti-Cartesian site as they radically challenge the taken for granted norms of phallogocentrism and as they re-define spaces, their bodies and overall their being a woman.

Overall, challenging the fact that man is the one to define the places that a woman belongs to, and changing the way their bodies are perceived in their societies, thus, not living up to the spatial and bodily ideals that their societies define, and using the power of food in taking control of and in showing their agency, Esther in Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Marian in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Tita in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, re-assert themselves and re-claim their identity and a different form of femininity.

By employing a conceptual outlook and by bringing together the coinciding matters regarding the social construction of space and body, this dissertation aimed to provide a feminist reading of the novels under study, claiming that space and body both disclose and aid in the construction of woman as a category and as kept within social and physical -also indicating biological- boundaries. In the discussion of the aforementioned coinciding elements with regards to space and place, food has also been looked at in relation with its spatial and somatic significances as well as a correspondent of femininity in line with a woman's duties and her body image. The feminist reading aimed not only to disclose the gender binaries, norms and the limits

as seen through the concepts employed but also aimed to provide a discussion of the possibility of challenging, going against and re-defining these limiting concepts as a mode of self-definition as freed from hegemonic constructs that the heroines Esther, Marian and Tita had to live by. The discussion of the novels as provided in this dissertation, aims to contribute to literature foremost by way of the comprehensive framework that is drawn for the analysis of the heroines, and also by providing a comparative study of Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*.

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## APPENDICES

### A. CURRICULUM VITAE

#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name Surname: Merve Erentuğ

#### EDUCATION

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Year of Graduation</b>
Ph.D.	English Literature Middle East Technical University	2024
MA	Curriculum and Instruction Bilkent University	2018
BA	English Language and Literature Bilkent University (Top ranked student of the department)	2016
High School	TED Ankara College High School	2012

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

<b>Year</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
2021 - Present	TED University, English Language School	Lecturer

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

English (Advanced), French (Beginner), Italian (Beginner).

## B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez Fay Weldon'un *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood'un *Evlenilecek Kadın (The Edible Woman)* ve Laura Esquivel'in *Acı Çikolata (Like Water for Chocolate)* romanlarını mekân ve beden kavramları üzerinden incelemekte, bunu yaparken yemek sembolünün, romanların baş kadın karakterlerinin, sırasıyla Esther, Marian ve Tita tarafından hem belirli bir mekân hem de bedene hapsolmuşluğunu göstermede nasıl kullanıldığını ele almaktadır. Mekân ve beden üzerinden yapılan incelemenin amacı, kadının (ataerkil) toplum tarafından belirlenen ev içi ve ev ile ilişkili rollere, ya da kamusal olmayan alanlara kısıtlanmışlığı ve aynı şekilde bedenine hapsolmuşluğunu tartışmak ve bütün bunları tartışırken de, asıl amacın, tek türlü bir kadın imgesi oluşturup, bu imgeyi idealize etmek ve kadının bu tanımlamaya uymasını beklemek olduğunu göstermektir. Her üç romanda da kadın baş karakterler kendilerine atfedilen annelik, ev hanımlığı ve eş olmak gibi rolleri veya genel anlamda toplumsal normlara uyan bir kadın olma zorunluluğunu sorgular. Buna ek olarak, içinde bulunmak durumunda oldukları ve sınırlarını kendilerinin belirleyemediği mekanları ve ayrıca kendilerine ait olan ve kadını tanımlamak için kullanılan ama hiçbir zaman tanımını kendilerinin yapamadığı ve istedikleri gibi deneyimleyemedikleri kadın bedenini sorgulamaktadırlar. Her üç roman da kadın baş karakterlerin bu sorgulamaların doğrultusunda kısıtlayıcı alanlar, bedensellik ve toplumsal rollerinden nasıl kurtulmaya çalıştıklarını anlatmaktadır. Romanların anlatıları aynı zamanda erkek/kadın, aktif/pasif, akıl/beden, dışarı/içeri gibi ikili zıtlıklara (binary opposition) da yer vermektedir ve bu tezin amaçlarından biri de kadınların yemek kavramını bir araç olarak kullanarak bu zıtlıkları ters yüz etme çabasını ele almaktadır.

Kadın, Simone de Beauvoir'ın *İkinci Cinsiyet (The Second Sex)*'de dediği gibi, erkeğin ötekisi olarak büyütülen, toplumsal rollerin öğretildiği bir kavram olarak algılanabilir. Mekân ve beden, kadının rolleri ve kısıtlanmışlığı doğrultusunda bakıldığında, kadını sınırlayan kavramlardır. Seçilen romanların hepsinde evlilik, kadın ve erkek ilişkileri veya kadınla ilişkilendirilen duygusallık, sorumluluk, annelik,

bakmakla yükümlülük gibi ortak olan belirli konular vardır. Bu konular, kadın kavramının özcü, cinsiyete bağlı ve Jacques Derrida'nın yapılsalcılık bağlamında vurguladığı ikili zıtlıklar çerçevesinde belirlenen, tanımlayıcı, indirgemeci ve aynı zamanda ataerkil toplumlar tarafından belirlenen, kadını erkeğin ötekisi yapan bir kavram olduğunu göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla bu kavramları sorgulamak ve değiştirmek, aynı zamanda kadın kavramının da sorgulanmasını ve kadınlar tarafından yeniden tanımlanmasını sağlamaktadır.

Bütün bunlar kadın kavramını tek tip bir tanıma indirgemektedir ve aynı zamanda kadın kavramının toplumsal ve ataerkil bir inşa, bir yapım, bir kurmaca olduğunu göstermektedir. Romanların ele aldığı konular gibi, belirlenen kavramlar ve bakış açıları da kadın kavramının ve bireyin toplumdaki yeri ve rollerinin biyolojik mi yoksa toplumsal bir kurgu mu olduğunu sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, bu tezin bir amacı da seçilen romanlarda biyolojik cinsiyeti özcü bir yaklaşımla kadını tanımlayan veya tanımlamak zorunda olan bir olgu olarak gösteren ve kadın olmanın doğal olarak gerektirdiği toplumsal roller olduğunu savunan ataerkil ve geleneksel toplumların nasıl ele aldığını ve eleştirdiğini de göstermektir. Baş kadın kahramanlar buldukları toplumlar, evlilikleri, kadın-erkek ilişkileri ve aile ilişkileri içerisinde, ikinci planda kalmakta, bunun sonucunda da çoğu zaman kendilerine verilen rolleri, toplumsal kimliklerini ve benliklerini sorgulamaktadırlar.

Kapsayıcı gibi görünen ama belirli normlara göre sınırları çizilmiş olan, kadını da bu normlar içinde kodlayıp sınırlandıran yapılar olmaları, mekân ve beden kavramlarının bu tezin başlıca bakış açıları olarak seçilmesinin temel sebebidir. Bu kavramlar doğrultusunda kadının toplumdaki limitli yeri ve aynı zamanda bedenine atfedilen limitler romanların baş kadın kahramanları üzerinden incelenmiş ve kadın kavramının sosyal olarak kodlanan ve oluşturulan bir kavram olup, cinsiyet temelli ikili zıtlıklar altında kadının özgürlüğü ve kendiliğini kaybetmesine sebep olduğu tartışılmıştır. Mekân ve bedenin ortak özelliği, her ikisinin de sınırlayıcı olması ve kadının her ikisi içinde de belirli normlara bağlı olmasıdır. Aynı zamanda, sosyal normlara göre tanımlanan ve dolayısıyla toplumsal bir inşadan ibaret olan her iki kavram da değişime ve yeniden yapılanmaya açıktır. Esther, Marian ve Tita, bu yeniden yapılanmayı, yemek sembolü üzerinden yapar.

Kültürel bir öge olan ama aynı zamanda da çoğunlukla kadınla ilişkilendirilen yemek sembolü bu tezde mekân ve beden kavramlarını birleştirici bir unsur olarak kullanılmaktadır. Yemek hazırlamak ve pişirmek, kadına verilen rollerin ve kadının ilişkilendirildiği mekânların altını çizmekte, kadının yemek yemek ile olan ilişkisi ise, beden algısının yaratımı ve kontrolü hakkında bilgi vermektedir. Bu bağlamda, seçilen üç romanda da yemek pişirmek ve yemek yemek gibi konular, hem kadının yeri olarak görülen ev ve mutfak, hem de güzellik ve zayıflık gibi kavramlarla kısıtlanan kadın bedeninin sorgulanmasını ve bu sorgulama sonucu, kadın baş kahramanların mekân ve bedenin kültürel kodlarla tanımlı olduğunu görmelerini sağlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, yemek kavramı, kadının özgürleşmesini sağlayan bir araç olarak ele alınmış, mekân ve beden ile olan bağlantısı dolayısıyla, tezin bölümleri arasında bir köprü görevi görmüştür. Ataerkil ve geleneksel toplumların kurduğu ve sınırlarını belirlediği ev ile ilişkilendirilen mekânlar ve kadın bedeni yemek sembolü üzerinden belirginleşmekte ve yine yemek sembolü üzerinden bu sınırlandırılmış kavramlara meydan okunmaktadır. Buna göre, öz benlik, bir edinim değil, bir edimdir ve Esther, Marian ve Tita, bunu yemek imgesi üzerinden, hem mutfakla olan geleneksel bağlarını değiştirerek, örneğin yemek yapmayarak ya da toplum tarafından alışlagelmiş yemekler pişirmeyerek, hem de bedenleri ile toplum dayatmalarına karşı koyarak, yani kilo alarak veya bedenlerini baskılamak yerine ifade ederek yaparlar.

Tezin planı belirlenirken, seçilen romanların farklı kültürlerden olmasını da göz önünde bulundurarak, tek bir feminist teori veya edebi eleştiri kuramına bağlı kalmak yerine, bu tezin feminist yaklaşımı ile ilişkilendirilebilecek kavramlar seçilmiş ve bu kavramlar çerçevesinde tezin amacı ve söylemine paralel olan kuramlardan yararlanılmıştır. Böylece tez için kavramsal bir çerçeve oluşturulmuştur. Burada amaç, tezde ele alınan romanların incelemesinin daha kapsayıcı olmasını ve daha çok eleştirel bakış açısının bir araya getirilebilmesini sağlamaktır. Bu sebeple, tezin her bir bölümü içerisinde ele alınan kavramlara tekrar değinilmiştir. Bu tezin amaçlarından biri de kadın kavramının toplumsal bir kurmaca olduğunu tartışmaktır. Bu doğrultuda, tezin düzeni planlanırken, belirlenen kavramsal çerçeveye ek olarak seçilen romanlar arasındaki konu ve temalar bağlamındaki ortaklık ve benzerliklerin de daha belirgin bir şekilde gösterilebilmesi adına, tezdeki bölümler romanlara göre üç ayrı bölüm olarak değil, belirlenen kavramlara göre bölümlenmiş, böylece tezin her bölümü

altında üç roman da incelenmiştir. Romanlarda mekân ve beden kavramları ele alınırken, paralel başlıklar geliştirilmiş, öncelikle mekânın ve bedenin sosyal normlara göre tanımlanışı ve kadının bu tanımlara uygunluğu, kadının bu normlara ve sınırlara karşı gelmesi ve bunu yaparken yemek imgesinin önemi, her iki bölüm için de alt başlıkları oluşturmuştur. Tezin her bir bölümü içerisinde yer alan alt başlıklarda, ilgili kuramsal çerçeve detaylandırılarak ayrıca verilmekte ve sonrasında, seçilen romanlar *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Edible Woman* ve *Like Water for Chocolate* sıralamasıyla, romanların basım tarihlerine göre kronolojik bir sıra gözetilerek incelenmiştir ve burada örneklerin birbirleriyle paralel olmasına dikkat edilmiştir.

Bu tez beş bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölüm tezin amacı, kapsamı, kavramsal çerçevesi ve tezde incelenecek romanlar hakkında bilgilerden oluşurken, ikinci bölüm seçilen kavramlar ve kuramlar doğrultusunda yapılan okumalar yönünde teorik bir zemin oluşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tezin üçüncü ve dördüncü bölümleri, mekân ve beden ile ilgili kuram ve kavramları daha da derinden irdelemekte ve bölüm başlarında, ele alınan konular kapsamındaki teorik arka planı genişleterek vermektedir. Tezin üçüncü bölümü romanları mekân kavramı doğrultusunda incelemekte, bunu yaparken, mekânın sosyal normlarla tanımlanan ve sınırları çizilen bir kavram olduğunu tartışmakta, kadın karakterlerin de ataerkil toplumlar tarafından geleneksel olarak tanımlanmış normlar ve roller çerçevesinde belirli mekanlara kısıtlandığını savunmaktadır. Kadın karakterlerin sınırlandırıldığı bu mekanlar ev veya aile ve eş ilişkileri bağlamında, kadına daha çok ev hanımlığı rolünü atfeden mekanlardır. Bu bölümde aynı zamanda dış mekân/iç mekân ikili zıtlığının erkek/kadın ikili zıtlığı ile paralel olduğu da savunulur. Son olarak, bu bölümde Esther, Marian ve Tita karakterlerinin, bulunmak zorunda oldukları veya ilişkilendirildikleri mekanlara nasıl karşı koydukları ve bunu yaparken çoğu zaman yemek imgesine başvurdukları tartışılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu bölüm, kadının ev ile ilişkili olarak yaptıklarının - ki romanlarda bu çoğu zaman yemek hazırlamak ve pişirmektir - ataerkil toplumlar tarafından doğal bir iş bölümü olarak gösterilse de aslında kadını eve bağlı tutan ve hatta eve hapseden bir durum olduğunu göstermekte ve kadın baş karakterlerin, aynı şekilde yemek yapma imgesini kullanarak bu duruma nasıl baş kaldırdığını örneklendirmektedir. Tezin dördüncü bölümü, seçilen romanları beden kavramı doğrultusunda ele almaktadır. Bu bölümde, bir önceki bölümdeki argümana



paralel olacak şekilde, kadın bedeninin sosyal bir olgu olduđu, daha doğrusu, kadın bedeninin ataerkil toplumların tanımladığı normlar ve ideal beden algısı doğrultusunda sınırlarının çizildiği tartışılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla kadın bedeni ve bedenselliği doğal ve biyolojik bir olgu olmaktan çok, sosyal bir durum halini almıştır. Romanlarda, kadın karakterlerin, benimsedikleri roller, bedenlerini algılayış ve bedenlerine müdahale ediş biçimlerinden de görüldüğü üzere, kadının toplumsal beden tanımlamaları ve sınırlarına uymakla yükümlü tutulduğu tartışılmaktadır. Kadın, bedenselliği üzerinden annelik, güzellik ve çekicilik gibi sosyal tanımlamalar ile ilişkilendirilir ve hatta etiketlenirken, kadın bedeni fiziksel zayıflık ve kabul gören beden algılarına uygunluk doğrultusunda kısıtlanmaktadır. Hatta, kadının duyguları, ne yemek istediği, düşünceleri, kısacası bedene ait olan ve beden üzerinden ifade edilmesi gereken bütün duyuları baskılanmaktadır. Sürekli olarak bedeni üzerinden tanımlanan ve vücudunun kabul gören beden algısına uyup uymadığı kontrol edilen kadın bedeni, erkekler ve erkek egemen toplum tarafından çeşitli eleştiri ve ihlallere maruz kalmakta, dolayısıyla kadın kendini yetersiz görürken aynı zamanda güçsüzleştirilmektedir. Kısaca, kadın, erkeğe kıyasla beden ile daha ilişkili görülürken, ki bunun sebebi geleneksel olarak kadının doğurganlık gibi onu bedene daha bağlı tutan özellikleri olarak kodlanmıştır, aynı zamanda bedeni sebebiyle ve bedeni üzerinden kontrol altında tutulmaktadır. Tezin sonuç bölümü ise, önceki bölümlerde tartışılan bütün bu konulara kısaca yeniden değinerek, tezin amacını bir kez daha vurgulamaktadır.

Tezin ana argümanı, kadın karakterlerin kendi benlikleri üzerinde söz sahibi olamayışlarının sebebinin, kısıtlandıkları mekanlar ve buldukları toplumlar tarafından sınırları belirlenen bedenleri olduğunu, bunun özünde de ataerkil sistemin ve erkek/kadın ikili zıtlığı doğrultusunda erkek egemen ideolojinin olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Buna göre bu tez, kadının öz benliğini, kimliğini ve kadınlık algısını kendisinin değil, içinde buldukları toplumların tanımladığını, kadın baş karakterlerin de aynı şekilde bu tanımlamalar içindeki sıkışmışlığını örneklendirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Varılmak istenen sonuç ise, Esther, Marian ve Tita karakterlerinin mekân ve beden üzerinden, erkek egemen toplumlarına nasıl baş kaldırdıklarını, hem de yemek imgesini kullanarak, kendilerine verilen rolleri, ev ile olan kabul görmüş ilişkilerini ve beden algılarını alt üst ederek, kadınlıklarını ve kendilerini yeniden

tanımladıklarını göstermektedir. Esther, Marian ve Tita'nın yemek imgesini kullanarak, mutfak ve evin anlamlarını değiştirme süreci ve yemek yemek veya yemeği kendilerini ifade etme biçimi olarak kullanmaları sayesinde kendi bedenleri ile olan ilişkilerinin yeniden oluşması, tezde zaman zaman kendini ilan eden öznellik (self-acclaimed subjectivity), eyleycilik (agency) veya kadının kendisi tarafından oluşturulmuş bir öz benlik algısı olarak da adlandırılmaktadır ki burada amaç, bu karakterlerin buldukları toplumların kendilerine dayattığı kimlik ve benlik algısını yıkıp, kendilerini keşfetme sürecini vurgulamaktır. Kendini gerçekleştiren edim gibi kavramların kullanılma sebebi, kadın baş karakterlerin alışlagelmiş mekân ve beden tanımlamalarının dışına çıkması veya bu tanımlamaları değiştirmesi ile ilişkilidir ki bu çoğu zaman erkek egemen toplumda sarsıcı bir etki yaratıp, güçsüzleştirilmiş olan kadını, yeniden güçlü kılar.

Tezin ele aldığı ve romanların incelenmesi sırasında kullanılan temel kavramlar mekân ve beden olarak belirlenmiştir. Romanlar içerisinde tartışılan konular ve tezin argümanı da göz önünde bulundurularak, mekân ve beden kavramları kuramsal boyutlarıyla ele alınmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, mekân kavramı için Henri Lefebvre ve Doreen Massey'in kuramları ve Linda McDowell'in mekanların bölünmesi hakkındaki söylemleri temel alınırken, beden kavramı için, kavramın kapsamı dolayısıyla Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Bordo ve Naomi Wolf ve Kim Chernin'in söylemlerine yer verilmiştir. Tezin esas odak noktası kadın karakterler ve genel anlamda kadın kavramı olduğundan, kuramsal çerçevede ek olarak Simone de Beauvoir her iki chapter için de bir temel oluşturmaktadır. Simone de Beauvoir'ın *İkinci Cinsiyet (The Second Sex)* eserindeki fikirleri üzerinden kadın kavramının toplumsal bir kavram oluşu ve beraberinde kadına belirli roller dayatıp, kadının öz benliğinin yok olmasına sebep olduğu da tartışılmıştır. Kadının rolleri ve toplumdaki konumu üzerine söylemleri olan Betty Friedan ve Iris Marion Young'da tezde fikirlerine atıfta bulunulan isimler arasındadır.

Tezin üçüncü bölümünün konusu olan mekân ve kadının mekanla ilişkisini ele alacak olursak; Cartezyen ve Kantçı yaklaşımların dışına çıkan 20. yüzyıl düşünürleri, mekânın, sabit, geometrik, değişmez bir olgu olduğu algısından uzaklaşıp, mekânın daimi bir oluşum ve değişim içinde olduğunu tartışmış, içi boş uzamsal mekân algısını

yıkarak, mekânın yaşam deneyimleri ile girift ve anlamca zengin bir zemin olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu algıya göre mekân, hem bir sosyal ürün, hem de daimi bir üretim sürecidir ve mekanın ürünü de aynı şekilde sosyal olandır. Mekân, insanların yaşamını ve dünyada varoluşlarını tanımlar ve etkiler çünkü mekanların kurgulanmasına göre, sosyal ilişkiler ve bireylerin sosyal konumları da belirlenir ve etkilenir. Bu 20.yüzyıl düşünürleri arasında, Henri Lefebvre *Mekânın Üretimi (The Production of Space)* ve Doreen Massey *Space, Place, and Gender* kitaplarında, mekânın (space) toplumsal ilişkiler ile şekillenen ve dolayısıyla toplumsal ve sosyal kavramlardan ayrıştırılamayacak bir olgu ve sosyal bir ürün olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Bu yaklaşıma göre, bir kavram olarak mekân, baskın toplum ideolojilerinden de etkilenerek kavramlaştırılır. Fiziki mekanlar (place) ise bu kavramsallaşma doğrultusunda, bireyin deneyimlerini yaşadığı mekanlar bölümlemesi olarak ifade edilmektedir. Lefebvre, mekânın sosyal ilişkiler tarafından şekillendiğini savunurken, aynı zamanda, sosyal ilişkilerin de mekânın kurgulanması ve fiziki mekanların bölümlenmesinden etkilendiğini öne sürer (82-83). Çoğu zaman baskın olan ideolojiler, mekân kavramına sosyal olarak en büyük etkiyi göstermekte ve bu ideolojiler doğrultusunda mekânlara anlamlar kodlamakta ve mekânlar düzenlemektedir. Buna göre, kadın erkek ilişkileri veya genel anlamda cinsiyet, fiziksel mekânların sınırlarının belirlenmesinde rol oynarken, aynı diyalektik, yani mekânın sınırları da kadın erkek ilişkilerine etki eden bir faktör olarak ortaya çıkar. Kadının, çocuk sahibi olma ve çocuğa bakmakla yükümlü olma gibi, onun aynı zamanda kadın olarak tanımlanmasında da rol oynayan biyolojik farklılıkları, annelik veya ev hanımlığı gibi rolleri doğallaştırmış ve Massey'in de ifade ettiği gibi domestik mekân kadın, anne, eş ve sevgili gibi daha çok ev ile bağdaştırılacak roller üzerinden tanımlanmıştır (10). Lefebvre ve Massey'in argümanlarını destekler nitelikte bir diğer söylem ise Linda McDowell'ındır. McDowell, erkek/kadın ikili zıtlığının kendini mekânsal bölümlemelerde de gösterdiğini ve buna göre kadının sadece ev ile ilişkilendirilmekle kalmayıp, aynı zamanda erkeğe bağlı ve güçsüz olarak da sınıflandırıldığını inceler (12). Romanlar incelendiğinde, açıkça görülmektedir ki Esther, Marian ve Tita'nın yeri, hem içinde buldukları toplumlar, hem de aileleri veya eşleri tarafından, ev olarak belirlenmiş, ev dışındaki mekanlar ile ilişkileri kısıtlanmıştır. Buna göre, bu üç kadının da ev ile ilişkili rolleri ve yapmak zorunda oldukları görevleri vardır ki bu çoğu zaman yemek hazırlamak, duyarlı ve ilgili davranmak, aile üyelerinin veya eşlerinin bakımıyla

yükümlü olmak gibi, toplumsal olarak tanımlanan görevlerdir. Bu noktada, bu tezin argümanlarından biri de hem mekânın, hem de kadının kavramsal olarak, herhangi bir öze dayanmadığı, sadece toplumsal kodlar tarafından tanımlanıp, kısıtlandığıdır. Mekân ve yer kavramlarının sosyal olarak, toplumsal normlarla bezeli bir şekilde kurgulanmış olması, kadının da aynı şekilde biyolojik ve anatomik özellikleri ve özünden bağımsız olarak, salt bir sosyal kurmaca olduğunu göstermiştir. Mekânın sınırlarının ve mekânların toplumsal bölümlenmesinin erkek/kadın ikili zıtlığına göre yapılmış olması, ataerkil toplum düzenini sürdürmede başat bir etki göstermektedir. Buna göre kadın ev, ev ile ilişkili olan veya genel anlamda domestik yani iç mekân ile ilişkilendirilirken, erkek kamusal yani dış mekân ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Lefebvre ve Massey'in söylemleri, tezin ele aldığı bir argüman olan, kadın baş karakterlerin kendilerini yeniden tanımlama sürecini de destekler, çünkü eğer mekân sosyal olarak oluşturulan bir kavram ise, aynı şekilde bir kadın da kendine ait olan mekânları yeniden ve kendi istediği biçimde tanımlayabilir.

Bu çalışmada ele alınan romanlar ve karakterler, aynı şekilde, toplumsal mekân kavramının baskın ideolojilerden, cinsiyetten ve cinsiyete bağlı ikili zıtlıklardan farklı düşünülmemeyeceğini öne sürmektedir. Weldon, Atwood ve Esquivel'in seçilen romanlarının incelemesi ve kadın baş karakterler üzerinden yapılan tartışmalar, kadının bir mekân olarak sadece ev ile ilişkilendirildiğini ve bunun kadın cinsiyetine dayandırılarak yapılan bir düzenleme olduğunu gösterirken aynı zamanda da kadının toplumsal ve aile içi rollerini de kısıtlayan bir sınırlandırma olduğunu açık eder.

Fay Weldon'un *The Fat Woman's Joke* romanında, Esther bir eş ve anne olarak, ev hanımı olarak tanımlanmış ve eve kısıtlanmıştır. Günlerinin evi temizlemek, yemek yapmak ve bütün emeklerine karşın eşinden eleştiri almakla kısıtlı olduğunu düşünen Esther, evliliği, ağır, güçlü, bütün toplumsal yapıların ve diğer birçok sosyal kurumun yükünü kadına taşıtan ve kadını bu yükün altında ezen bir yapıya benzetir. Ona göre eğer bir kadın kocasına meydan okursa, aynı zamanda bütün topluma da meydan okumuş olarak algılanır. Evliliği kadını ezen toplumsal bir yapı olarak gören Esther, bir evi çekip çevirmenin, bir kadının evlenmesi sonucu ona verilen bir rol olduğu ve böylece evliliğin kadını bir kısır döngüye hapsedtiğini söyler ki romanda önemli tartışma konularından birisi de Esther'in sadece ev işleri ve özellikle yemek yapmakla

ilgilenirken, eşi Alan'ın işe gidip geliyor olması ve hiçbir ev işini yapma sorumluluğunu üstlenmeyişidir. Kendisini çoğunlukla gün içinde ne yemek yapacağını planlayıp, eşi Alan'dan da bu konuda onay alırken bulan Esther, aslında eşinin de yemek yapabileceğini öne sürerek başladığı baş kaldırıışına, kendine ayrı bir ev tutup, bu evde yemek hazırlamak ve pişirmek yerine, hazır yemekleri tüketmeyi tercih ederek devam eder. Bu sayede, hem başkaları için bir şeyler yapma sorumluluğunu ve dolayısıyla kadına verilen ev hanımlığı rolünü, hem de yemek yapmanın onu kısıtlı tuttuğu kısır döngüyü kırar. Kendi evine geçerek, bir erkeğin kontrolü altında olan, evlilik sebebiyle onu rollerine bağlı tutan ve kadın ile ilişkilendirilen domestik mekândan uzaklaşmış ama bununla birlikte de önceleri onu kısıtlayan yemek yapma imgesini beklenilenin dışında kullanarak, yani yemek hazırlamak yerine hazır gıda tüketerek ve bu gıdaları kendisi tüketip başkaları için yemek yapmayarak, kadınlara atfedilen mekân tanımlarının ve sınırlarının dışına çıkar. Bunun sonucunda da Esther'in oğlu ve eşi, bir süre kendilerine bakamaz hale gelir ve eşi Alan, Esther'i eve geri çağırarak zorunda kalır. Sonuç olarak, yemek imgesi ve onu tanımlayan evinden uzaklaşması, Esther'in sosyal mekân ve mekânsal bölümlenmelerin cinsiyetçiliğini sorgulayıp, yeniden tanımlamasına yardımcı olur.

Margaret Atwood'un *Evlenilecek Kadın (The Edible Woman)* romanında, Marian karakteri, Esther'den farklı olarak, evli değildir veya bakmakla yükümlü olduğu bir çocuğu yoktur fakat erkek arkadaşı Peter ile olan ilişkisi çoğu zaman onu bir ev hanımı rolüne büründürür. Her ne kadar, bir anket şirketinde çalışıyor olsa da Marian'ın günleri benzer şekilde Peter'in evine gidip, mutfağının eksiklerini tamamlamak ve Peter'a bir şeyler hazırlamaktan ibarettir. Peter ise zaten Marian'ın onun en sevdiği içeceği dahi bilip, hayatını zorlaştırmak yerine kolaylaştırması gereken bir kadın ve eş olması gerektiğini vurgular. Yenilediği evinde arkadaşlarına bir parti düzenlediği durumda dahi, Marian'ın mutfakla ilgili olan işleri halletmesi gerektiğini söyler ve onu mükemmel bir ev sahibesi olarak görmek istediğini vurgular. İkili genellikle Peter'ın evinde buluşur ve bu evin tanımı dahi Marian'ın mekânsal olarak nasıl daha fazla kısıtlanacağını gözler önüne serer. Bir hukukçu olan Peter'ın odası kılavuzlar, silahlar, maketler ve modellerle doludur, kısaca Peter'ın evi hayatında beklediği düzeni ve sistematığı yansıtmaktadır. Peter ile olan ilişkisi, Marian'a, kadının sosyal olarak ev ile ilişkilendirildiğini açık etmektedir. Aynı zamanda çalıştığı iş yerinde, mekânın

sosyal kodlarla tanımlandığını açıkça hisseden ve hatta iş yerini bir dondurmalı sandviçine benzeten Marian, bu şirkette, erkeklerin şirketin üst katlarında ve üst pozisyonlarında yer aldığını, kadınların ise, ki kadınlara anket soruları yönelten bir şirket olduğu için burada çalışan kadınlar genellikle ev hanımıdır, daha alt katlarda olduğunu ve maalesef hiçbir zaman yükselemeyeceklerini gözlemler. Kısaca, Marian'ın dondurmalı sandviç benzetmesi, çalıştığı şirketteki mekânsal bölümlenmelerin ve katmanların altını çizirken aynı zamanda kadınların erkeklerden farklılıkları üzerinden tanımlanan yerlere yerleştirilmiş olduğunu ve bu mekânlarda sadece erkekler izin verdiği sürece var olduklarını vurgular. Benzer şekilde, Marian'ın evlilik kararı şirkette duyulur duyulmaz, onun gelecekte anne olmasının kaçınılmaz oluşu öne sürülerek, işten ayrılması beklenir. Kısacası Marian daha evlenmeden, domestik mekanla ve domestik roller ile ilişkilendirilir. Peter'in beklentileri de buna eklenince, Marian, kaçmak, Peter'in olmadığı mekanlara gitmek ister. Bir çamaşırhanede tanıştığı Duncan, Marian için bir kaçış noktası olur, onunla birlikte şehrin dışına doğru ve tasvir edilmesi zor, daha çok doğayla iç içe mekanlara giderler. Bu mekanların Marian'ı evliliğin kurumsallığı ve onun için ifade etmeye başladığı kısıtlayıcılığı unutturduğu savunulabilir. Fakat daha da önemlisi, Marian, Peter'in ondan beklediği mükemmel ev hanımlığı rolünü alt üst eder. Peter'a yemek hazırlamak yerine, romanın sonlarına doğru kendi evinin mutfağına girerek, kendi istediği yemeği yapan Marian, yaptığı yemek ile de ataerkil sistemi sorgular. Sonuç olarak, onu belirli kalıplara sokmaya çalışan, içinde olmak istediği iş ortamından uzaklaştıran, kadın kimliğinden kaçmak isterken, onun yerine kendi kimliğini kendi tanımlamaya karar verir ve bunu yaparken bir mekân olan mutfak ile olan ilişkisini yeniler ve bulunduğu mekânın sınırlarını ve potansiyelini kendi belirler.

Laura Esquivel'in *Acı Çikolata (Like Water for Chocolate)* romanı, baş kadın karakteri Tita'nın mutfağın içine olağanüstü bir şekilde doğduğunu anlatarak başlar. Mutfaktaki yemeklerin, tatların ve kokuların içine doğan Tita, mutfağa ve yemeğe karşı doğal bir ilgi ve hatta altıncı his ile doğar ve büyür. Her ne kadar Tita, mutfağa doğuştan gelen bir sevgi ve bağlılık gösterse de Esquivel, Tita'nın mutfak ile olan ilişkisinin aynı zamanda yaşadığı geleneksel Meksika toplumu ve ataerkil sistemi temsil eden annesi Elena'nın devam ettirmeye çalıştığı geleneklerden de kaynaklandığını gösterir. Tita'nın annesi, evin en küçük kızının evlenmesine karşı gelen bir geleneği takip

ettirmektedir. Bu geleneğe göre, Tita, annesi ölene kadar bekar kalmak ve annesine bakmakla yükümlüdür. Kısacası Tita, mutfağı her ne kadar çok sevse de mutfak ve ev, diğer romanlarda olduğu gibi kadının toplum tarafından dayatılan rollere kısıtlanmışlığını ve kadının ait olması gereken mekanların yine sosyal olarak kodlanan mekanlar olduğunu göstermektedir. Mutfak, evin çoğu zaman sadece Tita tarafından ziyaret edilen ve ona ait olarak tanımlanan bir bölümdür, bu da mutfağın Tita'yı dış dünyadan uzaklaştırma aracı olarak da kullanıldığını gösterir. Günleri yemek yapmakla geçen Tita, aşık olduğu Pedro ile evliliği bir kaçış olarak görürken, onun, ablası Rosaura ile evlenmesine dahi katlanmak, onların düğün pastasını yapmak zorunda kalır. Dolayısıyla, Tita'nın kadın oluşu, onun ailenin ev hanımı olmakla yükümlü en küçük kızı olmasının dışına çıkamaz. Yemek yaptığında dahi özgür değildir ve annesinin belirlediği tariflerin dışına çıktığı zaman, annesi tarafından kurallara uymadığı için azarlanacağını bilir. Tita'yı mutfak ile sınırlandırmak, onun annesi tarafından kontrol edilebilmesine olanak sağlarken, mutfak aynı zamanda Tita ve dış dünya arasındaki keskin çizgiyi ve sosyal bölümlendirmeyi de belirginleştirir. Mutfağın toplumsal olarak sınırlayıcı bir mekân olarak kullanılmasına karşı çıkmak isteyen Tita, bunu elindeki tek güç olan yemek yapmak sayesinde başarır. Yaptığı yemeklere duygularını katan Tita, hem duygularının mutfağın dışına, yani kadına atfedilen sınırların dışına çıkmasını sağlarken, hem de mutfağın sınırlayıcı bir mekân olduğu algısını alt üst eder. Bu sayede, Esquivel'in romanında mutfak, kadını kısıtlayan bir yer değil, tam tersine ona güç veren ve sesini duyuran bir yer halini alır.

Bu çalışmanın odaklandığı romanlar ve baş kadın karakterler, diğer bir konu olarak beden kavramının baskın ideolojiler tarafından, kadının biyolojik ve bedensel özelliklerine dayandırılarak oluşturulduğunu ama aslında bedenin bir özden çok, toplumsal normlar ve cinsiyete bağlı ikili zıtlıklar doğrultusunda tanımlandığını göstermektedir. Weldon, Atwood ve Esquivel'in seçilen romanlarının incelemesi ve kadın baş karakterler üzerinden yapılan tartışmalar, kadın bedeninin zayıflık, güzellik, çekicilik, naiflik ve pasiflik gibi toplumsal beklentilere dayandırılan bir kurgu olduğunu gösterirken aynı zamanda kadın bedeninin, kadını baskılayan, devamlı olarak yetersiz hissetmesine sebep olan ve her zaman toplumsal olarak eleştirilmeye açık bir kavram olduğunu gösterir.

Bu doğrultuda, tezin dördüncü bölümü, romanlardaki kadın baş karakterleri beden konusu üzerinden incelemektedir. Beden, biyolojik, psikolojik, zihnin karşıtı gibi birçok yönden ele alınabilen ve yapısalcı gelenekte daha çok kadınla ilişkilendirilen bir kavramdır. Bu tezde, beden, kadının biyolojik farklılıklarını gösteren, kadına özgü ama bir o kadar da toplum tarafından kadının nasıl görünmesi ve nasıl davranması gerektiğini belirleyen, dolayısıyla kadına toplumsal kimliğini veren bir kavram olarak ele alındığından, Elizabeth Grosz'un *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* ve Susan Bordo'nun *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Cultrure, and The Body* eserlerinde yer alan beden tanımlamaları önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Buna göre kadın bedeni adeta kültürel normları taşıyan bir alandır ve kadının toplumda nasıl algılandığını, erkek/kadın hiyerarşisindeki konumunu, kadının bedeni ile özdeşleşen kimliğini, deneyimlerinin ne olduğunu ve dahi bedeninin sınırlarını belirleyen, aslında kadına ait olan ama mekân gibi, yine toplum ve toplumsal beden standartları tarafından tanımlanan, daha da önemlisi erkek egemen toplumlarda baskı ve kontrol altında tutulan, sosyal bir kavramdır. Elizabeth Grosz'un *Volatile Bodies* adlı eserinde de belirttiği gibi, her ne kadar, kadının biyolojik farklılıkları ve annelik gibi kadını farklı kılan bedensel özellikleri sebebiyle kadın, bedenselliği ile ilişkilendirilmiş olsa da (14), bu ilişkilendirmeler hem kadının bedenini hem de öznelliğini bir sosyal anlamlar bütünü haline getirir (18) ve aslında ataerkil sistemin kadını bedensel ve erkeğin ötekisi olarak tanımlamada ve baskılamada kendisini doğrulamasını sağlar (14). Bu bağlamda, kadın bedeni aynı zamanda kadını bir kategori ve Susan Bordo'nun da dediği gibi uyulması gereken bedensel tavırlar (142), ve naiflik, zayıflık, güzellik, çekici bir dış görünüş gibi beden algıları bütünü olarak tanımlar. Tezde kadın bedeni hakkındaki söylemlerine atıfta bulunulan Naomi Wolf *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* eserinde bu bedensel ve fiziksel tanımlamaları ve beklentileri güzellik miti ('beauty myth') olarak adlandırırken, Kim Chernin ise atıfta bulunulan her iki eserinde de zayıflık zulmünden ('tyranny of slenderness') veya daha açıkça zayıflık algısının hüküm sürdüğü ve bunun sonucunda zayıf olmayan kadın bedeninin zorbalığa uğradığı toplumsal bir beden algısından bahseder. Çünkü kadın bedeninin erkekler tarafından tanımlanıyor olması, erkeklerin kadın bedeni üzerinde söz sahibi olmasına ve dolayısıyla kadının güçsüzleşmesine sebep olmaktadır. Chernin çoğu zaman kadınların bu beden algısı sonucunda anoreksiya gibi fiziksel patolojiler gösterdiklerini de anlatır. Dolayısıyla, hem güzellik, hem de zayıflık standartlarına



uymaya çalışan kadın, aynı zamanda, kadınlığını ve bedenini başkalarının onayına göre yaşamaya başlar ve kendini kırılmalı ve yetersiz hissedebilir. Kadına atfedilen beden tanımlamaları, kadını aynılaştırmaya ve kadın bedenini kontrol altında tutmaya yöneliktir ve bu sayede kadınlar bedenleri içinde hem kısıtlanır hem de beden algılarına uymaya çalışırken, kendi bedenlerine yabancılaşırlar. Bu doğrultuda, romanlarda kadın bedeninin nasıl kodlandığı incelendiğinde, bedenin sosyal algılara ve çoğu zaman erkeklerin kadınlık tanımlarına göre şekil alan ve dolayısıyla doğal olarak tanımlanabilecek özelliklerini kaybeden bir olgu olduğu görülmektedir. Bütün bunların sonucunda, bedeni kendi dışında tanımlanan ve başkaları tarafından kontrol edilen kadın baş karakterler, kendilerini bedenleri içinde huzursuz hissedebilir. Oysa ki, kadın bedeni her şeyden öte kadının deneyimlerini barındıran ve dolayısıyla bu sınırların dışında çokça anlam içeren yegâne kaynaktır. Bu tezde Grosz ve Bordo'nun kadın bedeni toplumsal olanı temsil eden bir alandır söylemlerinden yola çıkarak, eğer beden toplumsal bir anlamlar bütünüyse, aynı anlamlar bütünü yeniden oluşturulabilir ve hatta kadın tarafından tanımlanabilir savı örneklendirilmektedir.

Bu bölümde ele alınan güzellik algıları ve kadın bedeninin kısıtlanması konuları doğrultusunda öne sürülen bir argüman da yemek imgesinin beden algısını değiştirmedeki rolüdür. Yemek yiyerek kilo almak, yemek yemeyi bilinçli bir tercih olarak bırakmak ve dolayısıyla bedeni reddetmek veya yemek sayesinde bedeni ifade etmek gibi farklı yollardan kadın bedeninin tanımlanışını ve kendi bedenleri ile ilişkilerini değiştirmek sayesinde Esther, Marian ve Tita, kadın bedeninin salt bir tanıma uymadığını ve baskın ataerkil tanımlamalarının dışına da çıkabileceğini, kendi bedenlerinin kontrolünü yemek üzerinden yeniden kurgulayıp ele alabileceklerini fark ederler. Kısacası, erkek egemen beden tanımlarına karşı koyan Esther, Marian ve Tita, aynı zamanda kendilerini gerçekleştirip, kendi özelliklerini tanımlayabileceklerini gösterirler.

Fay Weldon'un *The Fat Woman's Joke* romanında, Esther'in bedeni annelik ile nitelendirilmiş ve çoğu zaman bedenini nasıl deneyimlediği anne oluşu ile ilgili olmuştur. Örneğin, Esther'e oğlu tarafından bir anne gibi davranması gerektiği ve anne olması sebebiyle dış görünüşünün pek de önemli olmadığı vurgulanmıştır. Dolayısıyla Esther'in bedenselliği, onun biyolojik olarak kadın olması doğrultusunda

kodlanmıştır. Fakat, Esther'in bedeninin sınırlarını belirleyen en önemli faktör, onun kilolu bir kadın olmasıdır. Bu sebeple toplumsal olarak dayatılan güzellik algılarına uymaz ve genç kızlığında annesi, evliliğinde ise eşi tarafından bedeni üzerinden yapılan eleştirilere maruz kalır. Alan ile başladığı diyet ise, Esther'in bedeninin kontrol altında tutulması gereken, toplumsal olarak kabul gören zayıflık ve güzellik gibi beden algılarına uyum sağlaması beklenen, kısaca, toplumsal bir dayatma olduğunun altını çizer. Esther'in yaşadığı toplumda kadın bedeni, sadece kadına biçilen ve beden ile ilgili roller, örneğin annelik ve zayıflık algısından ibaret değildir. Susan ve Phyllis adlı kadın karakterlerin incelemesi, bu toplumda, kadın bedeninin belirli güzellik normlarına da uyması gerektiğini vurgular. Bu normlar doğrultusunda bedenlerini erkeklere açıkça sunan, kendilerini zayıf, güçsüz, kontrol edilmeye muhtaç ama bir o kadar da güzellik ve estetik algılarına uyan birer beden olarak gösteren bu iki kadın karakter, aynı zamanda Weldon tarafından eleştirilmektedir çünkü hem Susan hem de Phyllis, erkeklere yem olmaktan kaçamaz ve erkek egemen normlar tarafından kontrol edilmesine izin verdikleri bedenleri, tam anlamıyla güçsüz bir hal alır. Buna karşı Esther, kilolu bedenini kabullenerek hem erkek egemen beden algılarına hem de erkek/kadın, güçlü/güçsüz ikili zıtlığına karşı koyar. Romanda, Esther'in kendi evine çıkmasıyla birlikte başlayan ve obezite olarak değerlendirilebilecek yeme bozukluğu, aslında Esther'in toplumsal beden dayatmalarına karşı gelişini gösteren bir durum olarak incelenmiştir. Gün içinde kendini sınırlamadan yediği yemekler onu hasta etse dahi, yeme isteğinin önüne geçmez çünkü kendisinin de dediği gibi, Esther duygusal açlığını doyurmaktadır. Evliliğinde yaşadığı problemlerin bedeninden kaynaklandığı, bulunduğu bedenin içinde olmak istemediğini ve hatta kadın olarak değil de erkek olarak doğmak istediğini söyleyen Esther, bütün bu bedensel sıkıntılarını aslında yemek sayesinde aşar. Ona göre yemek yemek, kadın olduğu için sınırlanan bedeninin sınırlarını aşmak, kendi adına nasıl görüneceği, yemek yiyip yiyemeyeceği, zayıf veya güzel olup olmadığı sorularını reddedip, bedenini kendi istediği gibi yaşamayı sağlayan bir araçtır. Yemek sayesinde toplumsal beden algılarını kıran Esther, aynı zamanda kendi hikayesini anlatma gücünü de bulur. Kısaca, zayıf ve güzel bir kadın bedeni imgesini reddederek, Esther kendi bedenini kendi istediği şekilde tanımlamış ve ataerkil beden sınırlarına karşı çıkmıştır.

Margaret Atwood'un *Evlenilecek Kadın (The Edible Woman)* romanında, Marian karakteri, tıpkı Esther gibi, bedenini biyolojik özelliklerine bağlı olarak yaşamak zorunda olduğunu hisseder. Peter ile olan ilişkisi evliliğe doğru ilerledikçe, Marian'a yapılan yorumlar, gelecekte anne olacağı doğrultusundadır. Çevresindeki yakın arkadaşları Clara ve Ainsley, aynı şekilde kadınlığın annelik ile bir bütün olduğu düşüncesini benimsemiş ve Marian'a da bu düşüncüyü empoze etmeye çalışmaktadır. Fakat Marian, Clara'nın anneliği ve hamileliği üzerinden tanık olduğu kadın bedenini, kadının kontrolü dışında ve kadını güçsüzleştiren bir durum olarak görmekte ve yavaş yavaş beden algısını yitirip, bedeninden uzaklaşmaktadır. Marian'ın beden algısının sınırlarını oluşturan bir diğer durum ise toplumsal olarak dayatılan güzellik algılarıdır. İşe gidip gelirken gördüğü reklamlar ve bu reklamlardaki kadınlar, iş yerindeki kadın çalışma arkadaşları, kısacası içinde bulunduğu toplum, kadını güzel ve çekici bir beden algısı doğrultusunda tanımlar ve hatta kadın bedeninin erkeğin istekleri doğrultusunda çeki düzen verilmesi gereken toplumsal bir kurmaca olduğu vurgulanır. Benzer şekilde Peter'da, Marian'ın nasıl giyinmesi, nasıl görünmesi ve hatta nasıl davranması gerektiği konusunda Marian'a yönergeler vermeye başlar. Bu doğrultuda, romanda incelenen örneklerden bir tanesi de kuaföre giden, makyaj yapan, kendine yeni kıyafetler alan Marian'ın, kendi benliğinden uzaklaştığı ve gördüğü kişinin kendisi olmadığını düşünmeye başladığını ele almaktadır. Marian'ın bedenini kendisi dışında bir varlık olarak görmesi, sadece toplumsal dayatmalar ile kendi beden algısı arasındaki farklılıktan kaynaklanmaz. Tezde incelenen önemli örneklerden bir tanesi, Marian'ın Peter ile gittiği bir yemekte, Peter'ın sipariş ettiği eti yeme şeklini görmesi, kendisinin ve bedeninin de Peter tarafından benzer şekilde tüketileceğini düşünmesidir. Bunu sonucunda bir yeme bozukluğu geliştiren ve birçok besini reddetmeye başlayan hatta bir süre sonra anoreksiyi andıran bir duruma gelen Marian, aslında toplumsal zayıflık algısına uyuyor gibi görünse de fakında olmadan, kadın bedenini reddetmeye başlar. Dolayısıyla, romanda ele alınan bu yeme bozukluğu, Marian'ın kadının hiçbir zaman kendine ait olamayan bedenini reddedişini vurgulamaktadır. Marian sadece yemek yemeyerek değil, aynı zamanda pişirdiği kadın şeklindeki kek sayesinde de toplumsal beden algılarına karşı koymaktadır. Kadın figürü şeklinde pişirdiği kek, bir yapım yani sosyal bir kurmaca, bu kekin süslemesi ise, kadın bedeninin erkek egemen toplumlar tarafından belirli güzellik algılarına göre nasıl şekillendirildiğini gösteren bir araçtır. Fakat, kadın şeklindeki bu

keke şekil veren ve onu süsleyenin kendisi olması dolayısıyla, Marian'ın toplumun kadın bedeni ve güzellik algısı dayatmalarına karşı geldiği ve bunu yaparken kadınlığı ve bedenini kendi istediği biçimde tanımladığı söylenebilir. Ayrıca, bu keki Peter'a servis eden Marian, Peter'a ve Peter'ın oluşturmak ve kontrol etmek istediği beden algısına ve hatta kadınlığa karşı koyar ve bu sayede yeme bozukluğunu da sonlandırır çünkü erkek/kadın ikili zıtlığını da derinden sarsar.

Laura Esquivel'in *Acı Çikolata (Like Water for Chocolate)* romanında Tita, bedeni ile romanın en başından itibaren yakından ilintilidir. Güzellik ve çekicilik kavramlarına uyan Tita, yine aynı sebepten Pedro tarafından arzulanmakta ama Tita'nın bedeninin sadece güzellik sebebiyle kabul edilebilir olması durumu erkeklerin kadın bedeni üzerinde müdahale ve kontrol hakkını da kendinde gördüğünü göstermektedir. Bu doğrultuda verilen örnekler göstermektedir ki, Pedro tarafından sevilse dahi aynı zamanda çoğunlukla bedenine odaklanılan Tita, pek çok kez Pedro'nun kendisini izlemesine, hatta fiziksel tacizine dahi maruz kalır. Tita'nın dış görünüşü ve bedeninin güzellik algılarına uyuyor oluşu, kız kardeşi Rosaura'nın da bir o kadar toplumsal güzellik algıları dışında tutulması ile desteklenmiştir. Bu sayede Esquivel, toplumun kadın bedenine bakış açısını her iki yönden de vermektedir. Rosaura, sadece annelik ile ilişkilendirilen ve bunun dışında herhangi bir rolü olmaya bir kadın bedeni olarak gösterilirken, aynı zamanda da yaşadığı sıkıntılı hamilelikler sonucu kilo alması, yaşadığı sindirim sorunları ve bedeninden rahatsız edici kokular gelmesi dolayısıyla eşi Pedro tarafından reddedilir. Kısacası, Rosaura, toplumsal kadın bedeni algılarına uymayan bir kadının, ne kadar güçsüzleştiğini ve toplum tarafından dışlandığını göstermektedir. Rosaura'ya kıyasla Tita, her ne kadar güzellik algılarına uyan bir kadın olsa da onun da bedeni, sosyal normlar çerçevesinde sınırlanmış, adeta bir tabuya dönüştürülmüş ve kabul görüp görmemesi, bu bedensel normları takip etmesi ile ilişkili olmuştur. Tita, geleneksel yapıları takip eden annesi tarafından sadece sosyal olarak değil, aynı zamanda da bedensel olarak baskılanmıştır. Pedro, ablası Rosaura ile evlenirken ağlayamaz, yeğenlerini emziremez veya onlara bakamaz, istemediği yemekleri yemek zorundadır, aile geleneğini devam ettirdiği için evlenemez ve çocuk sahibi olamaz. Kısaca, kendi bedenine ait olan hiçbir duyguyu yaşayamaz ve bedenini annesinin belirlediği sınırlar doğrultusunda yaşamak zorunda kalır. Esther ve Marian'ın bedensel tepkileri ve yaşadıkları yemek bozuklukları kadar net olmasa da

Tita da aynı şekilde bedenini sorgulamaya ve anlamaya çalışır. Yaşadığı kısa süreli hezeyan sürecinde, sessiz kalmayı ve yemek yememeyi tercih eden Tita, bu süreçte bedenini anlamaya çalışır. Ele alınan örneklerden bir tanesi, Tita'nın ellerini incelemesi ve ellerinin annesinin tanımladığı yemek yapma rolü dışında ne işe yaradığını bilmiyor oluşudur. Bu örnek, Tita'nın bedenini tanımasına dahi izin vermediğini göstermektedir ki romandaki önemli olaylardan bir tanesi de Tita'nın Pedro ile yaşadığı bir yakınlaşma sonucu hamile olduğunu düşünmesi ama aslında hamile olmayışıdır. Her iki örnek de Tita'nın bedeninin kendisi dışında tanımlandığı ve kontrol edildiğini ve aslında bedenini tanımasına fırsat verilmediğini gösterir. Bedeni içinde hapsolan ve duygularını bastırmak, bedenini toplumun ve annesinin kurallarına göre yaşamak durumunda kalan Tita için çözüm, kendisini yaptığı yemekler ile ifade etmektir. Yaptığı yemeklere kan ve gözyaşları gibi bedenden gelen elementleri ve üzüntü, özlem, öfke gibi hislerini katarak, kadın bedenini özgürleştirir. Çünkü bu sayede baskılanmış kadın bedeni kendini yemeği yiyen kişinin bedeninde ifade eder. Böylece, yaptığı yemekler üzerinden kendini ve duygularını ifade eden Tita, toplumsal ve geleneksel olarak baskılanan kadın bedenini ifade edebilir.

Kısaca, bu tez Fay Weldon'un *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Margaret Atwood'un *Evlenecek Kadın (The Edible Woman)* ve Laura Esquivel'in *Acı Çikolata (Like Water for Chocolate)* romanlarını mekân ve beden kavramları üzerinden incelemiş, bunu yaparken kadın baş karakterler Esther, Marian ve Tita'nın evlilikleri, kadın-erkek ve aile ilişkileri ve yaşadıkları toplumlardaki konumlarını ve kısıtlanmışlıklarını örneklendirmiştir. Romanların detaylı incelemesinden ortaya çıkan sonuç, kadının toplumsal normalar tarafından adlandırılan ve sınırlandırılan bir kavram olduğu ve kadınların bu kavramı kendilerine verilen sınırlı mekanlar ve sınırları erkek egemen toplumlar tarafından belirlenen bedenleri üzerinden deneyimliyor oluşudur. Fakat, bu tez, kadın, mekân ve beden kavramları sosyal olarak oluşturulan ve sınırlandırılan kavramlarsa, yeniden yapılandırılmaya da açıktır fikrini savunmuş ve bunun her üç romanda da yemek sembolü ile, hem kadına atfedilen evcimen rolün alt üst edilmesi, hem de estetik, zayıf, güzel ve pasif kadın bedeni algısının değiştirilmesi ile olduğunu göstermiştir. Sonuç olarak, kadın baş karakterler Esther, Marian ve Tita'nın bu şekilde erkek/kadın hiyerarşik ilişkisini sorguladıkları ve bu sayede kendilerini, kendilerine verilen mekanların sınırlarını ve beden algılarını yeniden tanımladıkları

savunulmuştur. Bu sayede bu doktora tezi, hem romanları incelerken ele aldığı kavramlar, hem de seçilen romanlar üzerinden yapılan karşılaştırmalı çalışma doğrultusunda literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamıştır.

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**Bölümü** / Department : İngiliz Edebiyatı / English Literature

**TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (İngilizce / English):** WOMAN, FOOD AND REDEFINING HER-SELF: A FEMINIST READING OF FAY WELDON'S *THE FAT WOMAN'S JOKE*, MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE EDIBLE WOMAN* AND LAURA ESQUIVEL'S *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE*

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