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Victimization of the Colonized Native Woman

Every new generation of patriarchal society, functioning under the male gaze, propagates historical conceptions of femininity that dictate femininity's synonymy with passivity and subordination. Relegated to the private sphere in which invisibility tangibly hinders agency, women struggle to overcome the confines the identity, "woman". To this point, Lata Mani's *The Female Subject, the Colonial Gaze: Eyewitness Accounts of Sati* and Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero's *Sexual Sensitivity (Lesbianism and Sexual Psychopathy)* explore the role of victimhood in societal portrayals of native femininity through analyses of sati practices contrasted with female criminality to ultimately parallel female agency with passive unconsciousness.

To begin, Lata Mani explores the manner in which Western characterizations of sati practices victimize female widows in order to depict native women as passive objects unable to achieve self-determination. Essentially, "within the discourse on *sati*, women are represented...as pathetic victims coerced against their will into the flames...In particular, the constrained notion of agency that underwrites the representation of women as victims discursively positions... the Indian woman not as someone who acts, but as someone to be acted upon" or, in other words, as an object that needs to be saved from the violence of her native culture (Mani 162). At the crux, portrayals of Indian women as experiencing fatal violence as a result of their inability to exert agency in the public sphere associate femininity with weakness and passivity. Moreover, characterizing women who self-immolate as coerced into, rather than choosing, suicide eliminates analytical insight into the autonomous, conscious motivations driving women to

participate in sati ceremonies. That is to say, western colonial depictions of sati that portray self-immolating women as unconscious victims of overtly violent cultural settings fundamentally characterize native femininity as passive and lacking agency.

Continuing, Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero delve into masculine characteristics attached to societal perceptions female criminality that intrinsically associate female violence with monstrous femininity in order to maintain societal understandings of female agency as necessarily passive and unconscious. To this point, Lombroso and Ferrero describe “the moral physiognomy of the born female criminal [as] close to that of the male...Her love of violent exercise, her vices, and even her clothing increase her resemblance to a man. These virile traits are often joined by the worst qualities of woman: her passion for revenge, her cunning, cruelty, ...and dishonesty,” each of which posit criminal women as masculinized and deviating from the good mother archetype (Lombroso & Ferrero 102). Generally, society re-represents native females who exert active agency through violence in public spheres as exhibiting deviant forms of failed femininity to identify the individual as monstrous, masculine, and as a non-woman. Most importantly, violent criminal behavior disrupts societal perceptions of femininity as passive and unconscious in nature. In order to reconcile native female violence with passive femininity, societal portrayals of criminal females recharacterize the women as masculinized, deviant forms of femininity, oftentimes labeled as non-normative in sexuality, gender, and social position. In other words, socio-cultural understandings of female criminals inherently associate female violence with masculinity and failed motherhood in order to preserve stereotypes of true femininity as lacking both agency and self-determination.

In conclusion, societal perceptions of native femininity associate female agency with unconsciousness and subordination to masculine dominance. Further, society

re-represents non-passive actions committed by women as masculine, deviant, and indicative of an underlying, monstrous form of femininity. The victimizing narratives discussed in Lata Mani's *The Female Subject, the Colonial Gaze: Eyewitness Accounts of Sati* uphold characterizations of native femininity as lacking agency while Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero's *Sexual Sensitivity (Lesbianism and Sexual Psychopathy)* masculinizes female criminals in order to maintain dominant socio-cultural portrayals of female agency as non-violent and submissive.