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Female perpetrated murder and criticism of the patriarchal system: Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and Eleni Yannakakis' *Cherubim in the Moquette* (2006)

The present paper, at the crossroads of literature (close reading), political philosophy and criminology, examines the representation of female perpetrated murder in two novels: Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and Eleni Yannakakis' *Cherubim in the Moquette* (2006). Gender identity has a culturally scripted and performative character, that is generated by power through repeated citations of hegemonic cultural norms (Butler 1990). These norms produce "melancholic" subjects, people with an "unhappy consciousness" (Hegel 1977[1807]).

In *Wife*, the Indian-born American writer depicts an Indian woman nurtured in a society which favors female hetero-determination and depersonalization. The heroine feels trapped in a mundane and a wedding for which she had great expectations. When she rebels by engaging in a sexual affair, she ends up feeling guilty and even more immured in the patriarchal system which shackles her. Eventually, she stabs her husband to death.

In her novel, the Greek writer Eleni Yannakakis paints the portrait of a Greek female murderer bred within an unhealthy closer and wider milieu, where oppression, hypocrisy, and material eudaimonism prevail. The woman-victim of the dream-stifling predetermined gender roles (Foucault 1976) and the "masculine domination" (Bourdieu 1998) drowns her lover in his bathtub.

The female characters depicted in the two novels are trapped in social roles that prevent them from free expression. Mukherjee and Yannakakis, by using free indirect discourse, demonstrate how their heroines' role of the dutiful daughter and that of the dutiful wife (and mother) are similar in their superficiality. The two heroines are also extremely concerned with their looks, since female bodies are objectified, and a flawless appearance is the sine qua non for a woman who seeks to arouse the male desire. Women are judged on their appearance, which endows them with symbolic capital, and makes them desirable in the market of symbolic exchanges (Bourdieu). The heroines' physical disorders and the concomitant grotesque imagery in the texts function as nonverbal cues of their psychological suffocation, since women's feelings are often not represented in the patriarchal system of language (Wolff 1996).

The two texts are configured in the tradition of the female adultery plot (found in many nineteenth and early-twentieth century novels) and yet subvert the typical outcome by having their heroines commit murder instead of turning to self-harm. The murder of a man, although clearly horrendous and illegal, is for the two female characters a radical action which refuses imitation, as opposed to every act and behavior in their lives so far.

The family in short circuit (Papanikolaou 2018), a synecdoche of a society in crisis, procreates female "monsters", alienated women who have experienced figurative murders and commit real-literal ones. These murderers reflect the cultural malaise of two societies which, despite being distant in space and in time, are not different

regarding gender issues. The two novels undermine the ideological construction of the Holy-Family and force the question whether there is a productive way for women to tackle long-term insidious oppression. By revealing the sociopolitical aspect of their narrative, Mukherjee and Yannakakis sharply criticize contemporary societies which are conducive to criminogenesis.

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