

A Space for Oneself: Comparative Spatial Analysis of Gender-Identity in Sylvia Plath and Forough Farrokhzad

Farnaz Ahmadi Sepehri^{[a],*}; Nasser Motallebzadeh^[b]

^[a]Independent Researcher, M.A Graduate in English Literature, Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran.

^[b]Teacher at Islamic Azad University- Osku Branch, Tabriz, Iran.

*Corresponding author.

Received 10 June 2015; accepted 13 July 2015

Published online 26 September 2015

Abstract

Since the twentieth century onward, women studies have gained undeniable significance in revealing gender issues. In this way the significance of space for women's lives began to gain importance by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Guilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Indeed, space in general (domestic, public, private, and physical) has been influential in shaping gender identities. Some feminist theorists have theorized the inter-play of gender and other identities in place, over space, and in shaping the production of space and power. This essay aims to analyze the role of space in identity construction of the outstanding American poet, Sylvia Plath and Forough Farrokhzad, one of the greatest Iranian poets of the twentieth century.

Key words: Space; Spatiality; Place; Feminism; Female; Gender and Identity

.....
Ahmadi Sepehri, F., & Motallebzadeh, N. (2015). A Space for Oneself: Comparative Spatial Analysis of Gender-Identity in Sylvia Plath and Forough Farrokhzad. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 11(3), 7-17. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/7489>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7489>
.....

INTRODUCTION

.....
Born in two different poles of the world with totally different life style and culture, American poet Sylvia Plath and Iranian poet, Forough (2002) are paralleling to each other in their life spans (1930s to 1960s), using highly

metaphoric language in their poetry and belonging to the same "confessional school" of poetry. Although each from different places, too far in distance, religion and history, there are numerous resemblances in their personal life like their lack of paternal affection, their nervous breakdowns, their problematic marriage, motherhood and divorce. It should be mentioned that although there has been done numerous researches comparing these two poets from different angles, there has not been any analysis regarding the concept of space as the most recent phenomenon in literary criticism.

Living in a patriarchal society, both used their powerful poetic language to resist male dominated society and showed great attempt to be a voice for their country's women against social and sexual discriminations. Being alert and aware to their surrounding world, they tried to break boundaries and show how the manners and rules of the place where they live are determining them as a woman in general and as a female poet in particular. Selecting from *Collected Poems* of Forough Farrokhzad and Sylvia Plath's *Collected Poems* (edited by Ted Hughes), in the present paper, I intend to examine their gender identity through spatial dimensions of their poetry.¹ As the impact of the space begins with real embodiment in the world, it seems that a short survey of the biography to understand the space of their life is helpful.

Forough was born in January, 1935, in Tehran. Her father was a military colonel with a cold and military attitude that was disparaging Forough for her reaching puberty, she also had a family that she never could establish communication mentally in seeking for a new and promising space and attempting to escape the suffocating confines of her strict home, she got married in early age of sixteen and gave birth to her only son

¹ See Forough Farrokhzad, (2002). Complete Collected Poems. Shadan Publishers, Tehran, For English version please see: Dilamghani, M. The Sad Little Fairy. "Poem Hunter," <http://www.foroughfarrokhzad.org/> Last accessed 12 March 2014.

on her seventeen when she published the controversial collection of her poetry *Captive* in 1955 for the first time. Because of its going against the strict boundaries of the society and displaying extremely shocking concepts of sin, desire, lust and sexuality which were taboo especially when written by a woman and apparently confessional in first person, religious authority of Iran boycotted the poetry and accused her of licentiousness. Soon after her husband divorced her, and won the custody of her son, she was prevented from seeing him ever again. But she didn't surrender and warbled four more poetry volumes; *The Wall* (1956), *Rebellion* (1958), *Rebirth* (1964) and her last volume *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season* (1965) which was published after her untimely death in an automobile crash.

Highlighting her literary and cinematic innovation, Farrokhzad occupies in Iran, both among modern Persian poets in general and as an Iranian woman writer in particular. The authors from all parts of the world also explore Farrokhzad's appeal outside Iran in the Iranian diasporic imagination and through the numerous translations of her poetry into English. Her poetry volume is a fitting and authoritative tribute to the work of a remarkable woman which introduces and explains her legacy for a 21st century audience (See [Michael Hillman, 1976](#); [Kessler & Banani, 1982](#); [Idem, 1987](#); [Brookshaw, 2010](#); [Rowshangar, 1992-1993](#); ...).

Forough Farrokhzad is known as an exceptionally pivotal woman poet in modern literary era who sought independence through poetry in a male oriented society, where women were viewed to be inferior and passive. She was the first modern Iranian woman to graphically articulate private sexual landscapes from a woman's perspective and transcended her own literary role and experimented with acting, painting, and documentary film-making.

Equal to Forough in rank and grade, but born in other side of the world is American great poet, Sylvia Plath who is believed to be one of the most influential female poets by many writers and thinkers. Sylvia was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1932. In 1940, when Sylvia was eight years old, her father died as a result of complications from diabetes. He had been a strict father, and both his authoritarian attitudes and his death drastically defined her relationships and her poems, as we see in her elegiac and famous poem, "*Daddy*". When she was ten, Sylvia made her first (and almost successful) attempt to commit suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. The experience is described in her autobiographical novel, *The "Bell Jar"*, published in 1963. After a period of recovery, which involved electroshock and psychotherapy she once again pursued academic and literary success and winning a Fulbright scholarship to study in Cambridge, England where she met Poet Laureate Ted Hughes and got married in 1956.

After breaking up with Ted because of his infidelity due to financial deficiencies, loneliness and nervous

breakdown on February 11, 1963, Sylvia Plath committed suicide with cooking gas at the age of 30. Two years later *Ariel*, a collection of some of her last poems, was published; this was followed by *Crossing the Water and Winter Trees* in 1971 and, in 1981, *The Collected Poems* appeared, edited by Ted Hughes.

1. THEORETICAL TRIANGLE OF SPACE, GENDER AND IDENTITY

Recently spatial criticism has found its way into literature and has been used as one of notable aspect of analyzing various literary pieces. The present study gains significance as the findings can shed more light upon spatial criticism and feminism studies. The issue of the "space" first appeared in the essay, "Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness" by the philosopher Henri Bergson and later in 1976 by Michel Foucault's essay titled "Of Other Spaces".

Before that space was not a noticeable phenomenon. Foucault caused many thinkers observe the notion of space as an objective entity that has direct impact over characters, so setting came to be most important. And many critics from various approaches focused on space and spatiality. In general, it can be assumed that space, as social or political, physical, geographical, and even imaginary appears fundamental factor in 21st century's world view.

It seems compulsory to highlight some theories in regard to the concept of space as a revolutionary argument in modern art and literature. After Foucault, Lefebvre (1991, pp.33-34) developed a "concrete abstract" tripartite model of space that attempts to take account of and to draw into a coherent ensemble the various other dimensions of the space. He argues that any socially interwoven matrix of what he calls "spatial practices", representations of space and "spaces of the representation", each allied with a specific cognitive mode through which we re-present it to ourselves: respectively, the domains of the "perceived" and "conceived" and the lived.

Recent approaches about space are highly bounded to the concept of identity. According to Deborah G. Martin and Byron Miller (2003, p.144), space is not merely a variable or "container" of activism, it constitutes structural relationships and networks (including the processes that produce gender, race, and class identities), situates social and cultural life including repertoires of contention, is integral to the attribution of threats and opportunities, is implicit in many types of category formation; and is central to scale-jumping strategies that aim to alter discrepancies in power among political contestants.² The notion of space as socially produced rests on an acknowledgement that space is an integral part of all social life, both affecting and affected by social action.

As Massey (1994, p.251) puts it: “space is one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world”. Smith (1983, p.139) considers place to be essential to any lived form of identity:

It may only be meaningful to consider identity, and therefore also difference, with reference to particular places at particular times. Place matters if we want to understand the way social identities are formed, reproduced and marked off from one another. *Where* identities are made is likely to have a bearing on which markers of difference —class, gender, and “race” and so on—are salient, and which are veiled.

From the final decades of the twentieth century, feminism, in its exploration of geographical and discursive terrains, employs an imagery of spaces, boundaries, circles and cycles, as well as imagery of movement within or out of limited spaces.

In spatial criticism of female body, segregation, and dwelling in relation to the male gaze, dynamic structure and somatic power gains significances. Doreen Massey (1994, p.179) assumes that the limitation of women to mobility in terms of both identity and space has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover, the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment or confinement to particular places on the one hand and the limitations on the identity on the other have been crucially rooted. One of the most evident aspects of this joint control of spatiality and identity has been in the West related to the culturally specific distinction between public and private, the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and through that a social control on identity.

While Massey contributes the power of space on identity to the West, some other feminist thinkers reject her idea by proposing that the power and influence of the space on the identity is not limited to the West, but the term of space and identity and counteraction between them is universal.

A triangle-shaped relation is evident between feminism, identity and space which can be shown perfectly in literary pieces. Kristen W. Shands (1999, pp.2-3) believes that feminism’s central agenda has everything to do with surveying and assessing environmental conditions and changing them. While the first wave of feminism including Mary Wolstoncraft and nineteenth-century feminists on both sides of Atlantic began to destabilize concepts of space in order to expand women’s horizon and possibilities, it remained mire in Enlightenment ideals of atemporality. The second wave, including thinkers such as Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and the European women’s liberation movements of 1960s and 1970s, continued and dramatized the confinement of escape imagery. A third wave of feminism presently in progress seeks to undermine the ideals of unified or universal time - space altogether, preferring fluid strategies and protean coalitions.

Looking through the concept of space at Plath and Farrokhzad’s poems illuminates diverse spatial tropes including nature, home (with its liminal connotations like wall, window and mirror...) and confined spaces such as graves, prisons and cages which ultimately highlight women’s exclusion from the public space and sense of dislocation or placelessness. Thus, spatial identity is directly influenced by place and space. The sense of place relates to the understanding of existential place relations in humanistic geography. Spatiality, identity, community and history are combined in a sense of place. It also plays a necessary part in collective identity politics. According to Relph, women’s exclusion from the public sphere and confining them to enclose private spaces in patriarchal society creates the multi scaled confusion in personal and collective spatial identity politics which is often felt as rootlessness or *placelessness*. (Cited in Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen, 2009)

The study thus concentrates on spatial dimensions of nature like landscape and which are connoted to female sexuality garden in both poets’ works. Many thinkers draw on a variety of theoretical sources about nature, specifically images related to garden as a frequent theme of the poetries by both Sylvia and Forough; including early studies of the cultural role of space by Gaston Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan, the more garden-oriented writings of John Dixon Hunt, and recent texts by the feminist geographers Gillian Rose, Doreen Massey, Mona Domosh, and Joni Seager.

Home with its related images such as walls, windows or thresholds appears to be one of the most prominent spatial implications in Plath and Farrokhzad’s poetry. Feminist geographers were pioneers in prompting a more nuance interpretation of the concept of home, arguing that traditional ideals about home were born of masculinism perspectives (Rose, 1993). From a woman’s viewpoint, it was argued that home often meant oppression, repression and sometimes resistance (Rose, 1993; Gregson & Lowe, 1995; McDowell, 1997).

2. SPACE IN PLATH AND FARROKHZAD

Many reviewers of Plath and Farrokhzad believe that they belong to the “Confessional School” of poetry, since both poets deal with the facts and intimate mental and physical experiences in their lives (see Braheni, 2010; Bayrami, 2005). It seems the idea is partially true due to spatiality because the “Confessional School” as a personal poetry almost always refers to real events and since spatiality analyses the impact of real or imaginary space, what Forough and Sylvia represent in their works is what they perceive from their place and space. De Certeau (1984, pp.106-7) argues that the stories are created while walking in the city take on characteristics of legends or superstitions that in turn confer a larger social and cultural significance on the spaces they describe. Similarly, the

stylistic choices authors made impart to these texts a fictional, even mythic element, which in turn gives these works their symbolic importance, revealing the role of the urban landscape in the articulation of class identity.

Plath's acute observation of the environment around her had changed her into a remarkably astute cultural critic. "Always I want to be an observer" was almost the motto of Sylvia Plath's life and Wagner-Martin (2003, p.10), too believes that she had an unusual "mature comprehension of the human condition". All those crucial historical events and their subsequent effects had evidently awakened a deep sense of responsibility in her as a writer to move beyond autobiographical in order to reflect the universal. Lisa Katz (2002, p.114) argues: "Plath's poetry generally features a rather routine transgression of presumed spatial limits on women's lives" (Katz, 2002).

Plath's immense perception of her surrounding is delineated in most of her poems. Gail Crowther (2011, p.139) by visiting most of the places where Plath lived believes that space has been an important factor in defining herself and transforming her ideas to her readers, Crowther implies to "elm trees" in the yard of Plath's house in the Court Green about 1953-1954 which have inspired Plath in her "Three Women". In "Three Women", the first voice complacently remarks "Dawn flowers in the great elm outside the house".

Likewise, Forough in an interview has talked about the fountainhead of her poetry as she says,

in my poems, I have been looking for something in the world of around and inside me...something that I should perceive and applies these specifications to my poetry...like in *Captive*, I have been just a plain reflector of the outside world. (Reza Shahrestani, 2010)

Bahmany (2010, p.75) notes: "In her poetry, Farrokhzad is in constant fluctuation between the world inside and the world outside"

Both poets seem to be provoked by their surrounding space which puts man as an omnipotent figure in the center of patriarchal society. Conspicuously, in attempt to denounce it through the voice of poems against confining space, they tend to acquire power and claim an identity for themselves as a woman. Using metonym, Forough in her poems portrays men as potent creatures who rule on women's life. In her *My Beloved* (p.268), which is addressed to her lover: "My beloved, with his bare bold body/Rose over his legs/Fearless like death" (Lines 1-4), the image of man obtains supreme power as she says: "My beloved is like the earth/In his blunt fated air/In his concrete, cruel rule" (Lines 17-19). This is an explicit image of the space and power on gender identity construction in a patriarchal society as the man obtains broad and potent image of the earth. She says: "My beloved/He is a natural man/And in this wicked wonderland/My beloved/He is a simple man" (51-55) ... "In the wake of warmth of my breasts/He must hideaway" (56-57). Poet links her "breast" as her sexuality to the

space "wicked wonderland" and as a shelter for her beloved.

Susan Ford notes in "*Landscape Revisited: A Feminist Reappraisal*" (1991), the controlling and "unavoidably phallogocentric" gaze that surveys the sweeping vistas of a landscape is fundamentally different from the participatory "matriarchal aesthetic". She suggests that the female body images are mingled with nature's elements. The domestic garden of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is thus, according to Ford, "a landscape which is heavily feminized", blending "the rational and emotional dimensions of those who participated in it". However, by reading both poets; poems, we would admit that Ford's idea is applicable to twentieth century female authors and poets.

Commensurately Plath and Farrokhzad sustain their poems with nature's spatial elements to accentuate the concept of feminine body but against Forough who exclusively evolves the body around sexual matters; the female's body leads to maternity subjects in Plath. Linda McDowell (1999, p.68) explains how placing of the body right at the center of social theory has been one of the most exciting moves in the contemporary theoretical endeavors, she writes: "Question of the sexual body, its differential construction, regulation and presentation are absolutely central to an understanding of gender relations at every spatial scale".

In most of her poems attributes the titles of "Lord" (Snowman on the Moor, 58), "moon" (*The Everlasting Monday*, 62), "sea", "wind" and "god" (*Full Fathom Five*, 92-3) to men. In her poems, the images of men are blended with spatial metaphor to emphasize the power and privilege they gain from space as in her impressive poem "Ouija" (77-8) she frequently addresses the man [probably her husband] as "god", as she writes: "It is a chilly god, a god of shades" (1)... "The glass mouth sucks blood-heat from my forefinger/ The old god dribbles, in return, his words/ The old god, too, writes aureate poetry" (10-12)... "Skies once wearing a blue, divine hauteur/ Ravel above us, mistily descend/Thickening with notes, to a marriage with the mire" (19-21). The man is the "god" which is associated with "skies" and "divine" and woman in contrast is the "mire", as she continues to depict female inferiority: "I see him, horny-skinned and tough, construe/What flinty pebbles the ploughblade upturns/ As ponderable tokens of her love/He, godly, doddering, spells/No succinct Gabriel from the letters here/But floridly, his amorous nostalgias" (27-32).

In most of Plath's poems, the numbers of material processes which signify action, physical experience, agency (Actor, Doer) are all attributed to men. Hence, the micro elements of the language to imply that men have the authority, power and the choice while women are cast as the object, goal, and phenomenon with agency and actor hood being excluded from female identity. If a woman is the doer, the sentence changes to a passive voice

indicating that the action of the woman is insignificant (Hassanpoor & Hashim, 2012, p.2).

Detailed examination of space in Forough's works reveals that her inner landscape is affected by the male centered outside space; it shows her affliction, anger and struggle against it to demand a new identity and new space for herself. In *Captive* (29), the space for her is prison and man as the guardian of it, however this is the case in most of her poems, notably in *Rebellion* (48): "Seal not my lips/Nor silence me/Let me relate my untold tale/ Take this chain/Which weighs so heavily on my heart/Off my feet O man, you self-centered creature/Come forth / Open the door of this cage" (1-8), she solicits the man listlessly to open the door of the cage where she has been imprisoned by him, she demands freedom to speak and tell the world untold suffocations of muted women and to be their tongue: "Wherein you hold me prisoner for life/ Allow me a breath of freedom/I must relate to the entire world/My burning tale, my fiery echo" (8-11).... She shows social disapproval of her poetry by saying: "To you, O self-centered creature/Not to malign my poetry, not to call it infamy/Do you know how confining this cage is/For the liberal at heart? It is confining, it is" (21-24).

She evinces the narrow and confining space of the cage and importunes the man to bestow her new and free space: "Pass me a gobletful of sin and infamy/ but grant me a hut in the depths of hell" (25-28). She earnestly begs a man to grant her a hut, a place for her even in the depth of hell. Furnishing her spatial confinement, placelessness and loss of identity through the poem, she finalizes it by depiction of the passion for poetry with her sexuality and making love to spatial elements like "sun" (38), "moon" (36), "breeze" (37). Gillan Rose's (1993) recognition of "the everyday [as] the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created – and contested" supports our study of the garden as a space in which women both were trained within traditional structures and asserted themselves against those constraints.

Plath's *The Jailer* (226) exactly corresponds with Forough's *Rebellion* in showing female's lack of space in the cage, having no freedom, being feeble and powerless under the control of the man in a patriarchal society, "With the same trees and headstones/Is that all he can come up with/ The rattler of keys? /I have been drugged and raped...Into a black sack/Where I relax, foetus or cat/ Lever of his wet dreams" (3-10). In this poem, like what was in Forough's *Rebellion* (48), a black sac or a cage is what Plath portrays as a space where she relaxes as she points and the rest of the poem deals with the outwardly physical but implicitly mental torture of women by men:

He has been burning me with cigarettes
Pretending I am a negress with pink paws
I am myself. That is not enough
Dream of someone else entirely
And he, for this subversion
Hurts me, he

With his armor of fakery
His high cold masks of amnesia
How did I get here?
Indeterminate criminal, I die with variety
Hung, starved, burned, hooked
I wish him dead or away. That, it seems, is the impossibility
That being free... (18-41).

In fact Sylvia aims to exhibit women's oppression in patriarchy and to extinguish the female's sense of placelessness, confinement, and inferiority. In his own formal definition Augé identifies the non-place as the inverse of the "anthropological place", a place which "can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity". The non-place lacks these features, as it is "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 1995, p.77). This structure of feeling is characterized by inherent dislocation of the individual from time and place – as humans have traditionally known and understood these – and a general notion of uneasiness, rootlessness, and otherness following the sense of dislocation

One of the main resemblances between the works of Forough and Sylvia is their spatial limitation which makes some spaces distinctive in their poems. "Home" is one of the accentuated places in this case as it has been a female related space from centuries ago. Luce Irigaray captures this sense of territorial unrest when she writes in "This Sex Which Is Not One" (1977, p.212) that: "Their father land, family, home, discourse, imprisons us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves. Their properties are our exiles".

Forough in most of her poems renders the space of the home (house) to gender as in *Return* (202-4): "Houses were in other color/Dusty, gloomy and confined/Faces inside chadors²/Like bounded ghosts chained" (9-12)... "The black mouth of the Hashtis³/Smells the moist of the grave" (25-26). Depicting female ghosts chained in gloomy and confined spaces which smell like grave, she ends the poem by My city was the grave of my wishes (52), relating larger space (city), to a narrow and gloomy space (grave) to establish her perception of space, city or house are a grave for her to bury her aspirations. *Friday* (261-2) is another poem in which Forough signifies dullness and solitudes of the space and conspicuously of home:

Oh, this empty room,
Oh, this gloomy home!
These opaque walls, isolating me from attacks of youth,

² According to Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia the definition of chador is a large cloth worn as a combination head covering, veil, and shawl usually by Muslim women especially in Iran.

³ For Karim Pirnia, Hashti or Dlan-e-voroudi, in most traditional houses in Iran, is the space one behind the sar-dar (doorway). Hashtis are designed in many different shapes, including octagonal, hexagonal, square and rectangular. In more luxurious homes the hashti has more ornamentation and a seating area. See Pirnia, M. K. (2005). *Sabk Shenasi Mi'mari Irani* (Study of styles in Iranian architecture, pp.40-51). Tehran Publishers.

These collapsing roofs on my short daydreams of light,
This place of solitude, reflection and doubt,
This space of hues and shapes, signs and sound,
All speak to me- of this invincible void (13-19).

Concept of “home” as a significant element in defining the space for women has been the case in most of Plath’s works. In order to render the drowned sense of women kept in enclosed spaces, she uses the words like “tent”, “cage”, “coffin”, and “attic” instead of “home”. As in *Landowners* (53): “From my rented attic with no earth/ To call my own except the air-motes/I malign the leaden perspective/Of identical gray brick houses/Orange roof-tiles, orange chimney pots/And see that first house, as if between/Mirrors, engendering a spectral/Corridor of inane replicas/Flimsily peopled” (1-9). It seems that speaker in the poetry wants to give us a sense of her placelessness by “attic with no earth” which can be presumed as a confined space for female.

In her groundbreaking book *Feminism and Geography* (1993) Rose reminds us that only an essentially masculinized geography could characterize the home-ground so unproblematically as a safe and stable place, and in fact she proposes that female identity in all of its diversity can only flourish through the loss of the constraining “safety” of home. She further critiques the humanistic geographers’ concept of “topophilia” as centered on an idealized view of “place” that involves “thoughtless passivity and unthinking immersion in the natural.” Rose observes that landscape is more than a cultural construct based on visual perception, but that it also entails a complex system of power relations

Both Plath and Farrokhzad perceived the confinement of women in an enclosed space and defied it by their poetry. Forough in *Lost* (125-6) says: “Like that Indian dancer, mincing/I stampede, but on my grave” (9-10). Due to Ohler-Stricklen (2005, p.22) who has studied self-identification in Farrokhzad, spokesperson in her poems posits the essential measure of her internal and external world. She also asserts that Farrokhzad’s attitude in poems such as “*It Is Only the Sound Remains*” is about a woman who has abandoned social conventions to align herself. Unlike the muted voices of many veiled women, Farrokhzad breaks out of the mould of a subaltern woman.

Similarly in *Forgive Her* (248), she rebels against the patriarchy for the expropriation of their freedom from women by keeping them in a coffin like places: “Forgive her/Whom that time by time/Forgets her painful attach of body/With stilled water/And empty holes/And foolishly ponders/ That has the right to live” (1-7)...”Forgiver her/ To whom that throughout of her coffin/Red flowing of moon is crossing” (13-15).

Both poets’ works encompass women’s lack of appropriate space in comparison to the vast space attributed to men. As in “*Forgive Her*”, the space associated with female is constrained (coffin) in compare to male’s vast and bright space (moon) to elaborate

the prevalent inequality of space and its role in gender construction in patriarchy. Connell (1987, p.194) regards that gender identity develops through the process of socialization and the fact that socialization) regards that gender identity develops through the process of socialization and the fact that socialization happens in and through space. Since antiquity, gender structure has been regulated by patriarchal social orders on the basis of unequal power relations nearly throughout the world. It is almost generally accepted that “. . . patriarchy refers to the system in which men as a group are superior to women and so assumed to have authority over them” (McDowell, 1999, p.16).

Plath in her *Last Word* (172) shows her contempt of the male dominated social codes that try to entomb her. She starts the poetry with her prone to a “coffin”, by saying: “I do not want a plain box, I want a sarcophagus/ With tigery stripes, and a face on it” (1-2) ... she assumes that the people around her and authority want to bury her; to make her dead and silent, “They will wonder if I was important” (9) ... “They will roll me up in bandages, they will store my heart/Under my feet in a neat parcel/I shall hardly know myself. It will be dark” (23-25).

Along with Plath, Farrokhzad manifests countless images of narrow spaces like “grave”. She says: “How life’s hubbub in the grave’s abyss?” (24), and “O you who raised me up from my grave!” (46). Comparing her home, the place where she is living to grave is to emphasize the lack of proper space for women and living motionless like a dead as in *Earth Signs* (279), “Cradles took refuge from the shame/In graves” (25-6). Likewise, Plath brings the image of the “grave” and “coffin” into her poems with a similar tone. In *The Moon and the Yew Tree* (172-3) she writes: “Fumy, spirituous mists inhabit this place/ Separated from my house by arrow of headstones” (5-6). Kristen Shands (1999, p.37) analyzes the motifs of self-burial and concepts of “grave” in literature written by women, she maintains, “The burying impulse was seen by the facts of homelessness; physical unattractiveness and sexual discrimination in stereotyping that impose self-burial on women looking future back across the centuries”.

Through repetition of words like “grave”, “coffin”, “funeral” and “corpse”, both Plath and Farrokhzad imply to their sense of living like a dead in a male centered space. Direct relation between space and gender in struggling over space between women and men is comprehensive. As for Soja (1989, p.68) the space of actually lived material and symbolic experience can be “terrain for the generation of “counterspace”, spaces of resistance to the dominant order...,” where alternative orders of material and symbolic space are imagined and struggled over. In *The Shatter of Requisite* (154) Forough tries to change roles and defeat man, “I came to hang in you/But I realized that you are that leafless

branch/But I saw that you are a laugh of death/On the face of my esperance/Oh, how sweet is/On your grave thou that needful love/To dance” (5-11).

Significantly, Plath in *Lady Lazarus* (244) uses “Nazi” (5) and “Jew” (7) to indicate her identity and then through “Peel off the napkin/O my enemy/Do I terrify?” (10-12)... “The grave cave ate will be/At home on me” (16-18) ... “Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman” (34), protests against domestication of woman and confining her to a closed space of home and she thinks suicide is the easiest way in a home that is like a cell, “It’s easy enough to do it in a cell” (49) to set free herself. Nevertheless she surrenders: “I am your opus/I am your valuable/The pure gold baby” (66-70). So she is furious about men’s supremacy: “I turn and burn/Do not think I underestimate your great concern.” She continues to challenge and defeat them, “Herr God, Herr Lucifer/ Beware/Beware/ Out of the ash/I rise with my red hair/And I eat men like air” (80-85).

Ariel (239) one of Plath’s well known poems, referring to “Godiva” (20) also undertakes the conception of gender and identity in relation to space and women’s resistance to patriarchy’s imposed confinement of space in women. The poem begins with the affirmation of the role of the space: “Stasis in darkness/Then the substanceless blue/Pour of tor and distances” (1-3)... “Something else/Hauls me through air/And now I/Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas” (15-18)... “And I/Am the arrow” (27). So she gains power through resisting against narrowing space of herself.

Forough’s *The Wind Up Doll* (263) corresponds with Plath’s *Purdah* (242-4) in attributing the image of “doll” to women to show their passiveness and motionlessness in a patriarchal society. In their poetry both depict the narrow and confined spaces of women like what Forough puts: “Inside a felt-lined box” (52) and Plath who writes: “Little nets/My visibilities hide” (16-17) to show how women are confined and ignored.

The same binary opposition is observable regarding to space; to define two kinds of spaces (all kinds of space, including physical and imaginary, social, political...), the one is “introvert” or “inner” and the other is “extravert” or “outer”. Based on the gender rules women belong to the inner spaces like home, and closed spaces and men occupy the outer space that are mostly open and active. It seems that both Plath and Farrokhzad resemble their awareness to this discrimination, resist it and represent it in their poems. Milani (2011, p.3) maintains: “women’s place it was argued was not public but private, not out in the streets but inside the home”.

So masculinity and femininity are defined in relation to space, the situation in Iran was more oppressive due to traditional culture and Pahlavi Shah’s severe censorship. Men belonged to squares and streets; in contrast, women were expected to remain in their “proper place” which was an enclosed space. According to Milani (2011,

p.5), “way”, “road” or “path” are spatial terms that are considered to be masculine, and if a woman dares leave her socially designated space, if she abandons her fenced-off space, she is branded a street walker, a universal term of disrespect for women “out of bands” which is the title of one of Forough’s poem *Streetwalker* (27) that is apparently about adultery and sense of sinfulness.

Indeed, in most of the poems written by both of Plath and Farrokhzad, exterior spaces are associated with masculinity and interior or closed spaces are attributed to femininity. Plath in *The Ghost’s Leavetaking* (90-1) shows her resentment toward their derogatory spatial limitations and protestation against male- oriented society’s imposed responsibilities on women as a wife or mother. Applying images like “laundry” (10), “bunch of sheets” (10) and “no –man’s land” (1) she condemns the domestication of women in an undesirable space.

Forough in *The wall* (161), significantly depicts the spatial gap between she and her lover, she shows the different spaces between them and male gaze as an obstacle for her. Realizing the fact that she doesn’t belong to his world, she decides to go and find a space for herself and attain a new identity for herself, far from his gaze because his eyes are blurring her vision, which shows the man’s gaze creates identity crises and oppression in her:

With the cold moments of the past fleeing by,
Your wild eyes contained in your silent demeanor
Build a wall around me
I flee from you to a pathless path (1-4),

But your eyes with their silent scream
Will blur my vision
Like your dark secrets that
Build a wall around me (20-24)

As she frequently expresses her initial need to a new space to define a new self for her, she escapes from the space that is closed and separated by the “wall”, demanding a place where she can attain freedom. The new space, would be a remedy for her as Shand’s (1999, p.2) notes: “If a creative use of metaphors can be seen as a sign of mental health, feminism’s imagery of space might be viewed as both barometer of present atmospheric conditions and as vitalizing remedy”.

I’m fleeing from you until I open the path
To the city of desires
And in that city...
The castle of dreams will have a heavy golden lock

It is there where I am happy and free
And I weave memories of this world (16-19).

In Plath’s most of the works, we premise the same search by woman for new space to define a new identity for herself like in *The Snowman on the Moor* (58-9):

Stalemated their armies stood, with tottering banners:
She flung from a room
Still ringing with bruit of insults and dishonors

And in fury left him (1-4)

Warned her to keep
Indoors with politic goodwill, not haste
Into a landscape (10-12)

Plath in this poem, portrays a woman who escapes from a house (closed space) to landscape (open space) to find a new place for herself but at the end, she returns home disappointed as the word “bent” gives us a sense of female’s submission: “Humbled then, and crying/The girl bent homeward/And mild obeying”(49-51). So, there is a significant concept of home in both poets’ works. The places we construct, dwell in and with (in) which we create meaningful relationships are usually referred to as homes. They are sites of belonging. Feminist scholars (from Irigaray 1993; de Beauvoir, 1964; Young, 1997; Johansson & Saarikangas, 2009) have analyzed the ways in which the processes of dwelling, making and having a home are gendered. Home is understood as a geographical location, an inner space, a material and immaterial extension of identity. Bachelard’s (1969) concern with notions of refuge and enclosure and his interest in thresholds and doors are significant in surveying the concept of home. In marking a human tendency to move outward, necessitating an expansion beyond the closed spaces – what he calls an “explosion toward the outside” – his approach undergirds our own

Although Plath and Forough had lived in totally different spaces, but both are in the same way obsessed with the space. Forough could comprehend the division of spaces between men and women as she says “how far was our earths more than this” (*Its Becoming Sun*, 230-3) and she showed it in *Captive* (29): “You are that clear and bright sky/I, in this corner of the cage, am a captive bird” (1-2). She attributes man to a vast and unlimited space like “sky” and in contrast, she shows her confinement to the “cage”. Respectively, Plath preoccupies us with the same twofold representation of space between men and women. She in *Full Fathom Five* (92-3) says: “You defy other godhood/I walk dry on your kingdom’s border/Exiled to no good” (37-39) or as she says in *Snakecharmer* (79): “As the gods began one world, and man another/So the snakecharmer begins a snaky sphere” (1-2).

As the space of the man is more extensive in comparison to that of the woman, two spatial elements of “mirror” and “window” in poems of Plath and Farrokhzad gain significance. Both have been demystified gender identity pertinent to spatiality. Common approach to gender/space relationship makes reference to the patriarchal gender division of labor between men and women, that is, allocating the housework or domestic labor to women and the public waged work to men. Spatial manifestation of this binary distinction of activities is presented on private/public dichotomy of spaces. By and large, concepts of Introvert and Extrovert point to the “inner” and “outer,” respectively. While the “inner” refers

to the internal spaces, the house and, the family life and mostly the women inside, the “outer” pertains, inversely, to the external spaces, the public and the public activity, and specially the men outside (Minoosh Sadeghianzade, 2013, p.2). Both Plath and Farrokhzad show these dualistic treatments of space in their poems.

We procure the function of “Mirror” in some of Forough’s poems as a replacement for absent lover and his gaze, like *Broken Mirror* (67) to imply the fact that in a patriarchal society, woman is dependent on men for realization of her own self and for her position in the world.

Freedman (1993, p.152) puts: “Plath uses ‘mirror’ as a symbol of female passivity, subjection, and Plath’s own conflicted self-identity caused by social pressures to reconcile the competing obligations of artistic and domestic life”.

Another important image is “window” which I am going to examine in both of Plath and Farrokhzad’s poetry. Their frequent use of “window” in relation to female subjectivity is the crucial point that gains significance in spatiality. Forough in most of her poems to name a few; *Window* (347-350), *A Girl and Spring* (84), *Night’s Devil* (45) and *Perception* (250), uses the image of “window” as a relation between femininity and space. In *Window* (347) she says: “A window to see/A window to hear” (1-4) ... “A window is enough for me” (11). So her assumption of “window” is a positive thing to communicate with the space, “A window to the instance of light/ insight and peace” (38-39) ... “A woman was buried in the chaste coffin of her hope/Is she the remnant of my youth?” (58) ... “In shelter of my window/I am attached to the sun” (68-69). Bahmany (2010, p.69) notes: “Through her constant oscillation between the mirror and the window, Forough demonstrates her consciousness of mirror’s complex reciprocity with one’s self image, identity and worldwide”.

In most of Plath’s poems, she obtains the image of “window” as we track in *A Birthday Present* (206-8) the theme of the poem is basically about the spatial aspect of “window” which is related to the problem of gender identity in women. She portrays a woman who as a birthday gift, demands her husband to take the curtains off from the window: “Sweetly, sweetly I breathe in/Filling my veins with invisibles, with the million” (41-42). Then she connects “window” to her subjectivity as a woman who is invisible in patriarchal society and she says: “There is this one thing I want today, and only you can give it to me” (48). So the only one who can grant a woman, her desired space, a “window” without curtain in this poem is the man as she says: “It stands at my window, big as the sky/It breathes from my sheets, the cold dead center/Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil/If it were death” (51-53). Plath puts “veil” as an obstacle that divides space of women and men and she wants him to remove it to make women and men equal by saying: “Let us sit down to it,

one on either side, admiring the gleam” (24). By the title of poem, we can assume that destroying discriminatory space between men and women would be poet’s desire and a rebirth for her.

Smith (2009, p.28) argues that the “window’s” status as a visual and spatial boundary holder is crucial in an era obsessed with crossings and borders between inside and outside, a set of terms that accrues psychoanalytical as well as socio-political resonance during the modernist period in terms of race, class, and gender. A symbolic act that served to break down barriers and transcend space between inside and outside, between the forces of capitalism and male power and the women they sought to exclude.

From spatial standpoint, both poets have illustrated their friction against what I suggest “spatial discrimination” or unjust division of space, as Plath shows in *Getting There* (247-9), she is living in a place where there is a bloody battle between men and women: “This earth I rise from, and I in agony” (37), poem is harsh and full of war scenes “Thunder and guns/The fire’s between us” (50) and speaker in the poem wants to leave there for a new place “I cannot undo myself, and the train is steaming” (54)... “Is there no still place” (51), a space that there is no discrimination between men and women. In poem, she asks: “How far is it?/How far is it now ?” (1-2-33) to reach her desired space.

In *Thalidomide* (252), another poem by Plath, she thoroughly clarifies what kind of space she is seeking. The poem begins with the representation of woman and her gender identity, “O half moon/Half-brain, luminosity/Negro, masked like a white/Your dark/What glove/What leatheriness/ Has protected/Me from that shadow” (1-8). She demonstrates woman with sparkling inside who has been veiled in the guise of protection, but she realizes her bondages and invisibility and she is making a space for herself by saying: “Shove into being, dragging/The lopped/Blood-caul of absences/All night I carpenter/A space for the thing I am given/A love/Of two wet eyes and a screech/White spit/Of indifference” (14-22).

Likewise, Forough feels the same sexual discrimination and lack of proper space for her, so she decides to be the speaker of the oppressed women in male- dominated society. As Milani points out: “Farrokhzad views her role as a speaker for a particular community, a community of ‘unarticulated’ members” (1992, p.85). In *Green Delusion* (292), the female persona of the poem is associated with the attributes of negative semantic load such as “cramped”, “alone”, “forsaken”, “drowned corps” connoting her discontentment with her situation. The circumstances in which the processes have occurred lie within a feminine environment, delineating the contradictions of the woman who is looking for her identity outside the domestic space. Speaker in the poem, demands resurrection from spatial images:

Where was The Peak?
When was The Rise?
Shelter me blinding, mystifying lights!
Shelter me, glowing, silent abodes! (43-47)

Both Forough and Plath realized their lack of proper space, profoundly resisted it and by means of their poetry reacted against patriarchal social codes which were limiting them to closed spaces. As brilliantly Proshansky (1983, p.59) pinpoints: “place serves as an external memory for people’s place- related aspects of their self-identity and its function is to regulate, stabilize and develop people’s self- identity”. In this paper, I attempted to unravel the triangular relationship between space, feminism and identity in Plath and Farrokhzad’s poems. Both poets represent their alienation and identity crises resulted from having no space which prompted them to seek for new spaces in male-oriented societies.

CONCLUSION

Both Farrokhzad and Plath are considered as iconic female poets who thrived and influenced many twentieth century poets with their highly symbolic, rough and innovative style. Their works distinctively divulge their deep perception of their limited space that causes anxiety, fragmentation and identity crises in them which is perceivable by reader in most of their poems.

Forough in her poems shrieked the suffocation of her circumstance as a woman while majority of women were muted and obedient. For the first time in the literary history of Iran, a woman broke boundaries and talked about her sexuality, desire and pleasure when these concepts were considered sinful and taboo. She centered her body in her poems, while women were denying their bodies in terms of chastity and religion. Farrokhzad’s poem demonstrates women’s lack of proper space for themselves in a patriarchal society, which creates alienation and identity crises. In most of her poems, she frequently asks herself “who am I?” She is in a quest for her true self or a space allocated to herself as a woman.

Likewise, Plath who became controversial among second post war poets gained her worldwide reputation by depicting women’s life, sufferings and strangulations. Plath began to effulge in a time that is often identified as the pinnacle of gender inequality when women were denigrated and portrayed as voiceless, submissive, purely domestic creatures. It was the time of sexual and racial discrimination. There was an outburst of domestic ideology as a revival of traditional ideals of woman’s place. Concepts like “marriage” and “motherhood” were among the femininity’s accepted ideal codes and by constraining women to these ideas, in the guise of protection, men excluded women from outside world to the confined domestic space of home.

Respectively, Plath in her poems reflected the constraining aspects of the domestic spaces which

were direct reflection of the repressive consequence of the spatial division and sexual segregation. As she demonstrates in her poetry, the passive, gloomy and static spaces commonly are associated with the realm of femininity in opposition to activity, movement and dynamism related to masculinity.

Spatial division in Plath's poetry is often related to the question of identity as her speakers in poems are in the desperate search of female identity. Lack of proper space for women and seeking it through resisting confined space imposed by patriarchal society, is the most important theme of her poetry. Challenging sexual stereotypes is what we obtain in most of her works. Female personas in her poems are "shadowy", "invisible" or "doll like" in service of men's pleasure and comfort. The most presented spaces for women in her poems are confined spaces of "home", "kitchen" and "bedroom". Her poems also closely deal with femininity or motherhood through concepts like "maternity hospital". Captivation in limited and enclosed private spheres causes the female's sense of loss and displacelessness which is the most inclusive point in analysis of the poems by both poets.

Sylvia Plath significantly both Farrokhzad and Plath employ the symbolic representation of narrow and limited spaces to imply confined and undesirably closed space of women in male-dominated society. In contrast, images associated with men's space are often vast and unlimited. Hence, similar spatial images of "home", "window", and "mirror" represented by both Plath and Farrokhzad equivalently in their poems show close association of spatial figures with femininity to define female gender identity construction.

What is inferable by the examination of their poetry is that neither Sylvia nor Forough succumb to the sense of placelessness. Deprivation of an appropriate space and the desire to find it for one's own as a remedy or revival of true self is sustained in poems of both Plath and Farrokhzad. Forough in most of her poems deliberately expresses her excruciating exigency for solitude which I take it as a desire to allot a space for her. Similarly, Plath in numerous poems discloses the same tribulation to find a new space to define a new identity for her. A space for oneself as a woman that is propounded by both poets is an utopian place based on feministic approach, where there is no discrimination between men and women, with no boundary or division in space allocated for them and to borrow from Plath, "A Space of Indifference" (*Thalidomide*, 22).

REFERENCES

Arponen, K., & Anna-Kaisa, R. (2009). "Place and Placelessness"; "the mobilities of forced displacement: Commemorating karelian evacuation in finland". *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10, 545-63.

- Bachelard, G. (1969/1958). *Poetics of space*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bahmany, L. R. (2010). *Bewildered mirror: Mirror, self and world in the Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*. Poet of Modern Iran; Iconic Woman and Feminine Pioneer of New Persian Poetry. In D. P. Brookshaw & N. Rahimiye (Eds.). LB. Tauris Publishers.
- Bayrami, T. (2005). *In the eye of mirror, life and works of Forough Farrokhzad*. (Online) Retrieved from <http://www.vaznhe.com/forough.htm> Last accessed 12 April 2014.
- Braheni, R. (1996). The progenitor of feminine farsi poetry. In B. Jalali (Ed.), *Living Immortal, Being in Cutting Edge*. Tehran: Morvarid
- Brookshaw, D. P. (1987). *A lonely woman: Forough Farrokhzad and her poetre* (pp.110-123). Mage Publishers.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. In S. Rendall (Trans.). Berkeley.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politic*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Crowther, G. (2011). Plath and place: Introduction. *Plath Profile (Vol.4)*. Indiana University Press.
- Forough, F. (2002). *Complete collected poems*. Tehran: Shadan Publishers.
- Freedman, W. (1993). The monster in plath's "mirror". *Papers on Language and literature*, 108(5), 152-69.
- Forough, F., & Suliza Hashim, R. (2012). An angry language: A stylistic study of the images of men in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy". *Studies in Literature and Language*, 4(1), 123-128. † †
- Katz, L. (2002). The space of motherhood Sylvia Plath's "Morning Song" and "Three Women". *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. <https://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/jarm/article/view/1869/0> † Last accessed 20 May 2014
- Lefebvre, H. (1991/1974). *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Martin, D. G., & Byron, M. (2003). Space and Contentious Politics. *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 8(2), 143-156.
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place and gende.*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McDowell, L. (1999). *Gender, identity and place: Understanding feminist geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Milani, F. (2011). *Words, not swords: Iranian women writers and the freedom of Movement*. Synracuse University Press.
- Milani, F. (1982). Forough Farrokhzad: A feminist perspective. *Bride of Acacias: Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*. In J. Kessler & A. Banani (trans.). Delmar, NY: Caravan Books p.143.
- Ohler-Stricklen, D. O. (2005). *And this I: The power of the individual in the poetry of Forough Farrokhzad*. A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements of Staffordshire University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy: The University of Texas at Austin.

- Proshansky, H., Fabian, A. K., & Kaminoff, R. (1983). Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3, 57-83.
- Plath, S. (1982). *The journals of Sylvia Plath*. In F. Mc Cullough & T. Hughes (Eds.). New York: Dial.
- Plath, S. (1992). *The collected poems*. In T. Hughes (Ed.). New York : Harper Perennial Print.
- Sadeghianzade, M. (2013). Gender structure and spatial organization: Iranian traditional spaces. *Sage Open Journal*, (3), 1-12.
- Smith, A. R. G. (2009). *Framed: The interior woman artist-observer in modernity*. University of Michigan. Last accessed 27 March 2014. Retrieved from http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/64689/smithrg_1.pdf?sequence=1
- Smith, B. (1989). *European vision and the South Pacific*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, L. E. (2012). *Women, literature, and the domesticated landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780-1870*. Cambridge University Press. Series: Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture. No.76.
- Shands, K. D. (1999). *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse*. Greenwood
- Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social*.