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The Other Woman Beyond Feminism

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Introduction

Feminism, it is often argued, resulted from a long period of frustrations, humiliations, ill-treatments, stigmatizations, injustices, and violence against women regardless of the levels attained by their civilization. Feminists have constantly put that such various forms of injustice and repressions against the category called the weaker sex begins and develops in the family unit, because the "patriarchal inscription"[42] is said to be one of the characteristics of quite all families. The family sphere appears in this case as an oppressive machine of the little girl and the woman's creative energies. Yet, conceptualizing feminism in terms of frontal opposition between the woman and the man may prove hazardous for the whole human society.

Though most feminists seem to have a negative view of the family, which, for them, has ever since become the space of repressive ideologies against women, this paper seeks to structure feminism around the family with both patriarchal and matriarchal pillars. The objective is to rethink feminism not in terms of "defiance"[43] of the patriarchal system of values as commonly advocated by most militants of the movement, but rather in terms of essence of the woman, or femininity.

The phrase 'other woman' used in this paper does not refer to any of the forms of family life created by some women because of their desire to escape male oppression in the traditionally-scheme family. By the same token, I do mean to discuss through these terms the case of single women having sexual intercourse with married men.[44] The article will not focus on the woman's recollection of frustrations experienced in the family circle – a recollection, which, it is normal, cannot but give rise to a sort of wrath mostly permeating discourse and practices of feminism.

[42]This phrase is used by Cora Kaplan in her essay " Speaking / Writing / Feminism," published in *Feminisms*, edited by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, 1997, p.41

[43] I quote this word from Cora Kaplan, who refers to it in terms of being outside the patriarchal system mentioned above, loc. Cit, p.41

[44] Giving an account of some books, critic Helena Michie quotes various definitions of what is termed as the "other woman." That often equates with women's "third world," or sometimes with "the lesbian", or the woman who is "excluded or resists the embrace of Oedipal sisterhood" in "Not One of the Family: the Repression of the Other Woman in Feminist Theory" in *Feminisms*, p. 57

Instead, it will define feminism through a study of the evolution of a lower class uneducated woman in John Steinbeck's masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*[45].

This novel is usually described as concentrating on the depiction of the dire living conditions of migrant croppers at a time when America was changing from a subsistence-form of economy into a complex capitalist system of production and ownership. But *The Grapes of Wrath* also addresses the notion of gender promotion, an issue that has become one of the major preoccupations of modern society aspiring to promote egalitarian human communities. It focuses on the story of a particular family, the Joads, whose search of better living conditions juxtaposes with the evolution of Ma Joad, a woman from Oklahoma, where the family formerly lived before moving to California. Ma Joad's situation is that of many other women who, throughout the world, do not necessarily participate in feminist organizations. But the actions of these women silently leading another type of fight within the patriarchal system need to be closely inspected. That is the case of Ma Joad whose power of decision gradually increases in the course of the long trip of her family, till when she becomes quite the true leader of the family.

Following this evolution of Ma Joad, the first section of this study proposes a reading of her behavior through her plea for the family circle. This plea will be juxtaposed with the feminist discourse. The second part articulates the patriarchal system in the traditional family as the space where violence, oppression, and injustice against the woman are developed. As such, it is in the family system that the patriarchal hegemony must be fought against or deconstructed. The third and last section brings out one particular form of feminism as embodied by Ma Joad. The evolution of this poor-class uneducated woman recalls that while we celebrate the victories of feminists in various fields, we cannot deny the fact that feminist movements have not successfully answered the issue of the specificity of the woman, that is, her inner and natural qualities that make her different from man. Ma Joad enables us to suggest an answer to this crucial question.

I. Feminist Discourse and the Family Circle

The orientation given to feminism, it seems, is closely linked with a long episode of the woman's poor condition both in the restricted circle of the family referred to as the private sphere of the family and the larger arena of public life, or outside the home, called the public sphere. At the heart of the discourse promoted by the movement is principally the change of what Chris

[45] John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath* [1939], 1967. New York: Penguin Books. For subsequent references to this book, I will use *G.O.W.*

Weedon (1987 and 1989) calls the "existing power relations between women and men in society," hence the popular protest of women's organizations aiming at the defense of their rights. In some ways, most militants of the movement tend to challenge the patriarchal system. But they also envisage the possibility of instituting a modern culture that substitutes the manly 'dictatorship' for equality, and, maybe in the subconscious of some militants, a new order characterized by a form of dictatorship in favor of the woman ever since victim of what Rosemary Hennessy (1993) qualifies as "the forces of oppression and exploitation" (67) institutionalized by man. To some extent, therefore, man's longstanding dominance proves a permanent reminder of the need for the woman to launch an open fight against various forms of humiliations, injustice, and abuses recorded in human history. One of the logical consequences remains that conception of feminism according to which the family unit has always been the plague that the little girl and the woman must avoid as male hegemony comes into being and develops within the family circle.

One of the many ways for women to challenge the cultural legacy of man's superiority consists of female gatherings to share their experiences. For instance, sisterhood and lesbianism are reported by some female writers as answers to man's actions representing in the family circle some sort of Leviathan that swallows the creative energies of the little girl and, later, the adult woman. Sisterhood stands not only as a refuge but, more importantly, as women's desire to gather and share their dire conditions. Similarly, lesbianism, which raises controversies among puritan minds, appears as women's desire to own their body and sexuality. Lesbians react against the patriarchal convention enjoining to the woman what Cora Kaplan (1997) calls "deferential silence." (37) As a refusal of the silence imposed by traditional social conventions, lesbianism is interpreted as the woman's desire to be active by taking initiative for sexual relations. This results in an inversion of the power hierarchy traditionally controlled by the phallus. The "metaphysics of presence" – as expressed by Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (1994) quoting the French philosopher Jacques Derrida – is then subverted by the woman (103). This also means her refusal to "impersonate" herself, in reference to Spivak in his critical work on Derrida, 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman.' (Ibid, 168)

The patriarchal structure with man's privileged position over the woman is shown through various episodes of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. One of the many representations of this structure is certainly the status-oriented space mentioned in the description of the positions held by the members of the Joad family in their exodus to California. For instance, though she is pregnant

and fragile, Rose of Sharon, one of the female characters in the novel, is asked to sit at the back of the overloaded truck transporting the family. The "honor seats beside the driver" – as indicated in the novel (*G.O.W*, 103) – is strictly reserved for male characters. Such a structure compels both recognition and obedience from all members of the group when the narrator mentions Uncle John's opinion about the seat attributed to Rose of Sharon: "Had he not been fifty years old, and so one of the natural rulers of the family, Uncle John would have preferred not to sit in the honor place beside the driver. He would have liked Rose of Sharon to sit there. This was impossible, because she was young and a woman" (104). Although Uncle John feels ill at ease at the thought of letting a pregnant lady sit at the back of a truck, he can change nothing to an institutionalized practice which is merciless for ladies even in this fragile state (104). In addition, while she has practically become the leader of the family, Ma Joad is obliged to beg a seat in the front of the truck: "Can – can I get up front? I don' wanna go back there [on the load] no more – I'm tar'd. I'm awful tar'd." (252) We guess that if she were not tired, Ma Joad's husband would not have done her a favor, allowing her to seat in the front.

When Ma Joad, one of the two heads of the family in partnership with Pa Joad, is offered to sit in the front place of the truck, we realize that it is just an exception to the 'custom' or the 'tradition'. That tradition reads as a current practice that offers honorary position to male figures like the old Grampa (110). That means that although she stands for a pillar that helps the members of the family not to get desperate facing their worsening conditions, she, too, is attributed a place corresponding to her inferior status. Indeed, in accordance with tradition, the woman is asked to adopt a passive attitude when a man speaks. Like any woman, Ma Joad must not take the floor during a meeting led by men. She owns a position of a child, which means standing "behind" in a submissive position and ready to execute orders from men (109).

Following the death of Grampa, the former leader of the family, Pa Joad becomes the new authority and Ma Joad must stand "behind him." (151) Here again, the term "behind" describes the woman's position as being not in front of her husband but near him. She only takes the floor when allowed to. In turn, it means that her husband may not consult her in taking any decision, even though the novel depicts her as someone who plays an enormous role in the family. This reminds of the paradox in which most women in rural areas live. Despite their great contribution to the income of their families, women's status hardly improves. The patriarchal structure is therefore

apparent through the process of attribution of some military ranks to characters depending on their sex.

When feminist militants read such passages where the wet nurse is not respected nor cared about, their right to protest becomes an imperative action. It is certainly in this sense that one can read, for example, the attitude of Penda, a female character in the Senegalese writer Sembene Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* translated as *God's Bits of Wood*. In fact, during a demonstration on the public square, Penda declares that the women in the names of whom she takes the floor will have a march on N'Dakarou to express their grievances. While Penda's community expects her to keep silent as a woman and stoically accept her condition, she decides to lead a march. Penda and her comrades' march in the street, that is, outside the home certainly appears as something of the unusual. Also important to note is that their action may be viewed as a defiant one by male ideology. But acting as the leader of the group, Penda has resolutely decided to carry the revolution to the end. Openly revealing the reasons why she and many other women are unhappy, she produces a declaration that proves the women's firm desire of change:

> Je parle au nom de toutes les femmes, mais je ne suis que leur porte-parole. Pour nous, cette grève c'est la possibilité d'une vie meilleure… Et demain nous allons marcher jusqu'à N'Dakarou.[46]

Like Penda, many feminist militants are prone to overtly protest against the insufficient political opportunities offered to them, or against what they regard as an injustice. Going outside the home for protest actions becomes all the more normal as the home has always been considered the place where the patriarchal hegemony with its correspondent social laws unfavorable to the woman is first and foremost decreed[47]. Thus, the woman's conditions in the public sphere concerning such issues as gender equality, political and job opportunities are also realities experienced in each individual family. The actual results achieved by feminist fighters thanks to open protest movements are undeniable in the history of human societies. Similarly, no one can

[46] Sembène Ousmane. *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. Presse Pocket: Paris, 1971, p. 288 ("I am speaking in the name of all women; but I am just their spokesperson. For us, this strike means the possibility of an improved living condition… And tomorrow we will have a march to N'Dakarou".)

[47] In her essay "Me and My Shadow" published in *Feminisms*, edited by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, Jane Tompkins describes this desire to go outside the constraining family circle. Discussing what she names as "public-private dichotomy," she defines that dichotomy or hierarchy as "a founding condition of female oppression," in *Feminisms*, p. 45

deny the fact that the home has been for long the space where the woman has been regarded as a second-class citizen.

Unlike the character of Penda in Sembene's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* seems to make do with very little. Although her role is quite capital for the psychological maintaining of the Joads in their trip for better living conditions, she seems not to demand any particular position. Ma Joad's sole preoccupation, beyond any thing whatsoever, remains not so much her condition as a woman but rather the cohesion of the family. On many occasions, she is seen taking care of the members of her family, cooking food, carrying buckets of water for them, and providing the men with comfort when necessary. Reporting the positive effects of Ma Joad's capital role, the narrator draws the following conclusion: "And then, all of sudden, the family began to move" (113). Her presence livens the house up, but her great commitment is that of any woman conditioned in the traditional scheme of women's role.

Apparently, Ma Joad cannot be cited as a model woman who is aware of her victimized status caused by the hegemony of the man in the home. Instead, she displays such an outstanding self-denial that she gives the impression of not having any rights but only duties. For instance, she may believe that it is her duty to take care of her family despite the hard conditions that can make the family develop some sort of selfishness, hence the dislocation of the family. In addition, some feminist militants may have a reproachful view of Ma Joad's attitude as her actions may participate in the continuity of the patriarchal pattern which confines the woman in the mere role of spouse and mother.

Ma Joad's attachment to the family for which she strongly fights becomes an aspect of her status of woman. She embodies that category of poor class uneducated women incapable of changing their destiny. And yet, a close reading of Ma Joad's actions can be interpreted as a strategy that aims to reverse the system in which man is viewed as the woman's superior. Although she is illiterate, she develops a well elaborate form of intelligence that subtly deconstructs the patriarchal hegemony. That occurs when we consider the gradually-high position gained by this female character in the minds of her husband, her sons, and other male characters.

Indeed, we learn with Ma Joad an important principle in the process of gender deconstruction. Because inequalities against the woman come into being in the family, it is within the family that

the woman must fight against the patriarchal hegemony[48]. Ma Joad's empowerment in the family obviously influences both her husband and sons. As a result, the hegemony of the men – at least in that family – becomes less and less strong. The principle of the woman's rights proportionally grows in those men's minds, and the so called weaker sex comes to be a stronger one, holding a considerable position in the private sphere.

II. Deconstructing the Patriarchal Hegemony Within the Family Unit

One major characteristic of families in most traditional societies is the division of labor according to sex. Ma Joad's current occupation corresponding to that of any woman defined by the social norm does not vary. Acting and reacting according to what Tracy Ore (2003) names the "ways of being" of the 'model housewife,' as expected by that norm, she stays at home while the men of her family are preoccupied with job opportunities (Tracy Ore,101). Through a description of the American society at a time when man was still considered the sole leader of the family, the novel depicts gender hierarchy. In the Joad family, too, patterns of "social differences" define woman and man (Tracy Ore, 101). Often related to the level of education, such differences become characteristic of the Joads where the members are lower-class farmers.

Ma Joad is described as someone confined in a role of spouse and mother. In other words, she becomes respectful of some sort of scheme predefined by the traditional society. If we allude to Tracy Ore's analysis, we may say that this female character helps "construct and maintain the gender order" (Tracy Ore, 102). The question, then, is to know how Ma Joad deconstructs the scheme which she apparently perpetuates. As indicated above, apparently, she is not a model woman on whom a feminist militant can rely in order to "invert" – as Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (1994) put it – that binary opposition "whose hierarchy supports and is supported by power."(103) In Ma Joad's family, man is considered as superior to the woman.

As the characters' speech indicates, the Joads, like most families in the novel, are not educated people. It is also shown in the novel that while Ma Joad's influence in the family grows as the trip gets more and more arduous, she does not willingly defy her husband who feels defeated by the hard conditions. Yet, she becomes the pillar of the family since Pa Joad is no more capable of any action allowing his kinsmen to improve their social and economic conditions. Tom Joad describes

[48] That is a paraphrase of the famous expression by the poet Archibald Mac Leish who was one the delegates sent by the USA for the drafting of the UNESCO charter in London, UK, in November, 1945.

his mother as a woman who seems "to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken." (*GOW,* 79) As such, she is said to be aware of her leading position when Pa Joad shows his weaknesses or his failure. It is because of this position that she often asks Pa Joad to perform some tasks: "Pa, you go up to the store there an' get me some neck meat. Make a nice stew here." (273) Surprisingly, while we could expect Pa to react like a man, he obeys to these instructions. Other passages of the novel show that the entire family relies on Ma Joad for the survival of the community. For instance, in chapter 16, Tom Joad proposes to part with the rest of the family. The objective is to go faster than the old truck transporting the members of his kinsmen and reach, as fast as possible, California where job opportunities are allegedly great. To take a final decision, all the members turn to Ma Joad: "The eyes of the whole family shifted to Ma. She was the power. She had taken control." (185 – 186) The woman refuses to let her elder son leave the family for fear that the clan might scatter. Commenting on her particularly unusual and authoritative tone, the narrator puts: "Her [Ma Joad's] tone was cold and final." (186)

However, paradoxically, Ma Joad seems to perpetuate the patriarchal system when she allows her elder son Tom to reply to Casy who wants to join the Joad family. It is reported that when Casy made his request, though she became de facto the leader of the family, Ma Joad "looked to Tom to speak, because he was the man." (101) Thus, to the narrator, although she had taken control of the private sphere, she seems to refuse this position in favor of a male member. In this sense, she goes against some of the major objectives of feminist activism.

If such an analysis about Ma Joad's attitude is relevant enough, it is also true that she is aware of her power in the family. She is described as a strong leader who even asks male characters to perform the task she has designed for him. In other words, her apparent refusal to play a leading role and to evolve as her husband's subaltern (109) can be interpreted as a way of ascertaining that she has really that power. When she addresses Tom who represents the younger generation of men who could perpetuate male hegemony, it can be equally argued that she intends to assess her own position. As we can guess, Tom refuses to respond to Casy's request because he is aware of his mother's new leading position in the family (101). Indeed, in chapter 8, when Tom comes back home from jail, he notices the mental strength of his mother whom he describes as "the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken." (79) Such a description evidences the change in the Joad family, notably in terms of new leadership. If that image is both perceived and admitted

by a male character, it means that the woman's presence has become something settled in his mind. Even so, when the woman is attributed such a leading position in her community, she needs to keep on fighting in order to reverse, so to speak, the patriarchal order represented by her own son.

In the novel, the deconstruction of gender is an involuntary process but the result proves palpable enough. On the one hand, Pa Joad accepts his wife as a leader of the family, and on the other hand, Tom Joad, the new generation learns that the image of the woman is not always that of man's 'subaltern'. Instead, through his mother, Tom is gradually trained to develop another opinion about the woman, and he becomes aware of the woman's abilities to assume a leading position. In Pa Joad and Tom Joad's minds the change in the man / woman relationship becomes proportionally evident. Such a reality in the family unit hardly changes the woman's condition outside the home and she still remains in the margin of social progress. But the novel reveals that Ma Joad has gained important victories over the traditional male dominated structure. The fact that such victories start at home is very significant. When the woman's progress takes place in the family circle, the possibility for her advancement with regard to the many preconceived ideas becomes important.

The various improvements in the woman's social condition prove an irreversible tendency. But Ma Joad's behavior and her constant preoccupation demonstrate that beyond these victories, the issue of the woman's intrinsic nature linked with her social role remains a permanent preoccupation. If we assume that nothing is defined solely in its opposition to another thing but also by an assertion of its proper characteristics, it becomes necessary to conduct a reflection on the essence of the woman and her refusal to abide the ideologies and practices against her. Following that postulate, a discussion of the essence of the woman becomes imperative. The term 'essence' will be defined in the present work as anything that defines the woman not in a state of opposition to the man, but in terms of all the qualities that identify her.

III. Feminism and Feminine Essence

From the first female writers to contemporary female scholars, the feminist movement has been directed to denounce women's oppression and the mechanisms and causes of this oppression, proposing strategies to combat them. In modern society, individually or collectively, we cannot ignore the voices that continue to denounce this male domination. In the political field and on the social plan, many people now take for granted the positions held and the advantages enjoyed by women in their respective nations. Yet, women's victories over various forms of male domination

have not been easy to achieve. Indeed, feminist movements gained some major battles in the political domain with an increasingly great number of women challenging the hegemony of the man. In terms of employment, for instance, female organizations played important role as more and more women in the world today hold positions traditionally considered as man's privilege. However, the concentration on the public sphere can be a crippling factor in the gendered battle within the family unit. While an individual can stay with other persons for some time, she / he remains with herself / himself all the time. In other words, despite the nobleness and the appropriateness of the fight of many generations of feminists, the question that remains to put is to know if after all and beyond all these victories, it is the essence of the woman that makes her different from man.

The process of procreation will be used here to exemplify that notion of the essence of the woman. Indeed, that process developing in the womb of the woman comes to its final stage with the birth of the baby because the woman is anatomically endowed with organs that permit to give form to the project of the formation of the human being. The project of formation contained in the man's germ is provided in the course of the sexual intercourse. That is the natural scheme of procreation as proved by biology. From that natural process, it can be inferred that the woman's task, which has nothing to do with her socially gendered role, is to give life to what is potential, and unify the various energies that might disappear for lack of that unifying element she represents. Because life develops in her womb and as she generously transmits that life, she is naturally prone to fight for it. That is obviously the very postulation rejected by lesbianism as this radical feminist tendency claims that the woman must control her sexuality and the product of her sexuality. But in cases like this natural evidence, the question lies not so much in what we reject because of a certain counter politics, as in what appears to be a self evident fact.

In *GOW*, the narrator does not depict Ma Joad as a feminist in the sense of a militant fighting for a philosophy of rejection of her 'natural' status. Instead, that female character perfectly embodies another feminine principle, perhaps different from the feminists' fight, but essentially rooted in her belief that she has to play a central role in the formation and the harmonious growth of the family. As if she were conscious of her specificity as a woman, she poses as someone who leads the fight for the construction of the family through the preservation of human values in the conscience of her kinsmen and also in that of other migrant workers the Joads meet during their exodus to California. For instance, after the death of Rose of Sharon's baby boy, Ma Joad, whose

principle is to provide her family with anything it needs, asks her daughter to breastfeed a starving man (501 – 502). The man becomes not only the manifestation of Rose of Sharon's dream of having a baby, but also the symbol of any woman's nature of passing on life. Being respectful of the suggestion of her mother, Rose of Sharon poses as the metaphor of the generous mother graciously providing mankind with her own wealth. In a transcendentalist perspective[49], Rose of Sharon's maternal milk from her breasts represents the gift of the woman to a world in a state of agony due to the various mutations it undergoes. In the novel such mutations are associated with the loss of some essential values for the preservation of a humane society. Beyond the agonizing man, the two women, Rose of Sharon and Ma Joad, disclose one natural role of the woman as the carrier of humanity. As the young lady saves the man dying of hunger, so women are described in this episode in terms of saviors of humanity.

Ma Joad's sense of generosity remains intact despite the extreme poverty in which all migrant farmers live. In chapter 20 of *GOW*, for example, a crowd of hungry children attracted by the smell of the woman's cooking come round the Joads' tent. Ma Joad feels sad at seeing them and she is practically unable to satisfy them all due to the insufficiency of food. Nevertheless, she promises to give them what will be left of the family's food (284). In this condition, it is clear that Ma Joad does all she can to offer these kids a loaf of food. As the children's mothers come over and ask Ma Joad to stop giving their offspring any more food – certainly because they proudly believe that they do not need any assistance – her humanistic qualities are brought out and reinforced. Unlike these women, she proves that her maternal instinct arouses any time she sees a person in need. Ready to help, she certainly believes that these women's feeling of pride, which might convey a form of egocentrism, is far less important than her responsibility of a mother. This shows that in a more and more selfish world, Ma Joad still believes in the values of self-sacrifice and generosity that give sense to human existence. Because she develops the view that the woman is the one who naturally carries humanity in her womb, she does not consider the difficulties characterizing the migrant farmers' lives, but rather, the prospect of a future world wherein such human virtues could curb the feeling of indifference modern life seems to impose on people.

Ma Joad's sense of duty is equally at work within her proper family. Early in chapter 8 when the entire family gathers until the end of the novel, her great concern remains the cohesion of the

[49] I mean to recall that John Steinbeck is one of the writers known as neo-transcendentalists following the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Joads. Her obsession with the family proves that for her, the family unit is an irreplaceable social structure where the individual grows and learns about social values. While most feminists view the family as the place where sexist inequalities come into being, Ma Joad seems to reply that nothing can replace the family. She constantly addresses Tom Joad, Noah Joad**,** Al Joad, Rose of Sharon, Ruthie Joad, and Winfield Joad, insisting that they should remain within the family circle. Her stature has become so intimately associated with that of the family that when her older son, Noah, decides not to continue the trip with the rest of his kinsmen, Tom asks him: "How 'bout the fam'ly? How 'bout Ma?" (284) After being informed of her son's decision, she helplessly says: "Family's falling apart." (284) The unifying cement of her family, Ma Joad reveals that a woman is always the one who gives sense to the notion of family. Her actions recall that there is no human society without solid families and that more than that of the man, the role of the woman is crucial.

With Ma Joad, feminism comes to mean whatever makes the specificity of the woman. This specificity, for Ma Joad, is undoubtedly the woman's capacity to fight for the family so that it may become a current reality, because it is within this social unit that humanism comes into being and develops in our minds. Ma Joad's psychological strength makes it possible for the Joads to resist the hostilities of life. This contradicts the assumption that the woman is the weaker sex. She asserts her feminine specificity through her mental strength that saves her family from falling apart. As such, she poses as the pedestal ensuring the solidity of her family thanks to which the individual's socialization becomes possible. Asserting and strengthening her presence in her family, she plays the part which the men of her family cannot play, that of maintaining hope despite hard living conditions. Ma Joad therefore questions the traditional manly power as she shows the men that the family cannot achieve its objective of social progress if the woman's contribution is ignored.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to analyze the evolution of a woman representing the countless number of uneducated women who do not, for this reason, participate in feminist militant actions. The fight of such women ascribes to this type of feminism what is called popular feminism, one that happens in Third World and poor areas of developed countries. Yet, the consequences of their fights in everyday life cannot be overlooked, as their actions enhance their image in their respective families, and accordingly command men's admiration and respect. *The Grapes of Wrath* shows that Ma Joad is an uneducated woman who may not understand the social reality of man's superiority

over the woman. But she undoubtedly proves to be a conquering woman. In her family, without apparently fighting for any particular position, without openly defying the authority of her man, she remains assertive for her husband and her four sons. She is both in the antechamber in terms of the exercise of power in the family, and also in front of the scene when it comes to give order to all the members of the family. Her four sons represent the new generation of men for whom the woman is certainly not that weaker sex, but rather someone who helps them grow up, demonstrating at the same time her great qualities in the construction of the family unit.

Ma Joad's actions call for a question related to feminists' fight: Is it not better for feminists to invite mothers to concentrate on the upbringing of little boys so that these boys develop early in their younger age the recognition of women's values and rights? If we admit that the woman plays a crucial part in the upbringing of the child, we must accept the idea that the man-centered society grows and develops, because early in their childhood, boys are trained to be preoccupied with the search of material wealth in order to dominate and gain social honor in their communities**.** Ma Joad's growing role proves that the social assumption according to which women are born to be in the private sphere while men are bread providers, must be substituted for another form of education of the whole society. As it is shown in the novel, it is the woman who must provide that education which, from the reading of the fiction, is subtly operated at home by a female character. One cannot deny the role of mothers in this orientation given to children's education within the family because at this stage, mothers are closer to the children than their fathers. Constructing another type of society becomes in this sense an essential task of mothers. Maybe feminist fight must now take place not so much in the public sphere but rather in the private sphere by putting emphasis on the upbringing of little boys through a change in male values.

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