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**Female Workers Exploitation and Their
Great Fights Towards Justice in Gail
Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk* (1991) and
Melanie Marnich's *These Shining Lives*
(2010).**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

- My parents
- My husband
- My sisters, brother, nieces, nephews, and my whole family
- My friends

Nadjet M'sili

I dedicate this work to:

- Myself
- My parents
- My Grandparents
- My sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, and my whole family
- My friends

Yasmine Sider

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Abstract

This paper investigates the female workers' exploitation and their great fight towards justice in Melanie Marnich's play *These Shining Lives* (2010) and Gail Tsukiyama's novel *Women of the Silk* (1991). In the light of the Feminist, Marxist, and Marxist Feminist literary theories, this comparative study discusses the issues women face at the domestic and public sphere of the Interwar America and China. Thus, this present research paper illustrates the different forms of patriarchal practices that American and Chinese women endure within their households. In addition to the diverse shapes of capitalist exploitation they experience in their workplace. Most importantly, through emancipator thoughts of Feminism and Marxism, this study exposes the steps that working women adopt to overcome the capitalist exploitation and claim their rights.

Keywords: Female Workers Exploitation, *These Shining Lives*, *Women of the Silk*, Feminism, Marxism, Marxist-Feminism.

General Introduction

“Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression”. Nelson Mandela

It is world widely grasped and felt, that atrocity and anguish could never be erased easily from the human memory even across centuries. As the famous poet, Percy Bysshe Shelly said: “history is a cyclic poem written by time upon the memories of man”. Women, verily, went through a long history of suffering and injustice. Their exposure to tyranny and abuse are issues rooted in history and various civilizations. Yet, the more societies change, the more women's condition changes, and thus their struggle against injustice alters as well. In pre-capitalist societies, women were seen as inferior and valid only to serve men and the family members. With the beginning of the twentieth century, women’s status changed along with the great alteration that occurred in the worldwide nations. Capitalism emerged as a global economic system, suggesting the liberation of women and guaranteeing their release from the handcuffs of the household and the patriarchal practices. It brought to the fore the necessity and importance of women’s presence in the working field. However, it did nothing more than exploiting them at the most extreme.

The exploitation of working women became a global issue that captures the interest of so many human rights advocates who call for their imperative liberation. While the feminists propose their release from the shackles of patriarchy, the Marxists draw particular attention to their rescue from the capitalist exploitation. In regards to this matter, the Marxist-feminists put emphasis on their liberation from both oppressive and exploitative systems. For instance, the American playwright Melanie Marnich in her play *These Shining Lives* (2010) portrays the rough experiences of the female workers and their exploitation while working for a radium dial company. In the same way, the American-born of a Chinese-Japanese ancestry writer, Gail

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Tsukiyama was attracted by the achievements of the Chinese girls who worked in the silk factories. In her novel, *Women of the Silk* (1991), she examines the women's downtrodden position in the rural societies of China and the exploitation they faced while working in one of the few factories. The two authors under study did not only depict women's suffering at the economic and social levels but also dedicated considerable pages in their texts to the portrayal of the different steps they pursued to reach liberation.

Thesis Statement

In this present study, we will discuss the female workers' exploitation and their emancipation in Melanie Marnich's play *These Shining Lives* and Gail Tsukiyama's novel *Women of the Silk*. Through the use of Feminist, Marxist, and Marxist Feminist approach and thoughts, we will highlight the struggle of American and Chinese women of the Interwar Era against patriarchy and capitalist exploitation. In addition to that, we will analyze the different steps that working women followed to achieve their emancipation, relying on significant emancipatory theories in Feminism and Marxism.

Literature Review

In "The Economic Exploitation of Women", Marilyn Power Goldberg criticizes capitalism and discusses the various forms of women's exploitation, including the split of the labor force into groups. According to her, this division created a class system where "It allows certain groups, namely minorities and women to be super-exploited" (36). It also stimulates the ideology that women must be restricted to housewifery and motherhood that acts as their central function in society and renders them always surrendered to the notion that their participation in the working field is dispensable. As a result, they are chosen to work in part time and impermanent jobs. Goldberg further argues that women face the segregation of work on the basis of gender. They are employed in works that commensurate with their basic role at the household and that typically offer low wages compared to men. The scholar concludes that it is also

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significant to note that women play a pivotal role in battling against their exploitation at the economic level, “because they are so important in shoring up the economic system” (44).

Through their writing in an article entitled “Economic and Social Causes of Sexism and of the Exploitation of Women”, George W. Albee and Melissa Perry investigate assorted sources of women’s exploitation and oppression under the capitalist patriarchal system. They argue that, “Girls and women of all classes, but especially the poor have been exploited throughout history, and are still exploited throughout the world” (147). In Albee and Perry’s opinion, economy is the fundamental fount of female subjugation. They explain that, “Women receive only one tenth of the world’s income and own less than 1% of the world’s property. They also put in two-thirds of all working hours” (146).

Juanita Elias in “Women Workers and Labour Standards” draws attention and backbones her piece of writing with various thoughts of feminist scholars in what in accordance with issues such as gender division of work, gender inequality and concerns of women’s work. Through her analysis, Elias raises the issue of the hypotheses and assumptions that entangles with gender inequality. In this concern, she states that “the gendered division of labour within the home and the consequent devaluation of feminine work foster perceptions of women’s ‘secondary’ status within the market economy.” (48). Elias deals with several problems and issues that the working women encounter due to their vulnerability saying that “Women’s work is not only characterised by low wages, but poor working conditions, insecure employment contracts and few opportunities for career advancement”(53). She also refers to the globalization of production as being characterized by factory work as well as feminized and low waged labor.

In “Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate”, Maxine Molyneux discusses various issues like the relation between women’s unpaid housework and paid work to capitalism. In so doing, Molyneux provides contrasting Marxist and non-Marxist ideas. She gives reasons behind sexual labor division arguing that “This is reinforced by the sexual division of labour which tends to

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allocate women to jobs designed to utilize their supposed 'natural' capacities for enduring tedious, delicate or intricate work; this is, at the same time, less well paid than analogous work performed by men"(24-25). Furthermore, she argues that women's joblessness is a mere social and political monopoly. They are used in times of distress and fired in times of sufficiency. Molyneux concludes by acknowledging the value of standing against all assumptions that control the sexual division of labor and its social impacts on the correlations existing between both the domestic and informal spheres.

Significance of the Study

After taking into consideration the critical works written upon the theme of female workers'exploitation, one can notice Marnich's play *These Shining Lives* and Gail Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk*, one can notice that little research has examined the aforementioned theme in relation to the aforementioned texts either separately or conjointly. Thus, this paper attempts to expose different and similar themes that the two works present.

Objectives of the study

In the framework of the Feminist, Marxist, and Marxist Feminist approach, our study aims to discuss women's issues with patriarchy and capitalism. We will explore the different forms of patriarchal and capitalist exploitation that American and Chinese women sustain through the experiences of Marnich's play and Tsukiyama's novel's female characters. In addition, we will highlight the stratagems these characters maintain to achieve their emancipation.

Methodology

To deal with the issue of female workers exploitation and their great fights toward justice in Marnich's *These Shining Lives* and Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk*, we shall rely, as it is previously mentioned on the Feminist, Marxist, and Marxist feminist assumptions. These latter seem appropriate to our current research, in particular the ideas of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Heidi E. Hartmann, and bell Hooks.

Structure of the Paper

In terms of structure, our research will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter, “Biographical, Literary, and Socio-historical background”, will revolve around the biographies of Melanie Marnich and Gail Tsukiyama and the summaries of their works. In addition to that, this chapter will provide a social and historical background of America and China in the Interwar Era. The second chapter entitled, “Theoretical Frameworks”, will introduce the theories on which our research will be based. It includes Feminism, Marxism, and Marxist-Feminism and their major principles and ideas. The third chapter, “Female Workers: From Exploitation to Emancipation”, will examine Marnich’s play and Tsukiyama’s novel, demonstrating the various forms of patriarchal and capitalist exploitation the women in both works are subjected to. In addition, it underlines the ways in which the female workers liberate themselves and make justice.

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Introduction

Our aim in this first chapter is to study the socio-historical, biographical, and literary background of our selected texts: Melanie Marnich's play *These Shining Lives* and Gail Tsukiyama's novel *Women of the Silk*. The first section of this chapter will be devoted to the authors' biographies. The second will deal with the summaries of their works. The third and the last section will discuss the socio-historical background of China and America in the Interwar Era, highlighting the condition of women of both countries at that time period.

1. Authors' Biographies

1.1. Melanie Marnich

The American playwright and television writer- producer Melanie Marnich was born in Duluth, Minnesota. She is the only child of Mike and Mary Fracassi and the second wife of the American Playwright Lee Blessing. After high school, Marnich joined the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis to graduate in journalism and work as an advertising copywriter for ten years. However, she was later attracted by theater and decided to leave advertising and attend the University of California, San Diego, where she received her M.F.A in playwriting.

Soon after her graduation, she started to publish plays and dramas that brought up different genres, and tackled different subjects, mainly women facing stereotypes in American societies and their issues and conditions in general. This explains well Marnich's choosing of female protagonists in her plays, which was not done hazardedly, but in order to illustrate and portray the aforementioned themes. Among her works, one may mention *Tall Grasse Gothic*(2003), *Quake*(2005), *Blur*(2006), and *A Sleeping Country*(2010). Yet, she did not only focalize on women as victims of male domination and as weak creatures but also as combatants who always seek to gain power and self-determination in their own lives, and this was fully depicted in her resplendent play, *These Shining Lives*(2010).

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Marnich's plays swept the national and international theaters including Manhattan Theatre Club, The Kennedy Center, Dallas Theater Center, Baltimore Center Stage, Steppenwolf Theatre Company and The Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival of New American Plays. Thus, she received many awards in playwriting, such as The Samuel Goldwyn Writing Award, The Francesca Primus Prize, and The Carbonell Award for Best New York of The Year.

1.2. Gail Tsukiyama

Born to a Chinese mother and a Japanese father in 1957 in San Francisco, USA, Gail Tsukiyama is a bestselling author, editor and teacher at the San Francisco State University. She inaugurated her story telling career with her first novel entitled *Women of the Silk* (1991), then she wrote *The Samurai's Garden* (1994), *Night of Many Dreams* (1998), *The Language of Threads* (1999), *Dreaming Water* (2002), *The Street of Thousand Blossoms* (2007), and *A Hundred Flowers: A Novel* (2012).

Tsukiyama received The Academy of American Poets Award as well as the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Literary Award. She was one of the nine authors to appear during the first Library of Congress National Book Festival. Her writings deals mainly with her Asian backgrounds, by the favor as well the influence of her parents especially her mother which made her best works a mother-daughter writing and a mishmash of Japanese and Chinese heritage, outlining stories about eastern ordinary life, traditions and beliefs. Her literary works were an umbrella that coated various literary genres and styles; she wrote romances, historical fiction, and fantastic fiction. Additionally, she covered several issues including colonial, political, moving to social, traditional and feminist enigmas.

Gail Tsukiyama's literature has been well received and welcomed universally. What justifies best this statement is that most of her writings were translated not only from English to East Asian languages such as Japanese and Chinese but also to German, French and even to Spanish.

2. Summary of *These Shining Lives* and *Women of the Silk*

2.1. *These Shining Lives*

Melanie Marnich's *These Shining Lives* is a play that is set in Ottawa, Illinois during the 1920s and 1930s. It tells the real tragic story of four women who worked in a factory of radium dials established in Ottawa, Illinois known as Radium Dial Company (RDC). One of them is our story's narrator and main protagonist, Catherine Wolf Donohue. She is a married working class woman who shares a humble life and house with her beloved children and husband. Her ambition to work and make money like all the girls of her working class environment and meet the family needs takes her to the RDC to meet her three coworkers, Pearl, Frances, and Charlotte with whom she later forms a bond and a strong friendship.

On her first day at work, Catherine was taught how to paint dials using the lip, dip, paint routine in which she would lip the brush to form a point and dip it in the radium luminous paint, and then paint the numbers on the face of the dial. The technique seemed easy for Catherine; what disturbed her was the taste of the paint and the fact that she had to get it in her mouth several times a day. Nevertheless, Mr. Reed, the company's superintendent, reassured her that putting the material in her mouth is safe, since it is medicinal and it almost can cure everything. Day in day out, Catherine becomes one of the best and fastest dial painters. She walks home every night shining in the dark streets from the remaining dust of radium on her clothes, hairs, skin, and hands. However, she feels proud of having such independence of making her own money. Although the long hours she spends at work estrange her from duties at home and trigger some disputes with her husband Tom, Catherine could never think to resign from her job and leave her dearest friends.

As the story goes on, Catherine's merry life turns upside down. Over time, she realizes that the dust is no longer on her skin, it is in her skin. Severe aches in her back and legs disrupted her sleep at night and left her incapable to lift her children, play with them, or finish her house

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chores. The company doctor, however, did not seriously take her condition and showed a disinterest. He keeps reassuring her that there is nothing wrong with her health and that if she is to recover, she has to go home and take an aspirin. Yet, it sounded illogical for her to calm such painful aches with a simple aspirin. She concluded that a dishonest doctor would never risk his name and job to save people's life.

In 1931, another doctor from Chicago, Dr. Dalitsch, diagnosed Catherine and her coworkers with radium poisoning which is terminal and incurable. They now realized that the company was making profits on behalf of their health and lives. The company bosses hid all the medical results the girls were subjected to years ago. Moreover, they set their minds at rest and promised them that the substance would never cause them harm. As the days went by, the misfortunate women got fired from work due to the regression their health showed lately, a matter of fact that pushed them to revolt against this corrupt company.

Mr. Leonard Grossman, an attorney, who fights for the working class people's compensation chooses Catherine as the most scandalous victim of hazardous workplace conditions and lack of safety measurements that would bring the company's inhuman acts to an end. Their story went to court, and then to the press who spread wrong rumors among the people, but Catherine was strong and determined with the help of her faithful friends, husband, lawyer, and doctor Dalitsch, to stand tough as a stone, until she brings up justice.

After a long struggle, Catherine was granted thousands of dollars as compensation by the industrial commission. She died a short period later but remained one of the best examples of women challenging the capitalist societies and the way they exploit females, and changing the law for the best of the ordinary working men and women.

2.2. Women of the Silk

Gail Tsukiyama's novel *Women of the Silk* (1991) is a work of fiction that explores and mirrors the ordinary life and the different oppressions that Chinese women went through in early

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twentieth century China. The novel's main protagonist is called Pei. Unlike her elder sister Li, She is an ambitious, talkative, acquisitive, challenging, and curious girl. Her family is controlled by a stone-hearted father, Pao, who always worked hard on his fish farm. Pao Chung whose daughters became a burden day after day went to a fortune-teller where Li was told that she is going to get married, while Pei is predicted as a non-marrying girl. That being so, Pao left Pei, despite her young age, at a silk factory in Yong Kee which was a roaring industrial growing city comparing to their conservative rural town.

At the Girls House, Pei got accustomed to her new life. Her new friends "Lin" and "Mei Li" helped her and replaced the loss of her sister Li, in addition to the motherly care of the Girls' House head, Auntie Yee. Within a short time, she started to learn the silk-making craft, and her talent grew brilliantly professional day after day. Pei's friend and co-worker "Su Lung" invited her and Mei Li for a dinner with her family.

Mei Li fell in Love with Su Lung's brother "Hong"; they had a love affair which led Mei Li to commit suicide due to her illegitimate pregnancy. This sorrowful tragedy was added to Pei's grief and hatred towards men, it stimulated her will to go through the "Hairdressing Ceremony" which is the final declaration of a young woman that she would not marry. Before long, she and her best friend Lin joined "Chen Ling" and "Ming", two sisters from the girls' house, in the Sisters' House, where so many adult girls from different regions of China live, as they work in the silk factory. Each of them had a reason for staying in the sister' house, but most of them had either their husbands working oversees or they simply went through the hairdressing ceremony, devoting their entire life for the silk industry.

At the Sisters 'House, their days became fuller and busier. Thus far, it was more than high time to say enough since the Owner, Chung, and his managers mistreated and disdained the working women. They were also given a short time as a rest and exposed to the hazards of steam machines' heat and bad ventilation, causing tragic accidents, as it happened to Ming.

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Additionally, the younger apprentice girls suffer from hand burnings.

Even the heavy rains and bad quality of cocoons usually worsen their situation, as they were forced to work for extra hours with the same former wage to compensate for the loss. They became slaves of Chung and his managers who take benefit of the fact that they are women and would always keep silent. Moreover, silk making was their only source of life so they will not rebel; a young girl died of fear of not to work even with the fatigue, fever, and the bad cough she suffered from. The news of her demise came with a great shock; however, it carried with it enough bravery to face the tyrant criminals before another soul would be burned. So, the girls were guided by Chen Ling and gathered for a secret meeting. Sui Ying and other girls feared to be caught at the beginning, but later became convinced when Chen Ling sharpened their mettle, reminding them to keep the fighting soul in order to achieve their demands. The strike began the day following the meeting, and the owner Chung grew angry and frightened them with his armed men. As a result, Sui Ling was shot and found dead. Despite their grief, the girls kept rising their voices until the strike victoriously ended.

The New Year celebrations offered some free time, Pei told Lin that she wants to see her family again, after all the deafening silence. Her mother, Yu Sung who remained all alone after Li's marriage and the death of her last child, was in her extreme happiness when she saw Pei, and rushed immediately to hug her, while Pao kept silent and could never express his regret and joy.

When the girls got back to Yong Kee, they were busier than ever due to the retirement of some women. However the matter that disturbed them the most was the spreading of the Japanese ghost, which means Yong Kee would soon be affected. Under such circumstances, Chen Ling gathered the girls and informed them about the war, and the soon closure of the silk factories; they must be ready for any surprising event. The owner Chung came defeated and lost his wealth as well as authority, saying that the factory is closing. Though being at this miserable

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condition, the girls could not feel any pity for him after the heinous deeds of his. After that, Lin's brother, "Ho Yong", asked them to travel to Hong Kong as the Sister's House closed, and Pei accepted since her mother is dead and no letter from her father is received. Moi, Antie Yee's cook, found a northern Chinese girl named "JiShen" in an extremely awful condition; she witnessed the horrors of the Japanese soldiers who raped her mother and sister, and thereby Pei asked Lin to let her join them in their journey. At the day of their departure, Lin went to the factory which made Pei so anxious about her absence. Suddenly, they saw thick and black smoke coming from the factory; it is a huge fire that resulted in Lin's death, and the reasons remained vague. Someone said that Chung was the reason; while others said that it is due to bad ventilation. This sad event made Pei's life meaningless ever since.

When the time came for their journey, Pei hugged her friends and promised to see them again. Ho Yong finally arrived and took Pei and JiShen to Canton; he took care of them and accompanied them to the boat where he booked their places. For the last time, Pei stared at Ho Yong to keep the image of her best friend Lin; the boat sailed toward Hong Kong, leaving all the painful memories they witnessed. Finally they could find serenity and start a new chapter in their lives, filled with mercy and joy.

3. Historical Background of America and China in the Interwar Years

The interwar period consists of two major phases. The first phase is known as the Roaring Twenties. It started in 1920 and finished in 1930, whereas the second took place between 1930 and 1939, and it is historically recognized as the Great Depression. In other words, this era is confined between two historical events, the end of the First World War and the outbreak of the Second World War.

3.1. America in Roaring Twenties and Great Depression

The "Roaring Twenties" or "Jazz Age" is a time when the American society was unchained from its old Victorian values and standards to embrace a new culture and a new

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lifestyle. The economy and technology started to boom, thus, daily life became rich and pleasant. Nonetheless, the welfare of this raucous era was condemned by the lost morals including racial tensions and xenophobia, the rise of Nativism which restricted immigration, bootleggers and gangsters. This also gave rise to a new society often called “The Lost Generation”, whose people, unlike their puritan predecessors who settled in America seeking for a promised land of their own, lost their faith in God and switched to a literally materialistic standpoint.

Concerning economy in this phase, it took an utterly new different path. With no government interference known as the policy of “Laissez-Faire Capitalism”, more corporations and investments in business were encouraged. Additionally, the new methods of the mass production including the Assembly line promoted the production of standardized inexpensive goods and products at the speed of light, and reduced the consumer’s costs, as mentioned in the *American-Historama*. Hence, everyone was able and eager to spend money in different exciting products, and that is what we call a consumer culture.

The “Twenties” is also an age of new inventions and technological advancements. Automobiles, radios, washing-machines, and refrigerators were almost indispensable in the life of every American family. These improvements in technology and economy were the major factors that catalyzed the American society's radical transformation. For instance, with automobiles, urbanization appeared as one of the major features of the period, and from a rural unpretentious life, people zealously jumped to a modern urban one.

The Great Depression, in contrast, is the most direful and the worst economic downturn in the history of the United States specifically, and in that of the worldwide industrialized nations generally. This dismal black episode embarked suddenly after the glorious decade of the ‘Roaring Twenties’, and had shaken the US economy and society.

Unemployment was one of the catastrophic consequences of the Great Depression. David M. Kennedy states in his book *Freedom from Fear: The American People in the Great*

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Depression that, “The exact number of laid-off workers remained conjectural; later studies estimated that some four million laborers were unemployed in 1930” (59). As a consequence, the American citizens crossed the threshold of a more gloomy life; their dream was demolished and switched into ordeals.

The city which was the dream place for a living of every American citizen turned to be a symbol of chaos, despondency, and poverty. In this connection, the *U.S. History* offered a glance at the social and cultural facets of the 1930s and how they were impacted by the depression claiming that “The great Depression brought a rapid rise in the CRIME RATE as many unemployed workers resorted to petty theft to put food on the table. Suicide rates rose, as did reported cases of malnutrition” (“Social and Cultural Effects of the Depression”).

3.2. Woman in the Interwar America

During the Interwar period, women challenged the conventional image of their Victorian ancestors who were handcuffed by traditions and norms of the patriarchal rural life. This paved the way to the offspring of new modern women, known as “Flappers”. Accordingly, Thomas C. Reeves asserts in his book, *Twentieth Century America: A Brief History* that, “Youthful “flappers,” who led the way, shortened their skirts above the knee, abandoned their corsets and petticoats, flattened their breasts and bobbed their hair to achieve the new boyish look, wore rouge and lipstick, smoked cigarettes, drank cocktails, read racy novels, and danced the fox trot and Charleston” (86). This era witnessed as well women’s gain of more economic power. As their ordinary roles of the household shifted to workforce, they became less subordinate to males.

When the First World War rang its bells and the US army needed the men to enlist, women entered the industrial labor field to fill in the vacant jobs left by men who served for the military. Kelly Boyer Sagert advances, “By 1920, nearly one-fourth of the workforce (23.6 percent) was female, with 8.3 million females, aged 15 and up, working outside the home” (13).

Women’s traces were similarly found in politics. The suffragists, for instance, after long

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parades and protests, have finally got the right to vote in 1920. As time went further, women carried on fighting for bettering theirs' and others' condition. In this connection, Ruby Maloni states, "Through voluntary associations, women could become political actors, lobbying for Progressive reform legislation such as factory and child labor laws, prohibitions, and urban reforms" (881). Their deeds remained unforgettable in the American history. They emerged as eminent actors of the twenties' society, leaving their legacy in diverse comprising law, science, education, art, and literature.

In 1930 when unemployment rates soared across the US, the American families' standards of life decreased and their stability was roiled. Women appeared as knights in shining armors, and rushed to find works as a way to support their own families. It is worth mentioning that the reason behind the increased number of employed women during the time was due to the fact that men lost their jobs. In this vein, Lisa Krissof Boehm argues that during the 1930s depressive disorder, big businesses and heavy industries like the steel production which were dominated by males saw a growth in the number of discharged employees, whilst service industries that were mainly "women's jobs" kept operating (1050).

Women faced numerous issues upon their entering the field of work such as, the low wages and long working hours. Jane Bingham maintains that basically women were given less money than men in their workplace; however, during the Great Depression their wages decreased to a greater extent, and employers kept hiring them instead of men because they knew women would accept the work at any wage. Additionally, Bingham threw the light on the long hours of work that women faced during that time "More than fifty hours a week" (18).

3.3. Women and the Radium Dial Industry

One of the Industries that women dominated in the interwar America was radium dial industry. Radium was discovered in 1898 by the couple Marie and Pierre Curie. It later pervades the world and becomes the 20th-century marvel due to the universal fame it gained for its

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efficiency and safety in the medicinal field. Thus, it became an increasingly sought-after gemstone that every nation tried to possess, and in this global race the United States had successfully found its own way through the establishment of a radium mining company. In this regard, Roger F. Robison mentions that in May 1913 the Standard Chemical Company took the lion's share and appeared as the first seller and producer of radium in America (143). Since then, the usage of radium broke records in America, as Kate Moore claims, "The element was dubbed "liquid sunshine," and it lit up not just the hospitals and drawing rooms of America, but its theaters, music halls, grocery stores, and bookshelves"(4).

More importantly, radium became the essence of one of the most noticeable inventions of the period, the luminous paint. Lawrence Badash affirms that the luminous paint became the product of the era that used amounts of Ra and as the World War one begun, watches, gun sights, compasses and aircraft instruments manufacturing reached its peak (151).

There is no doubt that this fluorescent paint sounded like a step in the right direction for US military and economy fair and square, thus; companies and corporations had been founded in various American quarters. R.E. Rowland recognizes in his book *Radium in Humans: A Review* that the new subsidiary of the Standard Chemical Company, The radium dial company, made the former enter the dial painting field in 1917 and by 1918 it started its operations in Chicago. In 1920, it changed its location from Chicago to Peru, Illinois. It did also move to a high school building in Ottawa, Illinois. The radium dial process continued at that site beginning from 1922 until its closure in the mid-1930s (15).

The men in charge of this industry saw that it needed womanly features to be accomplished; they employed women who are in their turn in need of such lucrative and easy work. In this vein, Rowland adds in the same book that Kjaer, an officer of the company in 1925 stated that from the beginning of Illinois operations in 1917, nearly 1000 young women were employed. He added that each month a millicurie of radium was used by each dial painting

worker (15).

3.4. China in the Years between the Two World Wars

Throughout the history of China, the years between the World Wars can be described as gory and gruesome. Indeed, that era was prevailed by a series of burdensome historical events and successive revolutions which instigated a political and social unrest.

As early as the twentieth century, china was still ruled by the Qing dynasty also known as “Manchu dynasty” for thousands of years, which was at that time weakened by many foreign forces until it was completely overthrown by a group of Chinese revolutionary leaders who sought to establish a republic, including Sun Yat-Sen. This latter abdicated his position as a president in favor of Yan Shikai, who worked as a general during the Qing autocracy. Matthew R. Portwood and John P. Dunn allege, “Yuan never connected to Republicanism and shortly before his death attempted an imperial restoration (1915-16)” (17). His death in 1916 brought nothing good to the country, but prompted the appearance of the vilest period of the interwar China, The Warlord Era. That is to say, Yuan’s egoistic ambitions over the absolute power did not evanesce along with his passing away but rather renewed by his successors, the warlords.

The Twenties in China were marked by the birth of the Warlord Era that was for the Chinese people a time of atrocities and disorder resulting from the country’s misrule. This period was further worsened by some catastrophic incidents such as, the North China famine of 1920. Another incident that is reminiscent of the warlord era was the May Fourth Movement. According to Robert André Lafleur, a manifestation emanated among students who were shortly consolidated by workers, tradesmen, as well as craftsmen, as a reaction against the warlords administration who stealthily approved the majority of the demands that Japan had required and that unfolded in the time of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. He added that communist associations which were impressed by the previous appeals for reform and effected by the communist literature, expanded all around China. Consequently, a group of arrangers such as

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Mao Zedong established the communist team of China in Shanghai in 1921 (59).

Meanwhile, the calls for reform progressed and propagated throughout China, the warlords persisted tenaciously in maintaining verdict and full control over their territories and their residents. The former revolutionary leader Sun Yat-Sen did not throw the towel and concede defeat by the solid dominance of warlordism; contrariwise, he endeavored with all patriotic spirit to reunify the country under one republic, the Republic of China. Accordingly, LaFleur further says, “In 1923 Sun Yat-Sen became the leader of a new coalition government the National Revolutionary government, again based in Guangzhou. He also states, Sun realized that no central power would be possible without strong military backing, and so he founded a revolutionary army and Whampa Military Academy to train officers for war against the northern warlords” (59-61).

Sadly, Yat-Sen was not fortunate to realize what he was accurately preparing for, as death came to extinguish the flame of revolution that had always been his desired goal. The period after Sun’s death was a period of rivalry and fights over dominance and power between the two prominent political parties, the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. This idea was highlighted by Rebecca E. Karl in her book, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History*. She claims:

By April 1927, Chiang’s forces had reached Shanghai. He finally was able to turn the fury of his counter-revolutionary convictions against the very revolutionary forces that had sustained him and his army. Beginning with a brutal assault on communists and workers in Shanghai that eviscerated the CCP and their urban-based labor unions, the attack soon spread to the rural areas, where peasant leaders, organizers, and everyone close to them were summarily killed. (33)

As a consequence, a Civil War was initiated between the two political parties, triggering the historically recognized under the name of “The Long March” of Mao and his fellows. However,

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three years after the long march incident, the two parties created the second united front to fight their country's real enemy, the Japanese colonizer. LaFleur, states again that, "Attacking Chinese troops near Beijing in July 1937, Japan quickly captured the city and then moved to occupy most of China's major coastal cities". He added that "[b]oth the Nationalist and Communist parties took a two-pronged approach to the war with Japanese" (61).

As stated in the Encyclopedia Britannica, the war was not announced up till December 9th, 1941, it perhaps can be split into three stages: a time of speedy Japanese progress up to the year of 1938, a term of implied impasse until 1944, and the terminal phase when the united forces' revenge took place, mainly in the pacific and on the Japanese Islands, and this gave rise to Japan's Capitulation ("Second Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945").

3.5. Society, Economy and Women in the Interwar China

China in the years between the two World Wars did not only experience a political chaos, internal and external wars, but it also witnessed an economic growth and prosperity. Warren Bruce Palmer contends that due to the First World War, China bore witness to an expansion in its market and a progress in the contemporary economy. He also argues that the economic evolution escalated during the 1920s regardless of the extremely precarious political atmosphere. Moreover, the 1930s universal downturn, unlike in the other countries, was less effective in China. He further explains that near the end of 1930s the neoteric industrial domain represented not more than 5 percent of GDP whereas traditional artisanship manufacturing surpassed 7 percent. Traditional agriculture remained as the output's primary fountain (84).

Much the same as America, China in the twenties saw the rise of a consumer culture following the economic boom. Keith Schoppa maintains that in the mid-1920s, a lot of urban areas, particularly the ones with external colonization, displayed a fast increase in consumer culture. He also affirmed, "Indeed many historians have called this period the twentieth century's 'golden age' for Chinese entrepreneurs and businessmen" (66).

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This period is also characterized by the emergence of movements led by social activists and reformers who aspired to enhance the conditions of the people in general and of women in particular, as they sought, for the most part, to emancipate them. Women in China were usually subject to ruthless experiences and heavy encumbrance that they carried throughout their life in early patriarchal societies, which used to impose constraints on their domestic and public life. Marriage was commonly considered as the fundamental part in Chinese women's lives. It was always their anticipated fate from the date of their coming to life. In her journal article "Education of Females in China: Trends and Issues", Jing- Qiu Liu states that "Marrying well attached dignity and grace to a female" (44). Whilst Jake McIvor affirms That, Marriage in the Qing Dynasty is a union controlled by two families, in which the wife and the husband serve as the spokespersons, rather than by two independent people (8).

Concubinage was a common custom in China that exploited women sexually. McIvor further declares, "This practice was directly connected to the other ways in which married women had their bodies regulated within the Qing Dynasty, through the control of women's sexuality" (9). Concerning education, Liu, in the same article, asserts that girls from aristocratic families were tutored at home on how to be a loyal wife and an honest mother to her son(s). Consequently, "the more education a female received, the more she would be subject to a man's control mentally and psychologically". Their engagement in the public education was forbidden (45).

Notwithstanding, all these atrocities and brutality that females received during the old autocratic rule were vanishing progressively starting from the early republican era with the cropping up of feminist movements and reformists. Yuhui Li states, "This period of the women's movement in Chinese history was named May Fourth Feminism, referring to the May Fourth Movement during the 1910s and 1920s when mostly intellectuals protested against the corruption and incompetence of warlord government and against foreign invasion in China" (31). He adds

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that it was the earliest feminist movement in China that confronted the division of the Chinese society according to gender in an outspoken and organized manner (31). One of the reforms that the May Fourth Movement brought about was female's higher education. Wong Yin Lee avows that in 1920, after nine years of the establishment of the Republic of China, the initial procedure concerning mixed superior schooling showed up, when two female students formally joined the Beijing University (356).

During the interwar years, Chinese women's involvement in the labor force was also encouraged. Here then, Honig's 1986 research maintained that women in Shanghai, one of the Chinese cities, exhaustively investigated, encompassed nearly two-thirds of factory employees; at the beginning of the 1930s, "almost three-quarters of Shanghai cotton mills- hands were women" (qtd. in Hershatter 52).

3.6. Women and the Silk Industry

Silk making existed in China since the ancient times, the so called "silk country" managed to develop a "Sericulture" which stands for silkworm cultivation for the sake of silk making. Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis informs that sericulture existed in China since the third millennium B.C.E and the Chinese people, notably women, became concerned by mulberry cultivations, silkworms care and silk-making process (10). She further expands that silk production sovereignty remained Chinese for 3000 years until its expansion to Korea and Japan. Thereafter, it moved westwards through maritime and land routes known as Silk Road to reach Byzantine and Medieval Europe, arriving to Muslims through the extreme North Africa, Spain and Sicily to reach the remaining quarters of Europe (11).

On the verge of the eighteenth century's end and the last days of the dynasty Qing, the statistics and facts changed. Robert Y. Eng confirms that silk and similar products exportations took around a fifth and a third of China's total exports between 1885 and 1930 (12). He also argues that China's foreign trade growth was not necessarily the offspring of

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imperialism, but the result of the policies adopted during Sino-Western Trade such as economic concessions' security, tariff autonomy loss which eased foreign commodity import and local raw materials export including silk, in addition to foreigners' judicial protection during extraterritoriality (12).

Another important point that is worth mentioning is the starring role played by women in what concerns China's lost monopoly over silk trade. As J. W. Powell accentuates, "Chinese women are determined to regain for their country the honor of being the producer of the best silk in the world" (133).

Silk making became no longer a traditional handicraft performed only by modest tools, or done only at the small rural villages. It became an eminent industry of the biggest cities in China, in addition to the western touch to the techniques and the materials enhanced. So Li Shi, in her book *The History of Science and Technology in the Qing Dynasty*, affirms that the British Jardine Matheson founded what is called the Jardine Spinning Bureau, marking by this the first establishment of machine silk factory in China. In the same matter he asserts that the first Chinese adoption of the high technologies was made by Chen Qiyuan who established the Chang long Silk Factory in Nanhai (1872). Li Shi adds while describing the machinery used, "The silk factory machine which was called the machine steam shovel at the time. It has adopted the steam boiled silkworm method, and the machine quickly uses steam power and transmission".

Conclusion

This chapter provided an insight about Melanie Marnich's play *These Shining Lives* as well as Gail Tsukiyama's novel *Women of the Silk* by giving the summaries of both literary texts. In addition, it sketched the biographical backgrounds of the author and playwright. Likewise, the United States of America and China's history during the early twentieth century and the interwar era have been thoroughly discussed. In the upcoming chapter, the focus will be laid on the theoretical framework by bringing forth the major ideas and concepts of Feminism, Marxism,

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and Marxist feminism that are used in the analysis of the play and the novel.

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Introduction

The previous chapter has thoroughly outlined the historical as well as the biographical context. The present chapter will deal with the theories and methodologies that the full-length of this corpora will be based on. First, the study will discuss the Feminist movement and approach, and then it will delve into an exploration of the Marxist approach. The last part will highlight the Marxist-Feminist theory and how it was the offshoot of the previously mentioned theories.

1. Feminism

The mishandling of women and their sidelining in the society led to the denial of their worth and significance. Thus, vigorous attempts to liberate women all over the world fostered their emancipation so that they could live freely as normal human beings and get involved in the public sphere. These potent endeavors to extricate and emancipate women from the miscellaneous oppressions and unjust treatments were universally acknowledged and recognized under the term ‘Feminism’.

Feminism is widely studied and variously defined. For instance, in the Merriam- Webster dictionary, the term Feminism refers either to “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes”, or to the “organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests” (“Feminism”). Yet, whatever idea has been widely taken on feminism, whether as an ideological adherence or as a political movement, the most important thing to heed is that it plays a crucial role in women’s lives as it calls a halt to the sexism in all its shapes.

bell Hooks advances in the introduction of her book, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, that “Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (viii). She adds that she appreciates this denotation that she has first provided ten years earlier in her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Hooks also explains that she adores it for the clarification it gives about feminism as a movement having nothing to do with

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the opposition of male. She also claims that, contrariwise, it plainly shows that the source of the trouble is Sexism. Similarly, Martha E. Gimenez explains that, “Feminism is the struggle against sexism or discriminatory social practices and ideologies that result in male supremacy and female oppression” (39).

Antje Schrupp refers to the male supremacy and their preeminence in the society by the term ‘patriarchy’ that she defined “(literally: rule by the father)” (v), which manifest itself in different forms. Moreover, she affirms that, “Every patriarchal society has feminism” (vi). In this respect, she explains, these societies possess lots of members, usually women more than men, who disapprove the idea of male primacy over females as they fight for the women’s emancipation. (viii) These members are those we call, ‘Feminists’. Taking into consideration all the aforesaid, we may seize that feminism considers patriarchy as the fountainhead of women’s oppression.

The feminist struggle has an eventful past, as it reached almost all parts of the world. June Hannam confirms that the status of women in the society has already been discussed by separate women of the bygone eras (6). However, she argues that during that time, the thoughts they conveyed in their compositions did only inspire the minority of intellectual and high social standing people. She asserts that a noticeable alteration in the scope and variety of the evolution of feminism did not occur unto the eighteenth century (7).

The eighteenth century was the Age of Enlightenment, also called Age of Reason. It was a time characterized by the emergence of concepts such as reason, freedom and scientific method. In consequence, it had a great influence on women’s thinking. In this regard, Hannam further claims: “Women were excited by the new ideas of the Enlightenment and the upheavals of the French Revolution. They began to imagine an alternative social and gender relations and come together in various forms of associations to challenge male domination and to reject contemporary definitions of what it meant to be female” (7).

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Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, is an eighteenth century British feminist writer who was the first writer to call for the right of women to education. She had a great influence on the course of the British movement aimed to secure the women's right to suffrage. The French Revolution coincided with the evolution of her rebellious thinking, especially after the publication of her philosophical work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792). This magnificent work is considered as the backbone of the feminist philosophy and literature since it is still significant for contemporary feminists and human rights advocates.

However, even if the origins of Feminism go back to centuries earlier, "it was not until the late nineteenth century that the efforts for women's equal rights coalesced into a clearly identifiable and self-conscious movement, or rather a series of movements", as claimed by Martha Rampton in her essay "Four Waves of Feminism". The first wave of the feminist movement took place in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and discussed the women's right to vote. It was later followed by the second wave in 1960s and early 1970s, the third wave in the early 1990s, and carried on until the emergence of the fourth wave around 2012.

As a theory, feminism emerged out of the feminist political fighting and movements that sought to liberate women all over the world. This idea was shared by Mary Howkesworth and Lisa Disch who believe, "Feminism would not exist as a theoretical endeavor without the political struggles for women's empowerment that have emerged in all regions of the world" (1-2). They added that the feminist approaches came into existence in combination with feminist advocacy and intellectual procedures, searching to reveal the hindrances and chains that limit the lives of women, clarify their underlying forces and firmness, and establish systems for alteration. As they also affirm that from the beginning, the feminist approaches have been varied and controversial, mirroring the particular situations of their evolution (2).

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Among the different approaches of Feminism one may mention: Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism, Eco-Feminism, Anarcha-Feminism, and above all Marxist Feminism, which is a significant theory to this present research.

2. Marxism

Marxism is a nineteenth century philosophical doctrine spanned the length and breadth of Europe, threatening the stability of the capital owners and the Bourgeoisie. The Marxists advocate the basic role of the people as a group rather than as individuals. This was not only manifested in their thoughts and beliefs, but also incorporated and translated in their works. As Emile Burns claims in his book, *What Is Marxism?* that Oliver Cromwell, for instance, is not eminent due to his own individual deeds but rather due to his efficient role as a part of English people's revolt against the former ruling system. In this concern, he adds, "So Marxism approaches the study of history in order to trace the natural laws which run through all human history, and for this purpose it looks not at individuals but at peoples" (8). Burns further expands that the Marxist approach to history considers the combat between struggling classes as the foremost trigger of the human society's growth and blossom(8-12).

Raymond Williams in his book *Marxism and Literature* acknowledges the importance of the Marxist theory in relation to literary criticism, he argues that: "It is significant that 'Marxist criticism' and 'Marxist literary studies' have been most successful, in ordinary terms, when they have worked within the received category of 'literature', which they may have extended or even revalued, but never radically questioned or opposed" (53). He further considers the contribution of Karl Marx to literature, saying that Marx himself made his efforts; his typical intelligence and thorough discussions of literature are often quoted nowadays (52).

In his classic entitled *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx argues that the 'mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation' grows simultaneously with the development of the production. He adds, however, that a stark and unified working class is growing as well. He

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further states that the dominance of capital becomes a shackle upon the mode of production, thus, the intensified means of production and the socialized labor would attain a limit where they become conflicting with their capitalist 'integument'. Marx concludes by claiming that the failure of the capitalist strategies is inevitable, he says: "This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated" (715).

Karl Marx and Frederich Engel note in their book, *The Communist Manifesto*, that Bourgeoisie and its 'out of a clear sky' metamorphoses it brought were depicted as follows: "The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers" (12). The stolen warmth of the family was as well depicted in this book: "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (12).

In an attempt to reveal the truth about the capitalist-laborer relationship, Karl Marx states in his pamphlet *Wage labour and Capital*, that the capitalist, as it seems, exchanges their labor with money and that for a wage they sell him their work, he adds that this is just the appearance since what they really sell is their labor power, which the capitalist buys for a day, a week, a month, etc (22).

No wonder that Marxists did never surrender on attempting to reveal the venomous side effects of Capitalism regarding laborers. Thus, Marx further expands in the same pamphlet that neither the 'nominal wages', that is the amount of money for which the laborer exchanges his labor power by selling it to the capitalist, nor the 'real wages', which is the amount of commodities he can buy with this amount of money he earns, determines the relations which are understood under the coined term 'wages'. He adds that wages are defined according to their relationship to the capitalist's own gain and profit (44).

Paul Simon Adler claims that the Marxist theory is fascinating for various reasons:

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First, it values knowledge of history of capitalism to assert the impossibility of the notion stating that capitalism could be the end of history. Second, this theory analyses deeply the social life, unveiling the social relations goal within the economic process. Third, Marxism acknowledges the eminent role of culture and thoughts, associates these changes that occur to these latter and to the material base of societies. Finally, for scholars in organization studies, the Marxist theory plays a major role in setting the analysis of organization in a theory of broader structures of society (11).

3. Marxist Feminism

The Marxist views have been traveling universally. They gave birth to offshoots including Leninism and Stalinism, as they mingled with modern philosophies as well as cultural and social movements. Feminism, for instance, adopted the Marxian thoughts to create what is famously known as Marxist Feminism. Thus, Marxist feminism is the amalgamation of the two extensive theories of Feminism and Marxism. RahaSheivari advances in her article “Marxist Feminism” that, “Marxist feminism refers to a set of theoretical frameworks that have emerged out of the intersection of Marxism and feminism”. Heidi I. Hartmann declares that the Marxist analysis of Women's question was shaped in three forms and all binds women's oppression to production, setting women among the working class. These analyses conspicuously categorize women's relation to men with regard to laborers relations to capital, these three frames, as declared by Hartman are: first, early Marxists such as Marx, Engels, Kautsky, and Lenin believe that the reason for the abolishment of the sexual division of labor is the capitalist enticement of women with a waged labor. Second, contemporary Marxists analyze women within a capitalist everyday life, where all aspects of Life are meant to reproduce the capitalist system in which we are all laborers. Third, and last, Hartman concludes, “Marxist-feminists have focused on housework and its relation to capital. Some arguing that housework produces surplus value and that house workers work directly for capitalists” (2-3).

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In the past times, when private property emerged, women's oppression and subjugation became more apparent as men became the high handed. Hence, in their book *The German Ideology* Frederich Engels and Karl Marx mention:

With the division of labour, in which all these contradictions are implicit, and which in its turn is based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another, is given simultaneously the distribution, and indeed the unequal distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property: the nucleus, the first form, of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property. (52)

Therefore, while men dominated the public sphere, women were restricted to the domestic one. They performed no less than ten professions, namely preparing the daily food, cleaning, taking care of children, and providing psychological and emotional support to the family. Above all, they did extra manual works as part of the household tasks, such as sewing. These occupations have no time limits, and no rest time; they are the services that all women are used to throughout their lives. When capitalism surfaced as an economic system, it strengthens men's dominance over women since they financially secure their families, in this concern, Engels argues in his book *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* that the husband is compelled to be the breadwinner of his family, he adds that this grants him a position of sovereignty without being legally acknowledged. Engels says: "within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat" (80).

Consequently, their work at home is unrecognized, devalued, and uncompensated. Accordingly, Margaret Benston claims, "In a society in which money determines value, women are a group who work outside the money economy". She adds that their labor does deserve neither wage nor tribute, or even to be classified as a genuine occupation, thus far, these women

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are considered worthless in comparison to men who earn money (16).

In the twentieth century, mainly in the interwar period, women's exit to work stood out, although with small rates, it was still a remarkable alteration in the socio-economic condition of women at that period. And as the time passed, the percentage of working women increased from one proportion to another. In her speech delivered at the 125 Years of Women at Brown Conference, Janet L. Yellen holds that regardless of the customary opinion opposing women, especially wedded women who are in gainful employment out of the household, along with the finite chances being offered to them, women vehemently set foot in the working field in large numbers during the interval of 1930, rising their involvement's average almost to 50 percent for unmarried women and around 12 percent for those who are married (4).

As we may see, women's workforce participation is common among both married and single women. Nonetheless, the determinants that prompt their involvement in the paid labor are sundry and vary according to their social and economic status. Some believe that women went to work due to the economic necessity, as Nancy Schrom Dye asserts, "Throughout the interwar period, women went to work with their primary identity as homemakers intact – they worked to help their families rather than for self-fulfillment" (976). Whereas others, claim that women's participation is restricted only to their desires to accomplish self-realization and become acknowledged in their societies. In this regard, Myra Marx Ferree argues that the financial requirement that women struggle with is quite realistic, however it must not be permitted to cover the actual necessities that they need to the same extent, including the social intercourse and the feeling of pride in their own abilities (433).

The paid work did provide women self-confidence and escape from social and domestic hardship, nevertheless, it made their situation worse as they take the responsibility of both productive and unproductive labor. In accordance with this idea, Engels claims that women become double burdened; he argues that the modern era of industry introduced women, but only

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the proletarian women, to the social production, yet, she would be kept out of the public sphere if she accomplishes her private duties, also, if she is willing to earn money and be a part of the informal sphere, this would impede her from accomplishing her private 'family duties'.

Moreover, it should be noted that women received crueler handling as they joined the labor force. In the same speech, Yelen adds that women with poor educational background were for the most part drudged in sweatshops, while paid for the number of pieces they manufacture instead for the number of hours they worked, or were employed in household services. These kinds of occupations were grubby and predominantly hazardous (3).

Here then, we clearly understand that women were exploited in the working field; they became a source of wealth for the capitalists. Chandra Talpade Mohanty states in her book, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* that, "women's labor has always been central to the development, consolidation, and reproduction of capitalism in the United States and elsewhere" (146). As a consequence, Marxism highlighted the condition of women in the labor field and their maltreatment. This idea was shown in Silvia Federici's article, "Notes on Gender in Marx's Capital", where she advances that Karl Marx took into consideration working women and children's conditions in the working field by relying on reports which depicted their hardship as paid laborers. She says that, "Thus, by the time Marx began his writing, reforms were underway, and he could count on a copious literature on the subject, mainly consisting of reports by the factory inspectors that, by the 1840s, the English government was employing to ensure that the limits imposed on the hours worked by women and children would be observed"(21).

Similarly, Frederick Engels in his book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England 1844*, refers to the conditions of the female workers. He states that approximately 15000 of the young girls employed in London's dressmaking factories became the absolute slaves of their masters. He added that during the four-month 'elegant season' working hours increased with no

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more than three or four hours, sometimes two, as a time for rest and sleep. Engels expands that these girls were morally threatened to be fired by the factories' owners. Additionally, he believes that the lack of ventilation in the workshops and dormitories, the bad quality of food, and so on are all conditions that engendered hazardous consequences on their health status. Among these consequences, one may mention exhaustion, mental and physical vulnerability, pulmonary diseases, bone weaknesses and deformation and in most and worse cases short sightedness or incurable blindness. Engels also concludes that even those who retire and quit earlier transmit these diseases to their children as they give birth to weak and sick babies (209-210).

Referring to Engels, one might be cognizant about his essential contribution to the Marxist Feminist approach. Ursula Tidd mentions that the feminist Simone de Beauvoir focalizes mainly on Frederick Engels' theories, Marx's whole life collaborator and editor (1820-1895), as the main delegate of historical materialism. She adds that this is why Engels, rather than Marx, focused more on the status of women in his improving of Marxist Theory (62). In the same manner, Pieter Jacobus Fourie highlights the memorable contribution of Frederick Engels to Marxist feminist outposts, announcing that Frederick Engels in his classic written under the title of *The origin of the family private property and the state* launched Marxist feminist arguments where he debated that women's servitude to men did not appear only after the emergence of capitalism, private property, and monogamous family forms (389).

In the same article, Federici argues, "Marx for the first time examined the question of 'gender' not in relation to the subordination of women within the bourgeois family, but with regard to the conditions of women's factory work in the industrial revolution" (21). In the same matter, Hartman mentions that most Marxist analyses of women's status concerns the relationship of women to the economic system much more than women's relationship with men (2). Through this statement, we may deduce that women's unpaid domestic labor was neglected in Marx's analysis of capitalism and focused only on the issues they faced within their paid

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work. As Federici further explained, “he naturalized domestic work and, like the European socialist movement as a whole, he idealized industrial labor as the normative form of social production and a potential leveler of social inequalities”. Moreover she states that Marx approved that differences determined by sex and age would fade away at some time in the future, “and he failed to see that strategic importance, both for capitalist development and for the struggle against it, of the sphere of activities and relations by which our lives and labour-power are reproduced, beginning with sexuality, procreation and, first and foremost, women’s unpaid domestic labour” (20).

As a result, Lise Vogel in her journal article, “Domestic Labor Revisited” affirms that, “From the late 1960s into the 1970s, Socialist Feminist sought to analyze women’s unpaid family work within a framework of Marxist political economy”. She adds that they believed this study would serve as a basis for realizing the various status that women assume “as mothers, family members, and workers”, and consequently for a capitalist study of the oppression of women (151-152).

Shaharazad Mojab referred in her book, *Marxism and Feminism*, to the fusion of Marxism and Feminism, paying huge attention to the similarities that gathers these two prominent theories, she says: “This political affinity is, however, constrained by divergent theoretical commitments that are themselves political and ideological. Theoretically, Marxism and feminism have never been as far apart as at present” (3). She adds that feminism is the offspring as well as the producer of its bourgeois revolutions, whereas Marxism grew in the thought of Bourgeoisie’s claim of power and the emergence of the working class. This engendered two class positions: one fighting for Freedom within the legal and political scope of capitalism, the other targets similar goals via opposing and denying the bourgeois relations (4). Mojab further expands that the post 1980s feminist theory flourished hugely within the theoretical frameworks of post-structuralism, post-modernism, and the prevailing trend of Marxism. These theories

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

claim that the central focus of the capitalist system that is racist patriarchy. Hence, Marxism and feminism dogma opens the parenthesis to give birth to a trenchant confrontation versus all sorts of subjugation and oppression (24).

Fourie links the Marxists view with what corresponds to Feminist thoughts. He declares that the Marxist-influenced feminism stands against radical and liberal dogmas, he added that Marx refuses the thought of Biological Determinism which is against radical feminism, and he also denies the liberal claim that individuals can independently improve themselves in a class society where wealth and power are run by the minority (389). To conclude, Sheivari puts that the objective of the Marxist Feminist theory is to emancipate women from their situation of oppression and exploitation, thus from patriarchy and capitalism.

Conclusion

Marxism rejected Bourgeoisie's control over minds and property and labor division, in addition to the metamorphoses it brought to the social life. Feminism did acknowledge this notion arguing that its tyrannical norms set a curse on the lives of women be it in the domestic scope or in the frame of their labor place. However, feminist theoreticians argue that there is a lack of a Marxist discussion of women's issues in the domestic field. Consequently, this gave birth to a variant of Feminism called Marxist-Feminism. Since the authors of the two selected literary texts alluded to women's issues in both domestic and public sphere, we strongly believe that the Feminist, Marxist, and their fusion as a Marxist feminist approach will genuinely and perfectly suit the theme of this present dissertation. As will be shown in the analytical chapter.

Introduction

This chapter will be devoted to the study of the struggle of female workers' characters of both Marnich's play and Tsukiyama's novel with patriarchy and capitalism and their paths towards emancipation. Thus, this chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section provides an investigation of women's issue with different forms of patriarchy relying on the experiences of the main characters of both works. The second will highlight the capitalist exploitation of working women and the consequences it leaves upon their physical and mental well-being. While the third section will analyze the different steps female workers characters followed to achieve their liberation.

1. Women and Patriarchy in *These Shining Lives* and *Women of the Silk*

Melanie Marnich's *These Shining Lives* and Gail Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk* bring to light the sufferings of women from different patriarchal practices in their lives through the unlike experiences of the female figures of the texts.

A worth mentioning example of American women's struggle with patriarchy in Marnich's *These Shining Lives* is Catherine Donohue's experience with her husband Tom. To begin with, Tom's dominance is clearly featured in the second scene of the play when Catherine is preparing herself with excitement for her first day at the Radium Dial Company to serve as a radium dial painter. During their discussion about her job, the first signs of the patriarchal principles appear; Tom is not really in favor for Catherine's entering to the field of work, "I'm just saying you don't have to do this" (*These Shining Lives* 12). He tries desperately to convince her to stay home, providing her with various arguments about the cruel nature of work despite the tempting luxury it sometimes offers, "Making good Money doesn't come cheap. Work that pays well costs you something. You, sitting at a table all day ... Maybe they try and make it sound fun. But trust me; they call it "work" for a reason" (*These Shining Lives* 12).

Tom's supremacy is more apparent through his strong desire to remain the only family's

breadwinner, especially when he tries to find an alternative to Catherine's work, "I could pick up an extra shift" (These Shining Lives 12). By doing this, he makes her admit her vulnerability and dependency and accept that her maternal role takes precedence over all the other roles, as she herself conceded, "Don't worry. I don't want to be some, some career girl. I'm a wife. I'm a mom. But for a little while ..." (These Shining Lives 12).

Catherine's subordination and dependency on her husband becomes more perspicuous when she finally unchains her pent-up desire to realize and fulfill herself through her participation in the public sphere, "I want to know what it feels like to make eight dollars a week. I want to know. Just once. I want to be that person. For a while" (These Shining Lives 13). Subsequently, Myra Marx Ferree argues that the financial requirement that women struggle with is quite realistic, however it must not be permitted to cover the actual necessities that they need to the same extent, including the social intercourse and the feeling of pride in their own abilities (433).

In addition to being dominated by her husband, Catherine is seen as a tool of free housework services for the family. Such reflection, much like all men of capitalist patriarchal societies, is also shared by Tom who fears that Catherine would neglect her housework after having a waged work. This is evident especially when he wants to make sure that she will quit her job once their financial situation stabilizes, "Really? You'll walk away from it" (These Shining Lives 12). In this respect, in her article "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards A More Progressive Union", Hartman argues that, "Not only were women 'cheap competition' but working women were their very wives, who could not 'serve two masters' well" (15).

In the fifth Scene of the play, Marnich exposes another form of patriarchy that women bear and which is usually recognized by feminist critics and theorists as "male violence". After her entering the Radium Dial Company, Catherine endures the unfair handling of her husband

who expects her to stir her stumps to go at home and carry the load of house chores and child care. Upon her returning at home late, Catherine is received by her husband's displeasure, reminding her of her family obligations that are abandoned for a long day, "Your mom just left. The kids didn't take their nap, so they're monsters. Hungry monsters. I haven't had time to make dinner, so ..." (These shining Lives 23). Soon, his mood flips to become more violent when he realizes that Catherine spent some time out with her coworkers after she left work, believing that she neglects the responsibility of the wellbeing of the family which belongs only to her, particularly when he said, "Oh yeah? I'm late, nothing happens. You're late, this place falls apart, the kids go nuts, I gotta scramble —!" (These Shining Lives 24). On this subject, Harriet Fraod, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff in their article, "For Every Knight in Shining Armor" confirm that, "There may also be problems of guilt and anger about reduced female surplus labor" (50).

Similarly in Gail Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk*, Pei, the novel's main character, depicts the outrageous, yet different, patriarchic customs that Chinese women endure. In a strictly conservative society like China, women are weighed as being of a less value than men. Additionally, showing any sign of curiosity is not appreciated and thus "silence and obedience" are seen to be more appropriate and fashionable for a woman. In this vein, Ursula Tidd asserts, "patriarchal societies traditionally value women's reproductive capacity more than her intellectual development or autonomy means that laws, institutions and belief systems reflected this view of women's role in society" (52). However, Pei adopts the "wanted" to be absent typical behavior; though being young her actions and questions manifest a spontaneous "iconoclastic" vision, a fact that disturbs patriarchs, as Tsukiyama mentions, "It was hard enough to find a husband of worth, because a girl with such spirit was not wanted by most families" (Women of the Silk 7).

Another form of patriarchy that Pei sustains is the "gender bias". Her father, Pao, has

always favored having boys believing that they would gracefully contribute to the family's continuity. His extreme sexist thoughts are expressed in this passage, "It was the land Pao had hoped to pass down to his own son, but with the birth of his fifth daughter, he could see that this day might never be" (Women of the Silk 7). Letha Scanzoni and John H. Scanzoni acknowledge, "Sons were needed to carry on the family name and inherit the land. Such an attitude, towards children, has been common, throughout history, in traditional, patriarchal, agricultural societies" (364).

bell Hooks mentions in her book, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* that patriarchal domestic violence is performed through the use of violent force to maintain dominance and gain more power. She adds, "Children were also victims of adult patriarchal violence enacted by women and men" (61). Indeed, Pei is subject to domestic physical abuse, since Pao's unique pride is to have a male heir, he gives no esteem to his daughters, he becomes careless and severe with them. Pao's violent treatment is expressed in this passage: "even when he became so angry he took a stick to her" (Women of the Silk 12). From another part, her mother tries to loosen the matters, acting like a blind, and keeps always reminding that too much curiosity shall bring only trouble for her since it would not change the reality, as Tsukiyama puts in this passage: "After the beatings, her father would go out to the groves, and her mother would always remind her to keep her words for herself, "it's a lesson," her mother would say, though Pei never really understood what the lesson was" (Women of the Silk 12).

Pao sees himself financially unsecure without a male heir, therefore, he makes of his daughter a scapegoat. Despite her young age, he forced her to engage in a silk factory work after the fortune teller foretold that she would never marry, "Pei had been the child of guilt. Not seized by death or marriage, she had been given away, sold, in order to save the farm" (Women of the Silk 233). This highlights the thought that marriage is no more than a mere jail and that her life is worth nothing but being objectified. Hence, Pei pitifully experiences tragic moments when she

realizes that she was left, “Panic and fear twisted in hollow of her stomach as she ran down the steps and through the courtyard of the gate. Once again she was out on the hot, dusty street, but her father was nowhere in sight” (Women of the Silk 28).

In spite of her young age she was left there to swallow the bitter emotions of loss and loneliness. Tsukiyama portrays her emotions as follows, “Once the tears came, she couldn’t stop crying for her mother and for Li. Everything else seemed too hard to imagine” (Women of the Silk 19). As naturally grasped, Pei has a stark and solid connection with her mother and sister Li, they used to the only shelter where she cherishes her best moment, nevertheless, this bond comes apart; her destiny is to live alone and far away henceforth.

After studying both Catherine and Pei’s experiences with patriarchy, it would be interesting to note what Sylvia Walby, a feminist theorist and critic, states in her journal article, “Theorizing Patriarchy”. She says that, “There are six main patriarchal structures which together constitute a system of patriarchy. These are: a patriarchal mode of production in which women’s labor is expropriated by their husbands; patriarchal relations within waged labor; the patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal culture”. She adds that these six structures “do have a considerable, even though temporary, duration through time and space. In other times and places the major forms of sedimentation of gender relations in social structures may vary” (220). As it stands, Walby makes us realize that Patriarchy may take various shapes, and it may vary from one geographical area to another as well as from one period to another.

2. Female Workers Exploitation in *These Shining Lives* and *Women of the Silk*:

Capitalists give an emphasis to the inclusion of women in the public sphere, because they need the working hands and the efforts of women in production. In doing so, they take advantage of their inferiority in society as females and as working class members, to use them as an inexpensive labor, especially when it comes to their work in factories. Female workers’

exploitation has no geographical confines and it can take many forms. Hence, Tsukiyama's *Women of the silk* and Marnich's *These Shining Lives* adopt the subject of female workers exploitation by portraying the injustice that their female characters deal with in their workplaces.

Tsukiyama chronicles the harsh nature of the silk work and the dire conditions in which the silk factory workers labor. The capitalist exploitation of female workers at the silk factories is manifested in all its sorts and the violation of their economic and social rights has become a routine. Undeniably, the female silk factory workers, who are mostly underage girls, labor extremely hard. Their arduous conditions at the silk factories are portrayed along these lines, "The steam rose up like a thick cloud of smoke. Several girls leaned over the edge of the pot with large wooden spoons, scooping out the hot water into barrels, which were then transported into the basin room [...] When the girls stood straight again, their faces were flushed pink, their hair passed wet against their foreheads"(Women of the Silk 39).

Into the bargain, the working women have to undergo the long hours they work per day. The owner Chung who does not meet the simplest necessary conditions of his industrial establishment weighs down the young poor girls in long working days and treats them as slaves, working like machines with little relief. Tsukiyama narrates their situation in this passage:

The girls arrived every morning at five thirty. When the horn wailed its low cry for them to stop working at seven thirty each evening, they left the factory wilted and drained from the wet heat. Most of the time they were given half an hour for lunch and ten minutes off for every three hours they worked. Sometimes, if they were behind their quota, these breaks never came. (Women of the Silk 51)

Furthermore, the girls are regarded as commodities subject to market mechanisms without any regard for their rights as human beings first and workers second. When the production is not lucrative, the silk workers have to pay for what they have not done, as Tsukiyama sets forth,

“The past year had made conditions worse, due to the poor quality of cocoons coming in. They had to be soaked longer, yet they brought lower prices at the market. Chung, the owner of the factory, insisted the workers make up the lost revenue by working longer hours with no increase in salary” (Women of the Silk 169). In this regard, George W. Albee and Melissa Perry argue, “As the factory system gradually grew in the nineteenth century into a major source of employment for women, their perceived inferiority increased. Working conditions in the factories were abysmal, hours were long, pay was poor—jobs were not unlike slavery” (153).

Chung manipulates and misuses his female employees to accumulate wealth at the expense of their sweat, taking advantage of their poverty and their circumstances. They in turn have to accept his unjust handling because they lack job alternatives. Thus, silence and restraint became their only weapon to counter Chung's threats and intimidation, as Tsukiyama tells us in this subsequent paragraph:

What was once their means to freedom had turned them into virtual slaves for Chung. He knew that the girls would continue to work in silence, afraid to challenge the unfair hours for fear of losing their jobs. “Where can you find other work?” Chung told them, his thick, short fingers waving in front of his balding head. “Who will have you? There are many more where you came from!”. (Women of the Silk 169)

The female silk workers' torture and exploitation is not only restricted to the poor conditions in the factories and to the long working hours, but to the become subject to insults, abuses, and ridicules by Chung's managers, “These men moved up and down the aisles, slapping into the palms of their hands the long wooden sticks they carried. Pei hated their sarcastic laughter and smug looks as they grouped together watching the girls work. The managers complained loudly if something went wrong with production” (Women of the Silk 170).

The managers' only task is to mock the exceedingly overworked girls who are supposed to act in accordance with their frightening injunctions, “The male managers hired by the owner

Chung, waved their sticks and shouted, “Keep working!” The girls reluctantly obeyed” (Women of the Silk 51). It might be claimed, therefore, that offending someone with words is a on this basis, the US Department of Labor’s 1992 study declares that offending someone with words is a variant of violence in the working area that can be more effortlessly addressed to working women, who, unlike men, are improbable to run supervisory or official standings and consequently, to become powerful and challenge this cruelty is something out of the ordinary (qtd. in Beverly116).

Likewise, Melanie Marnich mirrors in her piece of literature *These Shining Lives* the pitiful and hazardous state under which the women work. The capitalists’ greed and neglect of labor precautions are echoed throughout the lines of her play so that the reader may feel how these women were expendable in their day. On her first day at Radium dial factory, Catherine is introduced to the lip dip paint routine, where she is stunned by the gleaming nature of the painting substance. Her curiosity is soon satisfied when her new coworkers reveal the mystery behind this sparkling paint as shown in this following dialogue:

CATHERINE. Why does it shine?

FRANCES. There’s a little radium in there.

PEARL. Just a smidge. (*These Shining Lives* 16)

It is obvious that the Radium Dial Company owners neglected the safety of their staff. In spite of the scientific evidences that proved the dangers of radium exposure, they took no action. As Charles A. Barone argues in his book, *Radical Political Economy: A Concise Introduction that*, “capitalists exploited and wasted the human resources through intensifying the work and neglecting the workers’ safety and health” (135).

The company owners created a false belief about the radium harmlessness to boost productivity and profits. Since the managers were scientists and the working class is illiterate, they would easily trust. Frances seems to be convinced by saying, “It’s all the rage. Clinics all

over Chicago, you know. Cures just about everything” (These Shining Lives 16-17). Also, Catherine’s first experience with radium tasting was unpleasant; however, Mr. Reed wrongfully guarantees that it is safe by saying, “It’s more than okay. It’s *medicinal*”(These Shining Lives 16).

This thought was reinforced as well by the media. For instance, the radio announcer tries to catch the consumers’ attention in his showy advertisement about radium watches: “Only Westclox famous “night and day” watches can boast that they’re painted with radium [...] It’s the finest radium guaranteed to keep glowing for twelve years or more. Over million customers can’t be wrong! They wear only Westclox and Westclox wears only radium”(These Shining Lives 26). In this regard Herbert Marcuse states in his study entitled *One Dimensional* that, “the media create products that indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood” (qtd. in Devereux 163).

Moreover, the owners trigger competition between the working women just to reach their greed, for them, as Machiavelli said “aims justify means”, this attitude is manifested in Mr. Reed’s description of Charlotte trying to attract the attention of other workers: “Believe it or not, Charlotte’s one of the stars of Radium Dial. She’s got fast hands” (These Shining Lives 17).

In addition, radium dial painting is a piece rate based work; the workers are paid for the numbers of the watches they per day. Thus the working women in Radium Dial Company are fostered to work hard and fast as shown in this following excerpt:

PEARL. Then again, you don't have to put the brush in your mouth. FRANCES. You can just roll it on the edge of the dish.
PEARL. But it's faster if you do.

MR. REED. And since you get paid by the watch ... (These Shining Lives 17)

On this basis, Karl Marx argues, “Given the system of piece-wage, it is naturally in the personal interest of the worker that he should strain his labor power as intensely as possible; this in turn

enables the capitalist to raise the normal degree of intensity of labour more easily” (qtd. in Lebowitz 100).

Another important point that Marnich highlights is the Capitalist falsification of the educated class’ identity. Indeed, the company doctor seems to be well trained and brainwashed by his masters, as he took no single effort in dealing with a normal appropriate diagnosis when Catherine over narrated her symptoms and pains with worry:

CATHERINE. There’s something wrong.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Mm.

CATHERINE. With my leg. My foot. Ankle. Moving up to here.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Arthritis is my guess.

CATHERINE. I’m too young for arthritis.

COMPANY DOCTOR. Weak blood.

CATHERINE. It’s not weak blood.

COMPANY DOCTOR. I’m prescribing aspirin

CATHERINE. I’ve been taking aspirin. It doesn’t work. I—I need to figure out what’s wrong.

COMPANY DOCTOR. You’re young. You’re strong. You’re a mother. You’re a wife.

You have a family to take care of. You’re perfectly healthy. You’re fine. (These Shining Lives 36)

On this subject, Albee and Perry attests, “Within the exploitative rich society, a small elite maintains its authority and control by manipulating the special groups (e.g. teachers, journalists, managers, the media) who themselves exploit (or justify the exploitation of) workers, especially women and minorities” (146-147).

Through our study of both Marnich’s play and Tsukiyama’s novel, it becomes clear that the female workers characters in both texts fell victims to the draconian nature of the factory

work such as the long working hours and overtime work, the poor wages, bad working conditions, to name but a few. However, the most abominable handling they ever receive is the employers' indifference and ignorance of their miserable conditions, as it is reflected in their fragile health conditions.

In the general run of things, employers and managers must take into account the source of hazards and workplace accidents and strive to cut them in the future, because their workers' safety is their first responsibility. This means that as workers respond to production requirements, owners and managers must watch for their safety and free the workplace from any apparent danger that could cause injury or death to workers. Nonetheless, the main interest of the capitalist owners is to stockpile wealth and fortune, the safety of the workers is no longer worthwhile. Hence, both Tsukiyama and Marnich give prominence to the capitalist employers' carelessness and its negatives effects on female workers' mental and physical salubrity.

In *Women of the Silk*, endangering the silk workers' safety has become an almost daily problem. To be specific, in her eleventh chapter entitled "Pei", Tsukiyama delineates the quotidian accidents that generate in the silk factory and their effects on the silk workers health in the following lines:

Slowly many of the girls came down with illnesses due to fatigue and the bad ventilation. Each evening the girls, damp from the hot steam, left the factory to walk home in the chilly night air. It was a monstrous situation that would stop only when they gathered the courage to fight Chung. Lin's prediction came true when a young girl working in another building died suddenly. The girl had been too scared not to work, even with a high fever and a bad cough. One morning, she collapsed in front of her basin and never regained consciousness. (*Women of the Silk* 170)

As it stands, Tsukiyama makes us realize through this passage that in some cases the owner's failing to fulfill the responsibility of his female workers' safety is not limited to minor accidents

and health problems, but also leads to death.

By the same token, Marnich thoroughly pictures in her play the tragic aftermaths that the radium dial working women endured. As it might be clearly grasped that these questionable outcomes were the seed that capitalists greedily grew. The managers in spite of their full consciousness of radium hazards acted blindly towards the women, and thus, their physical state slowly collapses and deteriorates and the painful symptoms they suffered from were in fact the initial signs of the incurable diseases they develop. Catherine says, “Specifically, I’ve been diagnosed with bone cancer, necrosis of the jaw, and extreme radium poisoning” (Women of the Silk 54).

Moreover, these women saw the worst and most terrifying scenes of their lives. For instance, Catherine experiences bone extraction at the same time when she is still alive; she puts a part of her body in a small jewelry box, where priceless things should be kept. Catherine’s miserable situation is depicted in the following dialogue:

GROSSMAN. Can you tell the courtroom what exactly is in this box, Mrs. Donohue?

CATHERINE. Two pieces of bone.

GROSSMAN. Bones of what, Mrs. Donohue?

CATHERINE. They’re mine. They were removed from my jaw. (These Shining Lives 63)

Furthermore, this extreme absence of safety measures is not only manifesting in the working women’s physic and health, but in their mental state as well. It is obvious that no normal human being would bear the rage and the despair they felt after discovering the truth. These results remained rooted in the consciousness and sub-consciousness of the victimized women as it was echoed as a kind of traumatic behavior, as Marnich puts in this dialogue:

CATHERINE. This is me dying, isn’t it?

TOM. Shhh...Shh...Just a bad dream. (*These Shining Lives* 61)

Considering this stated passage, we understand that these hallucinations and nightmares are the offspring of their unenviable health condition. Death became the only thought hovering in their minds, counting their remaining days to pass away.

After referring to the various shapes of the capitalist exploitation imposed on the victimized women in both Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk* and Marnich's *These Shining Lives*, and after analyzing and deducing the consequences of this neglect on both working conditions and safety measure, it might be said that capitalism, in various areas and time periods, exploits women just to reach its greed. It did misuse women and failed in preserving their safety. This claim is reinforced by Barone stating that it is of the good of the capitalists to keep the labor intensified as well as ignore the expensive health and safety measurements. He adds that such ill-treats speak for the failure of the capitalist regime to preserve its labor resources (135).

3. Female Workers' Paths Towards Emancipation and Justice in *Women of the Silk* and *These Shining Lives*:

Marnich and Tsukiyama allocate a significant part in their texts for the release of their female characters from the capitalist patriarchal subjugation. Both authors scheme out a set of basics as a plan towards the emancipation of their downtrodden figures, thus this section will be devoted to the study and analysis of some of the paths that female workers, of both Tsukiyama's novel and Marnich's play, followed to achieve their emancipation and fulfill justice, including Sisterhood, solidarity and rebellion.

3.1.Sisterhood and Solidarity:

Sisterhood marks the stark bond that ties women so that they reach their reclaim. Thus, big names of the feminist theory always glorify and acknowledge the role of feminine unity. In

this saw, Renate Klein and Susan Hawthorne declare that feminism could not be founded without the theoretical structure of Sisterhood. In addition to the functional embodiments adopted from that theory (52). In a similar view, bell Hooks asserts in her book, *Feminist Theory from: Margin to Center* that the thought of Sisterhood triggered by women's emancipation is engendered by the tyranny womenfaced (43). Verily, the shared experience of both exploitation and oppression highlights genuinely the power of unity, a fact that was described by Tsukiyama and Marnich in their literary works.

In *These Shining Lives*, Marnich ascertains the suffering and exploitation of working women and elucidates the capitalists' disdain for their health and lives. Therefore, she devises a plan to liberate them and decipher their chains. Sisterhood was an essential part in the play and the first stage towards the working female figures' emancipation. This is simply because they share the same misery, and therefore, having one beside the other amounts to anything. To be precise, the female characters of Catherine, Pearl, Frances, and Charlotte are all belonging to the working class, as Catherine openly avows, “ But we are just girls who wanted to work [...] ordinary girls” (*These Shining Lives*9-10), and inevitably, any victimization or unjust treatment in their workplace would affect them all women first and workers second.

The harmony and unity between these women is manifested in the third scene, describing the fun atmosphere women create at work in order to make it easier and enjoyable, “They point the tip of their paint brushes between their lips, dip the brush in the paint, and paint the dials. They paint, sing, hum, happily. They love the companionship, camaraderie” (*These Shining Lives* 14). Most crucially, the dial painting studio turns out to be an outlet to break their usual silence and release their restricted thoughts and emotions. Even if their conversation is made up of casual talks and hearsay about other people, still, they give much importance to its indispensability, as Marnich sets forth in this passage:

Pearl. We're not gossiping.

Frances. What then?

Pearl. We're sharing vital information about our surroundings. It's crucial to our survival.

Frances. It's gossip. Gossip is the devil's radio.

Charlotte. Well, I like his station. And if you ask me, that's why the workplace was invented. To give us all somewhere to talk. What are we supposed to do? Sit here and be *quiet*? (These Shining Lives 21)

In fact, Pearl and Charlotte prove to be definitely right, sharing views and thoughts and having talks is vitally important, as it would mitigate the sentiment of loneliness and inhibition. If the women did not share their unyielding experiences of exploitation and rough handling they receive in their working space, and if they were not open about the effects the employers' irresponsibility and their disregard for the workers' safety left upon their health, they would never find the avenue to their liberation, as Catherine says, "The company doctor was a liar. But no other doctor in our town would see us. So we had to go to the city [...] to find the one doctor who would risk his name" (These Shining Lives 46).

The women in the play prove that their presence for each other is sacred. For instance, even while she is fighting her illness, Catherine is still not ready to quit her job, because for her the relationship that binds her to the other women at work is more than collegueship; it is an eternal commitment, as she herself puts in plain words to her husband " I don't think I can leave my friends there. I'd feel like I'm deserting them [...] You don't understand. These girls... They broke the mold. I feel like we grew up together. More than that. I can't leave them" (These Shining Lives 41).

Similarly, in Tsukiyama's novel the notion of sisterhood is profusely jingling and

trenchant. Doubtlessly, the forged sisterhood helps the girls to resist the burdens they held. At the silk factory they find the shelter and the acceptance they due; watchful eyes, attentive ears, thoughtful minds, and the kindest hearts. Tsukiyama mentions, “Ever since I came here, you’ve been my only family” (Women of the Silk 59). Indeed, Pei’s horrible experience with her rigorous father and the loss of her mother and sister Li would soon switch to a sisterly friendship with Lin that would never fall apart.

Notwithstanding the miseries they endure daily, the girls succeed in finding a way to strengthen more their friendship through entertaining themselves, as Tsukiyama sets, “At other times, Pei might go with Lin and a group of the girls to visit the village temple” (Women of the Silk 52-53). At least they reduce the pressure of the mental and physical issues they go through each and every day. Besides, they celebrate the freedom that was not granted to them by their families which adds more power to this friendship as well as to their self-esteem and existence. Hence these moments would certainly remain a sign of unity to the eternity, as Tsukiyama depicts, “Pei knew that no matter how far away she might be from Yong Kee, she could never forget its years of kindness. Lin and the sisterhood had been her life for so long; they were burned into her heart (Women of the Silk 268).

Marnich and Tsukiyama pay a memorable tribute to the solidarity fostered between the working women. Both authors show how these women translate their sisterly feelings into benevolent actions. It must be confessed then that the strong ties of sisterhood engender a stark solidarity. This claim is reinforced by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese saying, “At the core of the notion of sisterhood lies the affirmation of solidarity and similarity of all women” (13).

Tsukiyama proclaims the glory of the sisterly unity and the highness of the solidarity between the girls. The spirit of responsibility, duty, goodwill, and indeed commitment is highly present. In the times when the Japanese Empire was expanding westwards, where they dwell,

hoard was scarce and the circumstances do not bode well. However, the girls act in a complete determination, as Tsukiyama writes, “As Pei stood amid the sea of jars, she knew at the moment that Moi was showing her how much she cared for them, she was trying to protect them. She would never let them go hungry, no matter how bad the war became. Moi was storing food for the hard times, readying herself for the long winter ahead (Women of the Silk 259).

The girls help each other in confronting the unbearable missions of the owner Chung and his trustees. Pei, for instance, was under the caring and painstaking coaching of her fellows when she began her career as a silk worker. Hence, the girls are always due on demand to loosen and soften the matters. Correspondingly, Tsukiyama illustrates well this claim expressing, “Gradually, with the help and kindness of Lin and Mei Li, she grew accustomed to the rigorous routine and the long hours of standing” (Women of the Silk 52).

In a similar way, in *These Shining Lives* there are abundant instances of solidarity between women. The female characters’ mutual support is catalyzed by their loyalty to each other, whereby the strong one is present to provide help to the weak and the rich one to sustain the poor. In the fourteenth scene when Dr. DALITSCH uncovered the appalling truth about their illness resulting from the radium poisoning and its brutality in all their cases, the women found no soother but each other, as Catherine avows while subsiding her friend Charlotte, “We’re on the same side, Charlotte” (These Shining Lives 48).

The greater the women’s plight, the greater their consolidation. This idea is firmly evidenced as soon as Catherine's health and economic condition deteriorated. Her friends Pearl, Charlotte, and Frances came just in time to make up for her loss, restoring strength and energy into her life again and bringing happiness and reassurance to her heart. These moments of assistance and compassion are highlighted through the following dialogue:

PEARL. No. I said “Knock Knock” Now you say —

CATHERINE. Who's there?

PEARL. Aardvark.

CATHERINE. Aardvark who?

PEARL. Aardvark a million miles for one of your smiles! (A beat.)

FRANCES. We didn't actually walk here, we took the trolley, but ... (Catherine laughs in spite of herself.)

PEARL. See! I made you smile! I knew I could do it. Told you, Frances, told you.

(These Shining Lives 58)

Withal, the women seem to be unsatisfied with their moral backing for their hopeless friend, so they teamed up together to provide her with food and many basic daily necessities to meet her needs, especially after Catherine is fired from work. Their invaluable deed is forthrightly shown through their conversation:

CATHERINE. I can't accept all that! It's too much. I know you all meant well, but I can't — (Charlotte enters, wiping her hands, during Catherin's last line.)

CHARLOTTE. You can and you will and we're not going to hear another word about it. (To Frances and Pearl.) Girls, you mind? Just a minute?

FRANCES. Of course. (Frances steers Pearl toward the kitchen. Pearl stops.)

PEARL. (To all the women.) You know the really funny thing that happened today? For a minute, it felt like we'd been together forever. Forever. (These Shining Lives 59)

As it is obvious in both texts, the starring role of solidarity in these women's daily lives is unquestionable. Hence, it can be understood without any doubt that solidarity can be their first weapon in the face of injustice. In this regard, Julia A. Spiker argues in her book, *Empowering Women: Global Voices of Rhetorical Influence* that solidarity engenders a mighty unity which

can pave the way to worthwhile movement (125).

3.2.Rebellion

Epic lines of a strong willing revolt are evoked by Tsukiyama and Marnich in their texts. Both authors depict how these women are fed up of all the exploitations that shackled their lives and took off their youth and aspiration. For those women, it is high time to say enough, unify their voices as well as the sisterly strengths, and join together until reaching the salvation and emancipation they sought and dreamed of long ago. For sure, when there is the rebellion (44). And thus, in both texts the working women engage in to restore their stolen rights. In this concern, Robert Max Jackson argues, “Women helped erode gender inequality through several levels of action, including passive responses to altered circumstances, active efforts as individuals, and collective action in social movements” (173).

The working women begin their journey of collective action towards fairness. They opt to go on strike to better their situations. In so doing they venture by holding secret meetings where they plan for the rebellious move, also by rising the consciousness as well as sharpening the metal of the other women via strong speeches. These women have nothing to lose anymore and are ready to face anything, as Tsukiyama mentions, “Our only chance to fight Chung”, Chen Ling said, “Is for every one of us to come together and shut down the factory!” (Women of the Silk 171). She argues after a long discussion with all the working women about what they insist on that it is necessary to go on strike and stay together.

As it may seem, the owners would not easily grant the women what they want, they would rather keep their usual rituals of procrastination. Nevertheless, the women insist on claiming their demands, as Tsukiyama tells, “Chen Ling and Lin led the fight with strength and strategy, refusing to be strangled by Chung. His threats of starving them out before he would yield to their demands went unheeded (Women of the Silk 181). Even the death of Sui Ying by their guns did not move their stillness. Indeed, it adds fuel to their wrath and influences other

workers to react and strike later. Tsukiyama puts: “But as word of Sui Ying’s death spread through Yong Kee, other silk workers followed suit and went on strike” (Women of the Silk 180). The women did not surrender until this rebellion finally comes with its crops, the owner Chung submitted to their demands and the working women managed to change their situation, “You will have ten-hour work days from this day forward [...] sometimes twelve- hour days ,if there should be a large shipment due; you will be compensated for the extra work [...] You will have one day off every two weeks” (Women of the Silk 186).

In *These Shining Lives*, Marnich sketches rebellion as a central factor behind her female characters liberation. In fact, the women’s defiant new identity arises as a result of their repressed oppression and exploitation, and is highly strengthened and encouraged by their interchanged support and solidarity.

The women realize that they are the “easy to use and dispose of” instruments of their employers, as Charlotte explains to her friends, “They did this to us! They did this and they knew it! They threw us away for a few watches! That’s what we’re worth! That’s what you’re worth!” (These Shining Lives 48). It became clear to them who is their archenemy and thereby they have only two options in this battle, to defeat or to be defeated, as Charlotte says, “If we’re going to put up a fight — or lie down and die. Because that’s our choice as I see it” (These Shining Lives 53).

It is worth saying that the trouble is not only in the injustice of the wicked people but also in the silence of the good ones. Charlotte again incites her friends to fight the mistreatments they endure and encourages them to speak about their restrained hardship, “The Company’s counting on us just going away quietly, right? Maybe we should make a little noise [...] we could put up a bit of a fight. God knows we’ve earned it (These Shining Lives 52). From here begins their battle towards achieving justice and victory, as Catherine enthusiastically announces, “Fix our hair, stand up straight, and go get/ those sons of—”(These Shining Lives 53).

Catherine shows up as an example of sacrifice for the sake of her sisters and for the sake of humanity, carrying with her the traits of the revolutionaries as her only weapons towards freedom, as portrayed in this dialogue:

CATHERINE. I won my case six times. The Radium Dial Company appealed six times. After losing all six, the company appealed one last time, to the United States Supreme Court. Finally —

FRANCES. The Illinois Industrial Commission awarded Catherine 5,661 on July 6, 1938.

PEARL. She died 21 days later.

CHARLOTTE. After fighting the company for seven years.

FRANCES. Her case changed Illinois law so that companies could finally be held responsible for the safety of their workers.

PEARL. She was a test.

CHARLOTTE. She was an experiment.

FRANCES. She weighed sixty-five pounds. (*These Shining Lives* 65)

Indeed, Catherine's fearless and rebellious personality beats the capitalists' hegemony, as she brought the flame of liberation and justice to her friends and all working women and men and made of herself a human rights heroine whose name is echoed through history even after her demise.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have examined the exploitation and emancipation of female characters of our selected works. First, we have exposed the different forms of patriarchy that oppress women within their household. Then we moved to the discussion of their exploitation in the field of work. In the last section, we focused on the working female figures' paths towards their liberation.

General conclusion

This research have dealt with the issues of American and Chinese women with patriarchy within their family circles and the miscellaneous ways of exploitation they received by capitalism in their workplace in Melanie Marnich's *These Shining Lives* (2008) and Gail Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk* (1991). In this study we have pursued the analysis of both works female characters' experiences with the two oppressive systems, relying on the theories of Feminism, Marxism and Marxist feminism. We have also discussed the female worker figures' emancipation and their followed strategies to bring about justice. Thus, through our investigation we came to the following conclusions:

Patriarchy, like in many capitalist societies of the world, had a strong foothold in the American and Chinese societies of the Interwar Era. Through our comparative study of Marnich's play and Tsukiyama's novel, we concluded that although the American and Chinese Women have different social backgrounds and belong to two culturally different communities, both faced issues regarding patriarchy and its practices. Yet, it seems that patriarchy is more oppressive and abusive as a system in China compared to America.

As depicted by Tsukiyama, Pei, the main character of the novel was more dominated and maltreated in her family than Catherine in Marnich's play. For instance, she was exposed to physical violence despite her young age. She was also deprived of education because she is a woman and that knowledge does not suit her gender. What highlights more this dissimilarity is that both characters were compelled to enter the field of work by means of the oppressive practices of patriarchy, however this was done in different ways. While Pei was forced by her father to work in a silk factory to improve the family's standard of living and save his farm, Catherine volunteered herself to help her husband feed the family. In addition to that, she worked for the sake of self-fulfillment like most American women of the Twenties.

Capitalist exploitation of women in the working field surfaced in both American and Chinese societies as an intractable issue, due to the global industrial growth during the years between the Great Wars. This fact is substantiated by Melanie Marnich's *These Shining Lives* and Gail

General conclusion

Tsukiyama's *Women of the Silk*, as they presented the common struggles working women face under the global economic system.

Female characters of both texts experienced horrific events in the factories where they worked such as, long working hours for low income, few rest time, lack of safety measurements, not to mention the consequences they left upon their health and wellbeing whether physical or mental. However, the working women in *Women of the Silk* face a direct abuse like physical and verbal vehemence, whereas those in Marnich's play were less exposed to violence in the workplace. Instead, their exploitation was hidden. The managers and owners were treating them in a respectful manner. Pretending to offer the economic liberation and independence that most American women of the Roaring Twenties had. The Radium Dial Company owners take profit from the women's new position in society and misused them for their benefits.

It is true that women all over the world faced capitalist patriarchal exploitation. Yet, through our analysis of the works under study we deduced that women are not always silenced objects of the stereotypical capitalist patriarchal practices, they can also be the subjects and the actors of their lives. As a result of all the mistreatments they sustained on the basis of their gender and class in their workplaces, female characters in both works gathered their strength to reclaim their stolen rights. Marnich and Tsukiyama designed an identical blueprint to liberate their female working figures of their texts including sisterhood and solidarity and rebellion.

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Résumé

Cette recherche étudie l'exploitation capitaliste des ouvrières et leur grand combat pour la justice dans la pièce de théâtre *These Shining Lives* (2010) de Melanie Marnich et dans le roman *Women of the Silk* (1991) de Gail Tsukiyama. À la lumière des théories littéraires féministes, marxistes et marxistes-féministes, cette étude comparative aborde les problèmes auxquels les femmes sont confrontées dans la sphère domestique et publique de l'Amérique et de la Chine de l'entre-deux-guerres. Ainsi, le présent document de recherche illustre les différentes formes de pratiques patriarcales que les femmes américaines et chinoises endurent au sein de leur foyer. En plus des diverses formes d'exploitation capitaliste qu'elles subissent sur leur lieu de travail. Plus important encore, à travers des réflexions émancipatrices sur le féminisme et le marxisme, cette étude expose les mesures que les femmes qui travaillent adoptent pour surmonter l'exploitation capitaliste et revendiquer leurs droits.

Mots- clés: Exploitation des Ouvrières, *These Shining Lives*, *Women of the Silk*,

Féminisme, Marxisme, Marxiste-Féminisme.

ملخص :

يتمحور هذا البحث حول موضوع الاستغلال الرأسمالي للعاملات و كفاحهن العظيم من اجل تحقيق العدالة في مسرحية ميلاني مارنيتش المسماة " هذه الحيات الامعة"، و في رواية غايل تسوكياما "نساء الحرير" (1991). و علي ضوء النظريات الادبية النسائية، الماركسية، و النسائية الماركسية، تناقش هذه الدراسة المقارنة القضايا التي تواجهها المرأة في المجالين الداخلي الاسري و العام في اميركا و الصين في فترة ما بين الحربين العالميتين. و على هذا فان هذه الورقة البحثية توضح الأشكال المختلفة للممارسات الأبوية التي تتحملها النساء الأمريكيات والصينيات داخل أسرهن. بالإضافة إلى الأشكال المتنوعة للاستغلال الرأسمالي التي يعيشونها في مكان العمل. والأهم من ذلك أن هذه الدراسة، من خلال تحرير الأفكار النسوية والماركسية، تكشف عن الخطوات التي تتخذها النساء العاملات للتغلب على الرأسمالية.

كلمات مفتاحية : استغلال العاملات، هذه الحياة اللامعة، نساء الحرير، ماركسية، نسوية، ماركسية نسوية.