Empowerment of the Oppressed in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* – A Comparative Study of Feminism and Postcolonialism

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Introduction
In a world where the power is held by a few, the powerless are faced with two options: they either have to find a way of coping with their lack of power or attempt to take power. In many ways, women in a patriarchal world are as disempowered and “other” as the colonised subjects in a colonised world. Both Pauline, portrayed in Louise Erdrich’s Tracks, and the protagonist in Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing find themselves in a situation where they feel disempowered. These feelings are manifested in feminist theory in the questioning of the patriarchal forces in society. In postcolonial theory, the one who challenges those who are in power is the mimic man, or mimic woman, because he or she creates their own version of the coloniser’s reality.

Upon reading the two novels Surfacing and Tracks, I was surprised to find myself thinking about the clear parallels between the development of the protagonist in Surfacing and that of Pauline in Tracks, as I had never considered the similarities between feminism and postcolonialism before. In Louise Erdrich’s Tracks, the character Pauline attempts to move from the world of the colonised to that of the coloniser through mimicry, leading her into madness. In Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing, the protagonist goes through a mental metamorphosis, as she tries to find herself in the patriarchal world that is consuming her. Even though the two women develop in quite opposite directions, as the protagonist in Surfacing turns away from the oppressor’s ideal, whereas Pauline in Tracks rather joins sides with the oppressor, they both rebel against their roots and background and they both display signs of mental deterioration. By comparing the development of the protagonist in Surfacing with that of Pauline in Tracks, this essay will argue that there is a link between subjugated women in the phallocentric world and the hybrid subject in the postcolonial world. It will further argue that even though there are similarities between these oppressions, the two women’s ways of escaping the disempowered state differ greatly: Pauline escapes by joining sides with the oppressor, whereas the protagonist in Surfacing escapes by turning away from the oppressor’s ideal.

Approach
As mentioned above, when reading Surfacing and Tracks, I was struck by the parallels I noticed between feminism and postcolonialism. However, I could distinctly single out three levels on which much weight was put in the evolution of the two women: language, questioning authority, and madness, and these are the three levels that this essay will focus
on. By close reading of *Surfacing* and *Tracks*, followed by application of feminist theory on the former and postcolonial theory on the latter, this essay will deal with how language, questioning authorities, and madness are used as tools for the two women to escape subjugation. Each section starts with a feminist analysis of the protagonist in *Surfacing*, followed by a postcolonial analysis of Pauline in *Tracks*, and then a comparison between the two women.

**Theoretical Background**

Below follows a short theoretical background, in wide strokes describing feminist and postcolonial literary theory, highlighting more specific areas that will be used in the literary analysis of this essay. A lot of the sources used to back up theories and arguments might be considered to be dated, however, as *Surfacing* was written in the early seventies, it seemed only natural to apply feminist theories around at the same time.

**Feminist Literary Theory**

Feminism has developed and evolved over centuries and this essay will focus mainly on three areas within feminism. Firstly, I will discuss feminism in relation to language, as language has since long been considered to be one tool of subjugating women in society. Hélène Cixous, professor and French feminist writer, first coined the term “écriture féminine”, meaning women’s writing, expressing the need to define the differences between a “masculine” and a “feminine” language (Humm 195). Defined in terms of gender rather than sex, Cixous argues that masculine language is rational, linear and hierarchical, whereas feminine language is irrational, circular and resistant to hierarchies (Warhol et al. 343). In her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous emphasises the necessity for women to write, and by doing so free themselves of the oppression that man-made language has created. She encourages and celebrates the “otherness” of women and their writing. Since the protagonist in *Surfacing* questions the language used by men continuously throughout the novel, language and feminism seemed to be a very clear starting point in my analysis.

Secondly, the theories about female liberation will be of importance to my analysis of the protagonist in *Surfacing*. Maggie Humm puts it eloquently in her summary in *Feminisms: A Reader* when she states that the dominating themes in feminist theory are “the notion that patriarchy is ubiquitous; that the public and private divisions of traditional politics devalue women’s experiences and that the celebration of women’s experiences and diversity
are a necessary part of liberation” (59-60). Thus, she points out the importance of society acknowledging women’s experiences both in public and private life, highlighting the description of these experiences as part of women’s liberation from patriarchal subjugation. One of the most influential feminist texts is Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, written in 1949, which has had an enormous impact on later writers. In her text, de Beauvoir argues that in society, the male is set up as a positive norm, and woman as the negative, or “Other”, and she attacks men’s biological, psychological and economic discrimination against women (Humm 44-45). De Beauvoir’s view on women’s struggle for liberation will be used to support the analysis of how the protagonist in *Surfacing* is further empowered.

Thirdly, I will analyse the mental deterioration that the protagonist in *Surfacing* goes through. Barry mentions how, in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that the progression for a heroine is different from that of a hero, as a female protagonist goes through an “anxious self-denial”, which leads to losing the power of her own destiny and is followed by a state of madness (135-136). Gilbert and Gubar unveiled how this image of a heroine reflects the creativity of female writers, which had been repressed by patriarchal forces in society. This repressed creativity was let out through the creation of a madwoman, enabling female writers to, between the lines, protest against their own trapped position in society (Federico 2).

As can be seen in the examples by feminist theorists above, language, questioning authority and madness can all, though on different levels, be integrated into a feminist analysis of the empowering development of the protagonist in *Surfacing*. She starts by questioning language, which leads her to questioning authority bestowed upon men in society. However, her revelations further lead her into madness, which is her final step towards empowerment. Similarly to feminist theory, the three levels of language, questioning authority and madness can also be seen in postcolonial theory.

*Postcolonial Literary Theory*

Aschcroft et al state that language is the starting point of the struggle in postcolonial society as it is in language itself that the colonisation process begins. The cultural power that language holds is crucial to the colonisers, and the colonised subjects have two stances to choose between – rejection of the imperial language or subversion to it (Aschcroft et al 261). Frantz Fanon, psychiatrist and philosopher from Martinique, prominent in postcolonial theory,
discusses the effects of acquisition of the coloniser’s language: “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The [black man] who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is” (Britton 88). Fanon’s thoughts on the black man “taking on” (Fanon’s words) the culture of the white are just as applicable to the colonised subject doing the same in a postcolonial society. Through the act of speaking the coloniser’s language and the self-assertion that act brings, rather than as a feature of the language itself, the speaker gains access to the authority connected to the colonising power (Ashcroft, in Ashcroft et al 278). This view on language in the postcolonial world will be of importance to Pauline’s development, as it represents her first step towards leaving her Indian heritage behind.

Ashcroft et al state in the introduction to their collection of essays on postcolonial studies that “[f]or Bhabha ‘mimicry’ does not mean that opposition is rejected, but rather that it is seen to encompass more than overt opposition” (9). The inert threat in hybrid subjects is thus not their opposition to the colonisers, but how they represent a version of the colonisers that is not pure, but mixed. The hybrid challenges authority in that it represents both coloniser and colonised, both authority and sufferer of injustice. The mimicry can easily turn into mockery, and not knowing whether the mockery is intentional or unintentional is threatening to the colonising authority. This concept of mimicry will be crucial to this essay since I will argue that Pauline is empowered through becoming a mimic woman.

For Frantz Fanon, imitating the coloniser, or mimicry, could present a danger in that the mimic loses his or her sense of reality. In the alienation that he or she experiences by being in-between two worlds, it is common that he or she suffers a psychiatric breakdown (Britton 88). The colonised subject’s realisation that he (or she) can never attain the whiteness that he has been taught to desire, or shed the blackness that he has learned to devalue, results is psychic trauma (Loomba 148). Pauline goes through a psychiatric breakdown, but manages to come out of it further empowered.

Postcolonial theory recognises language, questioning authority and madness as empowering steps for the postcolonial subject. Using language as her first step, Pauline starts her empowerment, which turns her into a mimic woman questioning authority. As she is a hybrid, the struggle within Pauline leads her into madness, and, just as with the protagonist in Surfacing, this is the final step towards her empowerment, which I intend to show in my analysis.
Analysis

In both *Surfacing* and *Tracks*, language is mentioned early in the stories of the two women, and seems like the natural starting point of my analysis. As the truth about language becomes clearer to the two women, they both start challenging and questioning authority, which will be shown in the second part of my analysis. The final stage of the two women’s empowerment is the madness that they go through, and this will also be the final part of my analysis.

The Two Women’s Discoveries of Empowering Language

One of the points in feminism is that language is created by men, for men, and thereby excluding women. Hélène Cixous writes in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”:

> It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.

(Humm 200)

Observing the progress of the protagonist in *Surfacing*, it becomes evident that she moves closer and closer to becoming the kind of “peripheral figure” described by Cixous; she recognises language as one of the tools of oppression used against her – and other women.

As the female protagonist becomes increasingly aware of the “man-made” features of language, she finds herself uncomfortable with language, and starts to question its existence. She thinks of language as not actually hers, but “theirs” – “them” being men, thereby also distancing women from men and defining women as “others”. When she talks about her ex husband, she says, “lettering was one of the things he taught” (Atwood 41). She indicates that when she was younger and very much looked up to him, he would, just like a teacher educating a pupil, teach her lettering, the very basics of written language. By implying that she, an adult woman, needed him to educate her in something so basic, she shows a new aspect of her oppression: the belittling of her previous knowledge, on the basis
that she is a woman. Spender points out that “[b]y beginning with the initial assumption that there is something wrong with women’s language, research procedures have frequently been biased in favour of men” (7). Similarly, the “surfer’s” husband believes that she needs to learn the correct way of writing, that is, the way of writing like a man because woman’s language is wrong. The protagonist also says, “‘He said he loved me, the magic word, it was supposed to make everything light up, I’ll never trust that word again’” (41). She feels that she cannot even trust the words used by men because they are used to oppress her, make her believe everything is all right. Spender comments on the covert male power in language:

The English language has been literally man made and … is still primarily under male control … This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or ‘other’ nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have inherited.

As they represent the world of oppressors, the protagonist in Surfacing considers the words that her husband has used as untrustworthy. Therefore, when her lover Joe later on asks her if she loves him, she cannot give him the answer he wants, but ponders: “It was the language again, I couldn’t use it because it wasn’t mine” (Atwood 100). Talking about love, she cannot use the language of her oppressors anymore, and the only time she perhaps could think about Joe with love is “when he was asleep, demanding nothing” (Atwood 118). She feels as if by constantly validating and declaring her love to Joe, she also accepts her position as a subordinate woman. Only when he backs away and stops demanding of her to be a loving wife can she find love for him. As she understands more about language, she says “[t]he gods, their likenesses: to see them in their true shape is fatal. While you are human; but after the transformation they could be reached. First I had to immerse myself in the other language” (Atwood 152). She has to learn “the other language” before she can understand the gods and the empowerment they bring. Cixous states that “[woman] lets the other language speak – the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death. To life she refuses nothing. Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible” (Humm 202). Thus, the protagonist in Surfacing has to unlearn the language that she has been taught in order to learn this “other language”, or the language of “the other” – the language of woman. Through the transformation that the “other language” brings, she can
reach the gods and is thereby empowered.

Similarly to the protagonist in *Surfacing*, Pauline also finds language to be a key to her “otherness”. She tells her father – in English – that they should “build an outhouse with a door that swings open and shut” (Erdrich 14). Even though her father laughs at her suggestion, this is an obvious attempt to rebel against her father, and indeed against the entire Ojibwa culture: not only because of the suggestion itself, but also because of her choice of language. Fanon states that “[t]he colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (18). Through renouncing his mother tongue, the colonised also renounces his blackness, or state of “otherness” in proportion to the colonisers. Pauline speaks to her father in English, and thereby also gains access to the power that the colonisers hold. In Nanapush’s first description of Pauline, he mentions that they all had difficulties figuring out where in their society she could fit in, and he says that ignoring her worked fine, but that “she was different once she started to wag her tongue” (Erdrich 39). The hybridity that Pauline displays raises suspicions with the other Ojibwa, and even though at this early stage she has not yet entirely switched over to speaking English, what she says is perceived as lies. The efficiency of Pauline’s transformation is also conveyed in her interaction with other Indians. She says about the Pillager family: “They treated me as they would a white. I was ignored most of the time. When they did address me they usually spoke English” (Erdrich 145-6). Even though they all know very well that Pauline does speak and understand their own language, they distrust her too much to use it with her. When they talk to her, they prefer to use the language of the people they distrust, that is the language of the colonisers. This choice of language shows how they see her as a traitor of their tribe. Fanon claims that “[t]here is no forgiveness when one who claims a superiority falls below the standard” (24). This “superiority” that Pauline has claimed, by choosing the culture of the colonisers, is despised by the other Indians and they seize any opportunity to humiliate her. As she leaves the tribe and joins the convent, she explains that she has started referring to the Indians as “‘them’. Never neenawind or us” (Erdrich 138). Through her language use, Pauline distances herself from her “jungle”, as Fanon calls it, and is able to blend in with the nuns and finds empowerment in joining the colonisers.

In both novels, and thus, in both feminist and postcolonial theory, language is considered a tool of separation and subjugation. Patriarchal oppression tries to impose a language on women that they do not control, and the postcolonial subject is taught that the language of the coloniser will always be unattainable in its purity. Therefore, the versions of
language that the subjugated woman and colonised subject use are valued less highly than that of the oppressors. Even though the protagonist in *Surfacing* and Pauline in *Tracks* may try as best as they can, they will never be seen as eloquent and correct as their oppressors. However, as similar as the two women’s language situations might seem, the way that they are empowered through language differs, as one moves away from the oppressors and the other towards them. In her feminist questioning of language, the protagonist in *Surfacing* understands that she can no longer use the language of man, and she discovers the empowerment in the language of woman. The empowerment that colonised Pauline finds, however, is not based on embracing her “otherness”, but on renouncing it, and thereby leaving behind the powerlessness experienced by the colonised. Therefore, the two women’s escapes from the oppression that language imposes are each other’s opposite: in a patriarchal society, as with the protagonist in *Surfacing*, it entails renouncing the language of the oppressor, whereas in a colonised society, as with Pauline, it means embracing it. Yet, in both women’s cases, their language development leads them to the next step in their empowerment, which is questioning authority.

**The Two Women’s Empowerment Through Questioning Authority**

The story of the protagonist in *Surfacing* starts with a journey back to the surroundings where she grew up. This journey could also be seen as her travelling towards finding her own centre; it is first when she leaves her everyday life behind for a while that she can step back and observe her role in a society that has oppressed her for so long. Her journey seems to be an attempt for her to regain power over her life. She initially makes it clear to the reader on several occasions that she perceives herself as holding no power, and this is eventually what leads to her mental deterioration. The abortion she went through is what starts her process, and she describes the procedure with the following words:

> After the first I didn’t ever want to have another child, it was too much to go through for nothing, they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don’t let you see, they don’t want you to understand, they want you to believe it’s their power, not yours. They stick needles into you so you won’t hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practising on your body
She is obviously traumatised by the procedure, and feels disempowered in her position. Referring to the doctors who perform the abortion as “technicians”, “mechanics” and “butchers” clearly shows how they lack compassion and understanding for the female experience. Technicians and mechanics deal with technology and inanimate machines, and hardly consider the feelings or emotional stress of their subject of study. Butchers chop up animals into parts, seeing their value only in their meat, not as a whole being. The “surfacer” recognises that women are presented merely as “child-producing machines”. As the doctors focus on the “mechanics” of the female body, they fail in recognising the female experience, thereby “butchering” her body. Cixous states, concisely, that “woman must write woman. And man, man” (Humm 198). Feminism emphasises the importance that the female experience can only be described and fully understood by women. The protagonist in *Surfacing* realises that the doctors try to take this powerful knowledge away from her, but since they behave like technicians trying, but not succeeding, to figure her out she understands that the power, in the end, is hers.

In her relationship with her lover Joe, it is clear that it is the narrator in *Surfacing* who holds the power as she refers to him as a “packsack” (Atwood 2). She sees him as a man who displays all the traditional masculine features, such as physical strength comparable with a packsack. As they are inanimate objects, packsacks are unable to feel or display emotion, which is another feature traditionally referred to as masculine. Much like a backpack, Joe can take things in, but in the end, in spite of his masculine strength, it is she who will have to strap him to her back and carry all the weight because he would not move unless she were there to pick him up. She further states that Joe represents “a species once dominant, now threatened with extinction” (Atwood 2). The “dominant species” she talks about here is men, having dominated women for centuries. However, with the changes taking place in society, and also within herself, she thinks that this type of man will soon be extinct. Furthermore, she is determined to not let Joe get the upper hand in their relationship, like she did with her husband. After they have made love and Joe seems confident that they are back together again, she states, “He still doesn’t understand, he thinks he has won, act of his flesh a rope noosed around my neck, leash, he will lead me back to the city and tie me to fences, doorknobs” (Atwood 157). She has come too far in her development to go back to being who she used to be; the woman Joe wants her to be. De Beauvoir states that “[t]o emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her … when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of
hypocrisy that it implies, then the ‘division’ of humanity will reveal its genuine significance and the human couple will find its true form” (Humm 49). The protagonist in *Surfacing* refuses to go back to being confined to slavery in the house that the use of the words “fences” and “doorknobs” implies. She refuses to go back on a leash, empowered by the realisation that her emancipation is the only way for her to go.

Pauline in *Tracks* is driven by her thirst for power. She is aware of the disadvantages of being a Native from an early age and states that she wants to be like her Canadian grandfather. She thinks that “to hang back is to perish” and that she was “made for better” (Erdrich 14). She is determined to become a nun and join a convent, but her motives for this strive are not based on a Christian calling to follow God, but strictly on her own personal gain. Having lived her life feeling like an outsider in the Indian community, she realises that the colonisation offers her the possibility of escaping her life as an outcast. She does not want to go under with the rest of the Ojibwa, but wants to leave and become part of the colonising culture, as this is where the power lies. Bhabha states in his book *The Location of Culture* that through its “turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (85). Once Pauline has joined the convent, she becomes more and more delusional about her own power and importance. It becomes increasingly clear that the hybrid struggle within her is turning her into a mimic woman. She was famous for telling lies in the Ojibwa tribes, but in the convent, where no one knows about her background, her lies are seen as saintly visions, and pass by unchallenged. Pauline has discovered a way of getting away with almost anything by lying, and uses this to her advantage repeatedly. She claims that God talks to her, sitting on her stove, but that he finds it cold (Erdrich 138). It is in fact Pauline herself who is cold, but she has figured out that her lies can get her what she wants by using religious visions. However, the more she lies the more she turns herself into a mimic, rather than a true Christian. Bhabha argues that the mimic’s “‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (89). The “partial representation” Bhabha mentions is in Pauline’s case the version of Christianity that she creates. She first compares herself to saints: “Some saints endured burning pitch or redhot tongs. Some were torn asunder by lions … Predictable shapes, these martyrdoms. Mine took another form” (Erdrich 152). She makes herself believe that she is a martyr based on how she suffers from being ridiculed by the Pillagers. She later on prays: “Oh God who has seen fit to prove Thyself through the vessel of a woman, through me, Oh God who bound my wrists, who tripped me, Lord and Author of all Lies, hear
Pauline” (Erdrich 158). Here she blames God for lying: a disclaimer for her own responsibility by declaring that God is the one who created all the lies she has spread, thus excusing her behaviour by claiming to be a mere vessel. After a setback, Pauline’s delusion reaches another high, when she states: “perhaps, for all my suffering and faith, I was still insignificant. Which seemed impossible. I knew there never was a martyr like me” (Erdrich 192). There is no humility or submissiveness in her self-perception; it is beginning to escalate towards pride or hubris. As she sets out on the lake to meet with God, she states, “This was how God felt: beyond hindrance or reach” (198). She has reached a state of feeling like God, as she ranks herself equal to him. Bhabha argues that “[t]he menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (88). In her way of lying and deceiving, by becoming a mimic woman, creating her own version of what she tells herself Christianity is, she has challenged the ultimate authority in the colonisers’ culture: God.

By becoming aware of the power structure in their respective societies, the two women also gain access to them. The narrator in Surfacing starts to question her situation and the expectations that are placed on women in a patriarch society when she returns home and is presented with an opportunity to reflect on her choices in life. The empowerment she discovers through questioning the power structures is one of female emancipation; she has started her liberation. The questioning of authority in the case of Pauline is somewhat different. Whereas the protagonist in Surfacing questions patriarchal authority with the goal of equality, Pauline does not seem to realise that by mimicking the religion of the colonisers, she is actually mocking and diminishing the authority of the Christian God. Pauline is hence empowered not only because she can see herself as equal to God, but also because she is able to reduce the supposed authority of Him. Subsequently, empowerment through questioning authority takes different forms for the two women: for the woman in the patriarchal society the questioning is an explicit refusal to stay subjugated, whereas for the woman in the colonised society it is the (possibly unintentional) mockery of the oppressor. However, the protagonist’s in Surfacing questioning the presupposed patriarchal world-view and Pauline’s mimicry lead them both into the final stage of their empowerment – a state of madness.

The Two Women’s Empowerment Through Madness

When the protagonist of Surfacing returns to her childhood home, she is able to deal with her guilt about her abortion. She comes across a bird that has been killed and left hanging from a
tree. She wonders why the killers have “strung it up like a lynch victim” and why they did not “just throw it away like the trash”, and she states that this must be to “prove they could do it, they had the power to kill” (Atwood 110). It is obvious that she does not approve of how the bird was treated. This also refers back to the previously mentioned abortion. Just like the doctors behaving like technicians and mechanics removing the “wrong parts” inside her, examining their accomplishments in her body, the bird killers needed to show off their power. She further perceives the bird as “beautiful from a distance but it couldn’t be tamed or cooked or trained to talk, the only relation they could have to a thing like that was to destroy it” (Atwood 110). Her thoughts about the bird killers are an obvious reference to how she observes that women who are not trainable or “tameable” are a threat to patriarchal society and need to be eliminated. As the protagonist further tries to come to terms with her role as a woman, she regresses deeper into madness. When she is diving, she tries to come to terms with the guilt she feels about the abortion. She sees something in the water that triggers her thoughts, “[i]t had huge jelly eyes and fins instead of hands … I couldn’t let it out, it was dead already, it had drowned in air … Whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it” (Atwood 137). She blames herself for the abortion and feels like a killer because a woman should want her children. Gilbert and Gubar state that women writers have to kill the “angel”, or aesthetic ideal, through which they themselves have been “killed” into art, as well as killing the “monster” (17). From the realisation that she is not an “angel”, the traditional mothering woman, the protagonist in *Surfacing* deducts that she must be a “monster”, for killing her child. This ambiguity leads her into a sort of regression. The struggle for woman to redefine herself becomes a struggle for looking back, and seeing with fresh eyes (Gilbert and Gubar 49). The state of madness that the protagonist in *Surfacing* goes through is, thus, merely a necessary return to her roots in order to find herself as a woman, not as an “angel” or a monster”. On the very last page she states that “This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless” (185). This passage shows the end of her madness, as she comes to terms with her ambiguity. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the use of doubles such as “angels” and “monsters” signifies female victimisation, exemplified by Charlotte Brontë’s heroines unable to escape their repressed impulses (443). However, unlike these classic heroines, the protagonist in *Surfacing* embraces the repressed emotions as they surface. By doing so she is able to deal with her repressed emotions and break out of her madness, and with it she leaves behind the old belief of the powerless woman as a victim.

Inert in the hybrid subject is the struggle between the two sides, the colonised
versus the coloniser. Britton’s quote of Glissant’s comment on the Martinican is also applicable to the colonised subject; that is, that he or she “sees through eyes that are not his [or her] own” (Britton 83). Glissant’s reflection over the colonised subjects looking upon themselves with the critical view of the colonisers is almost identical to how Pauline thinks about herself as a young girl; she says that she “saw through the eyes of the world outside” (Erdrich 14). As a hybrid colonised subject, she observes, with the eyes of the colonising culture, the world that she wishes to leave behind. Even though Pauline seems quite determined to leave her Indian heritage behind from an early age, she does not appear to be able to stay away from the camp for too long; there is still something there that keeps pulling her back. It is this struggle within her that will eventually lead to her madness. Glissant’s theory about this struggle is described as an “‘obsession with imitation’ [that is] impossible to live with, not only because the imitation can never succeed but because the obsession itself is unbearable” and how the mimetic drive often leads to psychotic breakdown (Britton 83). When Nanapush talks about Pauline, he says that, “There was some question if she wasn’t afflicted, touched in the mind” (Erdrich 39). Clearly, he has already started noticing signs of madness in Pauline. Pauline is convinced that as long as she believes in God, His love for her is so strong that it will protect her hands as she puts them in boiling water. Her burns convince her that God is not as strong as she thought He was. The possibility of having made the wrong choice confuses her and she is no longer sure who it is appearing in her visions, God or the devil, as she states, “I must hate one, the other adore” (Erdrich 193). She is clearly torn, and the confusion leads her into the state of madness and delusion as she sets out in a boat to fight the devil in the lake. She strips off all her clothes and in her delusion she believes that she has killed the lake devil. By killing the “devil” Pauline also finally manages to kill off the Indian part in her.

Therefore, a common theme in both novels is how going through a state of madness helps the two women to move forward. The two women suffer from their duality, in being torn between expectations and self-realisation. In the patriarchal world, a woman is expected to love her children, never want to leave them, and to be driven by the instinct to protect them. Similarly, a colonised subject is expected to fight for their right to maintain their old values and stay submissive to the colonising power. However, the women feel trapped by these expectations and something exceptional needs to push them through to their self-realisation. The suppressed urges and drives in women that can drive them into madness are recognised in feminist literary theory. In postcolonial theory it is the struggle between the coloniser and the colonised that can lead to madness. The protagonist in Surfacing becomes
more aware of her own, true self from her hallucinations and imaginations, and Pauline manages to finally kill the part of her that keeps returning to her Indian heritage. Accordingly, the two women’s way from madness to empowerment differ thus: both sides struggling within the woman in patriarchal society need to be accepted, whereas in the colonised woman only one can remain.

Conclusions
This essay has argued that there are parallels between the oppressed in patriarchy and the oppressed in a postcolonial society, but that the ways to escape from the oppression are different for the oppressed.

Firstly, I argue that language is one important aspect of the oppression, but the solutions to the language issue are quite different for the subjugated. The protagonist in *Surfacing* perceives the language as not her own, as it is used as a tool to oppress women, and Pauline recognises the power that is invested in a choice of language. The way out of subjugation in feminist theory means to embrace one’s female language, as recognised by Cixous. However, in postcolonial theory, the way to become empowered and escape oppression is to leave one’s mother tongue behind and join the colonisers, which Fanon describes in his theories on colonised subjects “taking on” the coloniser’s culture.

Secondly, this essay argues that challenging authority is a feature in common for both feminist and postcolonial theory. For the oppressed in the patriarchal world, as well as in the colonial world, questioning authority works as empowerment for the oppressed. The protagonist in *Surfacing* challenges the patriarchal authority by refusing to be what she is expected to be, and instead focusing on trying to regain power over her own life, which is backed up by de Beauvoir’s theories on female liberation. Pauline is empowered by mimicking the religion of the colonisers, as the mimic woman challenges God. Even though she might not realise it, according to Bhabha’s theories on mimicry, she challenges Him both by claiming equality to Him, as well as thereby undermining His authority.

Thirdly, I have argued that madness is another theme that both feminist and postcolonial literary theory have in common. In feminist literary theory the madwoman is a commonly used term to show suppressed drives in women, and this is also a stage that the protagonist in *Surfacing* goes through. Gilbert and Gubar talk about the “angel” and “monster” portrayed in feminist literature, and through the realisation that she is neither the “angel” that society expects her to be, nor the “monster” that she feels like, the narrator in
Surfacing comes out of her madness, and oppression, empowered. Pauline’s hybrid mind is caught in the fight between coloniser and colonised, which leads to her going mad, just like Fanon has described in his theories on the hybrid subject. However, Pauline cannot get rid of her madness until she kills one of the struggling sides, and by killing her colonised side, she is empowered by joining the side of the oppressors.
Bibliography