Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

NOVELS OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM: AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS OF THE INTERWAR YEARS

Ezgi İLİMEN

Ph.D. Dissertation

Ankara, 2024

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Ezgi İLİMEN has on the date of 8/01/2024 successfully passed the defense examination and approves her Ph.D. Dissertation titled "Novels of Social Activism: American Women Writers of the Interwar Years".

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Ezgi İLİMEN

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ETİK BEYAN

Bu çalışmadaki bütün bilgi ve belgeleri akademik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, görsel, işitsel ve yazılı tüm bilgi ve sonuçları bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, kullandığım verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapmadığımı, yararlandığım kaynaklara bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunduğumu, tezimin kaynak gösterilen durumlar dışında özgün olduğunu, Prof. Dr. Tanfer Emin Tunç danışmanlığında tarafımdan üretildiğini ve Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Yazım Yönergesine göre yazıldığını beyan ederim.

Ezgi İLİMEN

To my beloved mother who has always been there for me

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ABSTRACT

İLİMEN, Ezgi. *Novels of Social Activism: American Women Writers of the Interwar Years*, PhD Dissertation, Ankara, 2024.

In the United States, the interwar decades of the 1920s and 1930s represented the struggle between liberation and conservatism during the "Roaring Twenties" and the turbulent Great Depression. The postwar emphasis on freedom, progress, and change was associated with the new youth, radical politics, industrial and urban growth, and immigration. Conservative reactions resulted in counteraction to modernization, working class activism, and foreign people and ideologies in light of economic crises, environmental disasters, and the changing socioeconomic and cultural structures of the United States. This dissertation explores six American women novelists who carried Progressive Era reform into the interwar years. Their social novels criticize the sociocultural and political context in order to improve modern American Woman's self-image and position, conditions of working class and farmers, and American society's awareness about global conflicts. Their drive to reform and consciousness raising narratives challenge popular and prejudiced portrayals in literature and the media. Gertrude Atherton's *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* (1921) and *Black Oxen* (1923) redefine the new woman's liberation and morality through wartime services and the postwar reconstruction of society. Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) and Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930) convey working class families' demands for rights in the booming textile industries via the Gastonia Strike of 1929. Josephine Johnson's *Now in November* (1934) and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown: A Novel* (written in 1939/published in 2004) address farm families' struggle with the Great Depression, drought, and the Dust Bowl during the New Deal. In *The Deepening Stream* (1930), Dorothy Canfield critiques WWI and peace settlements, while warning American society against growing totalitarianism and persecution in the pre-WWII era in *Seasoned Timber* (1939). These novels of social activism express critical observations, the suffering of the masses, the reality behind myths and bias, and a call for change.

Keywords: Interwar Era, American Social Novel, New Woman, Gastonia Strike, Great Depression, Dust Bowl, World Wars

ÖZET

İLİMEN, Ezgi. *Toplumsal Aktivizm Romanları: Birinci ve İkinci Dünya Savaşları Arasında Amerikan Kadın Yazarları*, Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde Birinci ve İkinci Dünya Savaşları arası dönem (1918-1939), "Kükreyen Yirmiler" ve çalkantılı Büyük Buhran yılları sırasında özgürleşme ve muhafazakârlık arasındaki mücadeleyi yansıtır. Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası özgürlük, ilerleme ve değişim vurgusu yeni gençlik, radikal politikalar, endüstriyel ve kentsel büyüme ve göçle ilişkilendirilir. Ekonomik krizler, çevresel felaketler ve ABD'nin değişen sosyoekonomik ve kültürel yapısı ışığında muhafazakâr tepkiler modernleşme, işçi sınıfı aktivizmi ve yabancı insanlara ve ideolojilere karşı koymaya yol açar. Bu tez İlerlemeci Dönem reformunu dünya savaşları arası döneme taşıyan altı Amerikan kadın romancıyı ele almaktadır. Yazdıkları toplumsal romanlar modern Amerikan kadınının benliğini ve konumunu, işçi sınıfı ve çiftçilerin durumunu ve Amerikan toplumunun küresel çatışmalar hakkında farkındalığını geliştirmek amacıyla mevcut sosyokültürel ve politik durumu eleştirir. Yazarların reform çabaları ve farkındalığı arttıran anlatıları edebiyat ve medyadaki popüler ve önyargılı temsillere karşı çıkar. Gertrude Atherton'ın *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* (1921) ve *Black Oxen* (1923) romanları yeni kadının özgürleşmesini ve ahlak anlayışını savaş dönemi hizmetleri ve savaş sonrası toplumun yeniden yapılanması üzerinden yeniden tanımlar. Grace Lumpkin'in *To Make My Bread* (1932) and Mary Heaton Vorse'ün *Strike!* (1930) romanları işçi sınıfı ailelerinin gelişen tekstil endüstrisinde 1929 Gastonia Grevi aracılığıyla hak taleplerini anlatır. Josephine Johnson'ın *Now in November* (1934) ve Sanora Babb'ın *Whose Names Are Unknown: A Novel* (1939'da yazılan/2004'te basılan) romanları Yeni Anlaşma döneminde çiftçi ailelerinin Büyük Buhran, kuraklık ve Toz Çanağı ile mücadelelerini ele alır. *The Deepening Stream* (1930) romanında Dorothy Canfield Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve barış görüşmelerini eleştirirken, *Seasoned Timber* (1939) romanında İkinci Dünya Savaşı öncesinde Amerikan toplumunu giderek artan totalitarizm ve kısıtlamalara karşı uyarır. Bu toplumsal aktivizm romanları eleştirel gözlemleri, kitlelerin çektiği acıyı, mitler ve ön yargılar ardındaki gerçeği ve bir değişim çağrısını ifade etmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dünya Savaşları Arası Dönem, Amerikan Toplumsal Romanı, Yeni Kadın, Gastonia Grevi, Büyük Buhran, Toz Çanağı, Dünya Savaşları

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s reflected a paradoxical swing between radicalism and conservatism in the aftermath of the First World War and during the Great Depression. With an emphasis on change and progress, the "Roaring Twenties" emerged as a manifestation of the postwar freedom and individualism that rewarded the women's suffrage struggle with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, depicted rebellious flappers and materialist new youth in literature and motion pictures, and saw the expansion of the modern city through industry, electricity, and mass produced goods, including the Model T automobile. Meanwhile, the postwar decades also encompassed conflicts and contradictions, positioned in between radical activism and conservative right-wing reactions. Anti-immigration sentiments, the rise of nativism, and the popularity of eugenics as promoted by Charles B. Davenport, Harry S. Laughlin, and Madison Grant resulted in restrictive immigration legislation, such as the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, that placed quotas on eastern and southern Europeans and increased border control. The Eighteenth Amendment enacted the prohibition of alcoholic beverages in the United States in 1920, until it was repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment in 1933. During the First Red Scare (1917-1920), anti-communist reactions to labor activists, socialists, and communists led to the Palmer Raids (1919-1920) with the arrest and deportation of hundreds of immigrants, especially Italians, Russians, and Jews. Racial violence was also at a peak during the Red Summer of 1919, in which anti-black attacks and race riots took place across the nation. Along with the labor unrest and strikes, religious fundamentalism's emphasis on creationism over evolution occupied the headlines during the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925.

With progressive tides in society, economy, and politics, in the 1920s, the new woman made her debut in public places, the workplace, and on the political scene as an enfranchised woman. She remained the primary target of consumerism, mobility, and mass media in advertisements, radio, and Hollywood (e.g., Clara Bow and Joan Crawford were the iconic flappers of the screen). At the same time, new woman's popularity, visibility, and freedom in manners, morals, and style triggered anti-modern reactions from the conservative front of anti-radicals, prohibitionists, supporters of "one hundred percent Americanism" against "race suicide," and the members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

Lynn Dumenil notes that the centrality of flapper in the representations of the 1920s turned the new liberated woman into a dancing, drinking, bobbed-haired audacious icon who associated with bootleggers, speakeasies, and Jazz clubs. This concealed "the complexity of an era and the diversity of the American people" with contradicting responses to sociocultural changes ("Foreword" 5). The changing pace of life, with modernity, new socioeconomic opportunities, and technological strides contributed to mass production industries, consumer culture, American global power, women's "evolving roles," and the arrival of immigrants, which added to the country's "racial, ethnic and cultural pluralism" (Dumenil, "Foreword" 5). The forms of resistance to change reflected legacies of the past through the agenda of white supremacists against blacks, Catholics, and Jews; the struggle between rural conservatism and urban liberalism; and anti-immigration rallies, while ironically taking pride in mass produced cars and the cultural diversity of the nation (5). People welcomed the amenities of modern life such as democratized access to consumption, alternatives to transportation, and mass media. However, they reacted to new manners, morals, and the appearance of youth culture and immigrants with an aggressive defense of "true" American life and white Anglo-Saxon Protestant puritan values.

Post-WWI prosperity obscured the signs of economic downturn, especially in high-profit industries and agriculture, despite a sharp decline in market demand and international trade, and growing unemployment rates. Bank loans and easy credit encouraged consumerism and investment until the 1929 stock market crash and bank failures. In urban America, poverty and homelessness transformed modern cities into ghettos with Hoovervilles and breadlines, and self-sufficient farmers were hard-hit by the Great Drought and dust storms on the Great Plains, where they struggled with tumbling crop prices and crop failures on mortgaged farms. The New Deal administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt encouraged unemployment relief, the recovery of the financial sector, including the unregulated banking system and labor, and agricultural reform programs. Internal migration to western states from the plains, triggered by economic crisis, ecological imbalance, and labor unrest, contributed to the rise of labor movements in the mid-1930s and its subsequent decline with the outbreak of the Second World War. The American economic depression and the postwar isolationist turn to domestic policies ignored the rise of Nazism, the rearmament and industrialization of Germany, the

emergence of totalitarian, fascist regimes in Italy and Spain, and violation of the Treaty of Versailles, all of which led to another global war.

This dissertation seeks to recuperate neglected socially-conscious women writers, their novels, and the ways in which they examine the clash between radicalism and conservatism during the 1920s and 1930s, two turbulent decades of economic crisis, ecological disasters, and rising concerns about global conflicts. This dissertation will argue that in fact, their critique of the social and political milieu of their time carried Progressive Era social reform and political activism into the interwar decades. Over the course of four chapters, it will examine the concerns of the New Woman, working class families, drought and dust bowl-hit farm communities, and humanitarian and democratic principles beyond the confines of WWI, analyzing each one of these themes through two overlooked interwar novels written by women.

THE INTERWAR NEW WOMAN AND THE PROGRESSIVE LEGACY

Enfranchised women participated in the political activism of the 1920s. The new woman's expanding roles in family, the American socioeconomic structure, and politics reflected the legacy of the pre-WWI Progressive agenda, the suffrage victory, wartime relief work, and demands for equal rights and citizenship. Democrats and Republicans acknowledged women's political power by providing minor positions within their party organizations; however, many women were nevertheless actively involved in state politics and local governments through "municipal housekeeping," often using maternalist concerns about health, education, labor, and the welfare of women and children to become active at the grassroots level (Dumenil, "New Woman" 23–24). Progressive Era women's nonpartisan politics and social reform activism (roughly the 1880s to the 1910s) took a different direction through lobbying in Washington DC, which laid the foundation of the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC) for federal legislations. Some of their main accomplishments were the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Amendments, the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, securing federal funding for maternity and childcare, child labor legislation, and organizing a peace movement in the wake of WWI (24). The progressive emphasis on controlled maternity also complemented the birth control movement and women's demand for reproductive rights under the leadership of Margaret Sanger, a trained nurse and writer.

As Ellen C. DuBois and Lynn Dumenil indicate, women contributed to wartime mobilization via nursing and support of the American Red Cross, fundraising for relief activities, labor in industries, and various campaigns for war bonds and food conservation through the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) (441–42). DuBois and Dumenil characterize the changes in women's lives in the first decades of the twentieth century as follows: "Women had entered the Progressive era under the banner of motherhood; they were leaving it, unbeknownst to many of them, under the banner of worker" (446). However, as Ruby Maloni suggests, the new woman's freedom and equality furnished an idealized public image, rather than tangible success or radical change, as "she was more of an illusion, to be studied and understood later, as a literary creation and cultural symbol" (880). The arrival of the new woman was signaled by her willingness to attend college, take part in sports and professions, and confront the Victorian cult of womanhood that confined her body and potential through corseted clothing and glorified domesticity (Maloni 880). Popular depictions of the 1920s new women emphasized this freedom through associations with automobiles, the changing fashion industry, and discussions of sexuality in Freudian terms, all of which gave rise to new manners and morals that contrasted with traditional gender norms and glorified womanhood. Yet, such representations obscured women's encounters with gender barriers in education, employment, the workplace, and family life, leading to "a myth of equality" that overshadowed reality (Freedman 393). The historical and cultural discourse of the 1920s publicized the image of the "politically apathetic but sexually active" new woman. This would justify women's stereotypical sexual roles and homemaker duties for years, regardless of their potential or pursuit of interests beyond traditional occupations (393). The flapper's apolitical and hedonist freedom cast a shadow over the suffrage struggle, women's continued political activism, their desire for social reform, and the labor struggle for unionization in major industries.

The postwar backlash against women's progressive reform was compounded by public resentment towards Prohibition and the First Red Scare that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Dumenil, "New Woman" 25). Anti-communist hysteria was transformed into an anti-radical and "un-American" witch hunt that targeted immigrants such as the anarchist feminist activist Emma Goldman with deportation. The anti-radicalism of the Red Scare sabotaged the labor movement's efforts to organize,

transformed social reformers into threats, fueled the violation of civil liberties, encouraged restrictive immigration laws, triggered racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Catholic sentiments, and prompted the second revival of KKK (Dumenil, "New Woman" 25). The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom came under the attack of communist hysteria, including social reformers such as Jane Addams, who was accused of promoting Bolshevism through the settlement house movement. Conservative women were also part of this backlash, with the Women Sentinels of the Republic, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and female supporters of the KKK regarding women's social reform and lobbying for legislation as a pathway to a Bolshevik revolution (26).

WOMEN'S LABOR ACTIVISM

Despite the 1920s red-baiting and sexist underestimation of women, their progressive activism and social reform paved the way for their invaluable place in New Deal programs, the labor activism of the Great Depression, and Roosevelt administration of the 1930s. Lois R. Helmbold and Ann Schofield state that the history of women's labor focuses on the experience of white women leaving home for industrial employment with "sex-segregated" work, the wage gap, and workplace hierarchy, which neglects the troubling history of preindustrial plantation slave labor and African American toil in the domestic sphere (502). Initially, textile mills, like the Lowell Mill in Massachusetts, took advantage of white women's traditional home-grown skills for monotonous, yet skilled, labor in the shoe industry, department stores, and in clerical work. This set a gendered standard for low-paying "pink collar" care-oriented jobs, such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work that emphasized domestic skills and expected women to reclaim their position as homemakers upon marriage and motherhood (Helmbold and Schofield 502–503). Gendered occupations and labor relations disrupted working class solidarity in the workplace and weakened the organized labor movement. "Feminized" labor (e.g., maids, secretaries, and clerks) normalized gender barriers and prevented the class consciousness that was necessary for unionization (503). Capitalist mill owners, middle class benefactors, the media and the church also heavily criticized women mill workers, strike organizers, and union workers. The sexual and moral connotations of men and women working together still seemed improper to many, even during the interwar years. Within

the workplace and union circles, women workers were viewed as temporary laborers without rights or privileges, a prominent threat with their lower wages, and second-class workers who perpetuated low paying feminized labor.

Consequently, women workers could not find a place in the trade union movement led by male-headed American Federation of Labor (AFL), which regarded women as a cheap labor force within the industrial capitalist system. Thus, women's labor organizations were left to struggle for better wages and conditions without the support of larger unions (DuBois and Dumenil 410–11). Women's underestimation as a laboring class and their exclusion from labor organizations paved the way for maternalist labor activism under the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL). In the early twentieth century, women workers in the New York shirtwaist industry organized strikes with the help of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and immigrant women workers who took active leadership roles despite harassment and arrest (412). As an expression of women's cross-class alliance, upper class benefactors from the WTUL provided publicity and resources for the struggling working class women of the ILGWU, which set workday hours and wages without the recognition of unions. However, the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire, during which women workers were burned alive or jumped to their deaths from the smoldering building, tragically proved the urgent need for labor regulations, unionization, and workplace safety codes (413). Under the leadership of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Lawrence Strike (1912) in Massachusetts, known as the Bread and Roses Strike, addressed the problems of textile industry workers, who were mostly immigrants and workers employed as families. Their grievances included low wages, the poor living and working conditions of company towns, child labor, and a high mortality rate. According to DuBois and Dumenil, the police attacks on children and the imprisonment of mothers attracted national attention, which resulted in a wage increase and a fifty-four-hour work week. This encouraged women workers to join labor organizations, but sent textile mills down South in search of cheap labor (415).

The "public housekeeping" role was also used to legitimize progressive women's public work within social reform movements, especially when it came to improving the conditions of women and children. Progressive women's clubs targeted political corruption, assisted reform sympathizers as political candidates, provided funds for public

facilities, worked to set food standards in the dairy industry, and collaborated with the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and Florence Kelley's National Consumers' League (NCL) (DuBois and Dumenil 416). The maternalist crusade for public morality, safe and clean urban housing, fair labor practices, and childcare legitimized women's social and political activism, and simultaneously reinforced gender roles and interests through protective legislation. As DuBois and Dumenil point out, the *Muller v. Oregon* Supreme Court decision of 1908 legalized the regulation of women's working hours, wages, and tasks, using eugenic arguments regarding women's reproductive roles as its basis (419). However, protective labor regulation neglected women employed in the agricultural labor market and in domestic services, and identified women as the weaker sex, giving rise to state laws that prevented women's work at night and minimum wages for shorter working hours. Progressive organizations evoked governmental initiatives to protect maternity and childcare; yet, they failed to improve all wage-earning women's conditions and to bring child labor to a decisive end.

THE LORAY MILL STRIKE OF 1929

In the early twentieth century, many northern industries moved to the South where mill owners would pay lower wages to blacks and poor whites, mostly women and children, in the absence of unions. In North Carolina, Gastonia was recognized as "the South's City of Spindles" because it had the highest number of spindles in the state and in the South in 1930, with its rising population of Piedmont mountaineers (Draper 4). These poor whites, namely farmers, migrated to the city with high hopes about prosperity and urban life, in order to be cotton mill workers. Their migration to mill cities prompted an increase in the number of Gastonia textile mills from seven in 1900 to almost forty in 1930 (4). As Sylvia Cook notes, the Loray Mill Strike of 1929 in Gastonia represented an historical encounter between capitalist industrial machinery and communism on the eve of the Great Depression, witnessing the race, gender and religion-based manipulation of workers by mill owners (53). Despite red baiting in the local media, communist sympathizers helped mill families during the strike. The primary cause behind the strike and the organized labor struggle was the popular "stretch-out" system that cut labor costs in booming textile mills. This motivated mill workers to call for a walkout with Fred Beal, a National Textile

Workers Union (NTWU) organizer, on April 1 (Cook 53). The mill management responded with strikebreakers, the eviction of families from mill houses and property, mob violence targeting workers, and a police invasion of the tent colony of strikers and labor organizers, leading to the police-chief's death and the trial of union organizers on charges of murder (53–54). Strike leaders received prison sentences and some released on bail fled to Russia.

The mob vandalism and vigilantism culminated in attacks on union members with grim outcomes such as the murder of Ella May Wiggins, the balladeer of the strike. Wiggins emerged as the public face of the Loray Mill Strike of 1929 as a mill mother-worker, strike balladeer and a martyr in the headlines. As Lisa Schreibersdorf points out, the media overemphasized her role as a "mill mother of five children" over everything else, underscoring the maternal aspect of her activism: "Although she had walked the picket line and served the union in other roles, the roles of mother and singer-songwriter of the often reprinted 'Mill Mother's Lament' (or, 'How it Grieves the Heart of a Mother') consistently describe this 'martyr' who became a defining character of the strike" (307). The traditional emphasis on maternity continued to justify women's politics and activism in postwar conservative and radical contexts, as well as in sociocultural commentaries on women strikers and union workers on picket lines. Nevertheless, the organized labor struggle led by mill women set an example for industrial workers and unionism.

The Loray Mill Strike of 1929 produced six Gastonia strike novels. Fielding Burke, the penname of Olive Tilford Dargan, published *Call Home the Heart* (1932) as a testimony to the radical awakening of mountain people in cotton mills through working class solidarity and activism. Another southerner acquainted with poor whites was Grace Lumpkin, who published *To Make My Bread* (1932) about the mountain farmers' transformation into mill hands and their confrontation with urban life and factory labor. In this novel, a female protagonist represents Ella May Wiggins in fictionalized form (Cook 55). Myra Page's *Gathering Storm* (1932) differs from other Gastonia writers with her aggressive Marxist political portrayals of workers, emphasis on union activism, and attention to the historical accuracy of events, except for her fictional ending that replaced fleeing union leaders and local strife with a national gathering of communists (55–56). Mary Heaton Vorse's proletarian novel *Strike!* (1930) reflects her observations and commentary as a labor reporter for *Harper's* during the Gastonia strike. However, Vorse

underlines the struggle between union organizers and the local mob, ending the novel with the "martyrdom" of the union leader and radical awakening of a northern reporter who pledges a life-long alliance with the working class (56). Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire* (1932) was yet another proletarian strike novel. It elaborates his notable radicalism and skeptical view of any ideology, whereas William Rollins Jr.'s *The Shadow Before* (1934) greatly differs from other Gastonia novels with its New England setting (57).

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND NEW DEAL INITIATIVES

By the time of the presidential election of 1932, unemployment rates had already surpassed twenty percent, accompanied by a severe decline in annual production rates and services. For this reason, Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised a New Deal to Americans as a solution to the Great Depression and its socioeconomic crises (Fishback and Wallis 290). Despite the various initiatives of the Hoover administration and the Republican Congress, Roosevelt won the election with Democrats dominating both the House of Representatives and the Senate, which launched the era of New Deal economy-based politics and regulations during the First Hundred Days. FDR's initial New Deal programs would be expanded, altered, and even removed over the years, while some of them have remained as forerunners of today's policies (290). Relying on existing governmental programs, the New Deal administered funding for "highways and roads; reclamation and irrigation; flood control and improved navigation; benefits to veterans . . . mortgage loans and emergency crop and feed loans for farmers; education; agricultural experimentation, extension, and advanced education; and national defense spending" (291–92).

President Hoover attempted to manage the economic crisis with programs already in place. Roosevelt introduced new programs or improved existing policies under the New Deal by expanding the role of the federal government in the organization of markets and the banking system. The New Deal reinforced the duties of state and local governments by means of federal grants or loans to provide work, relief, and housing to the unemployed and poor. For example, the National Employment Service, public housing projects, and public works programs extended federal funds for the basic needs of Americans. Likewise, other New Deal policies assisted the US economic recovery via investments in

infrastructure. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), initially engaged in the construction of dams for flood and navigation control, ended up providing electricity to neighboring states through the Rural Electrification Administration (Fishback and Wallis 292).

During the Great Depression, farmers experienced unfortunate times after the "Golden Era" of high production and prices during the early twentieth century, especially during the WWI economic boom years. However, the postwar 1920s indicated the bust cycle in the US economy when European market demand for American products fell drastically. The economic crisis was further aggravated in the 1930s, which paved the way for the New Deal agricultural policies of limiting farm production, through subsidies, in order to raise crop prices, and "non-recourse loans" as a control mechanism over falling prices (Fishback and Wallis 310). The economic crisis, coupled with natural disasters of droughts and dust storms, placed a heavy burden on farmers struggling to pay their mortgage and loan payments due to low productivity and prices. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and other programs assisted large farmers; funds for small farmers were introduced to combat rural poverty through the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA), the Resettlement Administration's initiatives to move small farmers to better farm land, and other federal loan and grant programs. In 1937, these farm-related relief initiatives were placed under the newly-established Farm Security Administration (312).

With respect to New Deal labor programs, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933 defined labor codes for wages, working hours, and prices in leading economic sectors, without dismantling the gendered division of labor and wage gap (DuBois and Dumenil 503). Women were not only marginalized as a significant work force, giving priority to male breadwinners, but they were also granted limited opportunities in fields such as clerical jobs, farm work, and domestic services. The NIRA's regulation of labor opened the way for the federal recognition of organized labor, which was later addressed by the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act due to the Supreme Court decision that overruled the NIRA in 1935. Women still took advantage of unionization since they worked for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) as labor organizers and gained access to industrial work (503). As Fishback and Wallis state, the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932 protected peaceful union activities from the interference of federal courts and employers, prohibited non-union (yellow dog) contracts, and considered state labor laws

(315). The New Deal extended this legislation by setting labor codes regarding unionization through the establishment of the National Recovery Administration (NRA), under the NIRA. Section 7a of the NIRA provided "standard language" about workers' rights to collective bargaining by means of an "agent of their choice" (Fishback and Wallis 315). The Wagner Act reaffirmed Section 7a, enabling workers to choose a representative union for collective bargaining. Formerly, employers either refused to acknowledge workers' unions, or established company-affiliated unions. Gradually, New Deal labor legislation, unionization activities, and strikes encouraged the organized labor struggle in the late 1930s, with the help of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which supervised collective bargaining, union elections, and fair labor practices (315).

Federal relief projects also integrated unemployed women through Eleanor Roosevelt's initiatives. The New Deal provided jobs for women through relief agencies such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Works Projects Administration (WPA). Thus, women found positions in social work, libraries, teaching, nursing, domestic services, and in other federal projects as artists and writers (DuBois and Dumenil 504). While the New Deal programs helped unemployed women, it also maintained patriarchal and racial norms with limited access to jobs, exclusion from certain fields, and lower wages for Native American women and African American women in segregated southern states. The Social Security Act of 1935 provided a federal pension program, unemployment assistance, and financial help for dependent mothers and children, with the exception of domestic and farm workers. The Social Security system was shaped by traditional gender assumptions about women's secondary position at work, the inevitability of marriage to a male breadwinner, and their primary role as homemakers (506–507). Many women were forced to earn a living under these unjust and biased circumstances.

THE GREAT DROUGHT AND THE DUST BOWL

The 1930 Great Drought deepened the trials of the masses, who struggled with unemployment, Sisyphean attempts towards economic recovery, and a sharp decline in agricultural prices. At the beginning of the crisis, President Herbert Hoover had a chance to reinforce his political image as the "man who had aided the helpless Belgians during the World War, the people of Europe after the war, the famine-stricken Russians in 1921

and 1922, and the homeless victims of the Mississippi Flood in 1927" (Hamilton 850–51). Hoover could have engaged in well-planned relief efforts; yet, he and some members of his administration could not reach a consensus with Congress about urgent relief initiatives, due to his own reservations about the role and scope of the federal government (851). The residents of depression and drought-ridden rural America eventually faced the risk of losing their livestock and the threat of farm foreclosures in the midst of rising unemployment rates, bank failures, and dust storms.

During the dust storms of the 1930s, the economic and environmental aspects of the Dust Bowl were aggravated by the blowing dust that carried away the fertile topsoil from Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas. The dust storms resulted in the collapse of the agricultural system on the Great Plains, where farm communities struggled with economic damage and serious health problems on farms buried under drifts of dust, without a glimpse of sun for days:

> Even wet towels stuffed in the cracks of windows could not keep the dust out, and from across the room an electric light might look no brighter than the tip of a cigarette. Everything in the house—even food in the refrigerator—was covered with dust. To be able to breathe, people covered their faces with wet cloths, but continuously breathing the damp air only aggravated the effects of the dust. Each storm was followed by many cases of serious lung damage, and some proved fatal. (Lockeretz 560)

On the plains, dust storms periodically occurred in the mid-1930s in varying dimensions, without being limited the Dust Bowl region. However, severe wind erosion and black blizzards unexpectedly reached the plains, particularly the Southern Plains, already struggling with the impact of the economic crisis (560). The untimely concurrence of dust storms, depression, and drought displaced farm families who were relegated to the status of tenant farmers and then to dust bowl refugee-laborers on the West Coast due to their inability to keep up with mortgages. Furthermore, the drought would not have led to the Dust Bowl and damage on the plains if farmers had preserved the grassland instead of turning it into farm plots. The result was that wheat farming spread on the plains during a period of high wheat prices, the mechanization of farming, and land speculation (Lockeretz 566). Consequently, the Soil Conservation Service (1935) was established to deal with soil erosion and inform farmers about crop planning and other preventive measures in the midst of the dust bowl disaster and the socioeconomic crisis in farm communities.

The 1930s economic and natural disasters resulted in social unrest and the redefinition of American citizenship with the westward migration of displaced people. Abigail G. H. Manzella underlines that the multitude of migrant workers on the West Coast uncommonly included white seasonal laborers who were working alongside people of color—Mexicans, Asians, and Filipinos—in the farmlands and orchards of California (68). The arrival of white American migrant-laborers triggered concerns about the cultural and political interconnectedness of race, whiteness, and citizenship. In response, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity was used to legitimize the refusal of temporary workers' citizenship and the preservation of preexisting social and economic structures (Manzella 68).

The artistic representation of the depression and its unforeseen outcomes was captured by John Steinbeck's dramatic portrayal *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). It "not only records history but makes history" of depression-ridden, Dust Bowl refugee farm families heading to California, by depicting the plight of Midwestern "Okie" families from Oklahoma and beyond (Gregory, "Dust Bowl Legacies" 74). Unlike artists, policymakers, and journalists, Steinbeck managed to turn the Joad family's journey into an everlasting symbol of the Great Depression and the drought years. Steinbeck believed that dust bowl migrants could have prospered in California with the help of farm labor unions that would secure their living conditions and rights against agribusiness. With this in mind, he depicted dust bowl migrants as "backward, barely educated, even premodern" in his call for their adaptation to modern life; however, instead of experiencing the power of organized labor or the elimination of agribusiness, they experience destitution and tragic loss (74).

Interestingly, the New Deal was also concerned with the archival documentation of the Great Depression. As a government photographer in 1936, Dorothea Lange visited a camp of pea pickers near Nipomo, California, where she took several pictures of Florence Owens, a thirty-two-year-old Okie woman, along with her children in a makeshift tent. The series would come to be known as *Migrant Mother*, an icon of photographic representation during the 1930s economic and refugee crisis (Curtis 1). At that time, Lange was working for the Historical Section of the Resettlement Administration (RA), established by FDR's advisor Rexford Tugwell in 1935. A member of the Roosevelt administration's "Brain Trust," Tugwell articulated progressive solutions to the problems

of rural America such as the control of devastated agricultural land and the resettlement of farmers on productive fields (2). He believed that the Historical Section would provide relevant material for the RA's educational campaign. As the head of the photographic project, Roy Stryker shared Tugwell's faith in the convincing role of photographs and hired artists such as Walker Evans and Arthur Rothstein. Lange contributed to the RA project through her "new and dramatic photographs of the suffering" in California, her experience as a portrait photographer, and her network of artists (3).

A PRELUDE TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR: THE POSTWAR CRISIS

As Dietmar Rothermund indicates, European nations were overwhelmed by war debt during the post-WWI period since they had paid their wartime expenses though credit, war bonds, and foreign loans, including US loans to the allies (840). The postwar European economy had a hard time balancing national budgets while paying war debts and slipped into a recession in 1920. Despite a brief period of economic boom, the German government's financial struggle with reparations triggered hyperinflation in 1923 with tragic social and political outcomes. As a result, people who suffered from the loss of life savings and trust in the government turned to radical, fascist and conservative alternatives to the Weimar Republic. The American Dawes Plan of 1924 provided only temporary relief to Germany with respect to reparation payments at the time (840).

In 1919, a Peace Conference was held in Paris, which discussed German war reparations and the Covenant of the League of Nations, taking into consideration the postwar economy, peace, and democracy under the Treaty of Versailles (Rothermund 841). Created with the initiative of President Woodrow Wilson, the League did not have a chance to fulfill its agenda of peaceful governance and diplomacy without US membership. John Maynard Keynes harshly criticized the peace terms of the Treaty of Versailles in his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (published in 1919 in London and in New York in 1920) with his experience in the British Treasury and observations of the Paris Peace Conference (841). Keynes noted that peacetime financial and political pressure on Germany would have serious repercussions, claiming that another war could be on the horizon in just two decades. His critique of peace settlements and predictions supported Americans seeking non-involvement in the League, Britons

siding with Germany for a revision of the treaty terms, and acceptance of appeasement policies (841).

The Treaty of Versailles and the Great Depression unquestionably triggered the outbreak of the Second World War after a long period of economic crisis, ideological struggles, and social unrest. The interwar economic depression led to high unemployment rates in countries such as Italy and Germany. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, the National Socialist Party benefited from mounting social discontent and economic failure after WWI. According to Rothermund, the German government retained the gold standard along with a "deflationary policy," worsening the German economy and destroying its ability to pay war reparations (847). When he came to power in 1933, Hitler's goal was to annul war reparations and the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. Then, he would run his political agenda of abolishing parliamentary democracy and reinstituting the armament of Germany, all of which he eventually accomplished. After he cautiously observed the weak British and French responses to his policies, he began his expansionism with the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 (Rothermund 847–48). Once again, there was no reaction to his violation of the peace agreement, so Hitler annexed Austria and German-populated areas of Czechoslovakia with a claim to Wilson's self-determination principle: "The Germans in what was left of Austria were inclined to join Germany. Similarly, the Germans of Czechoslovakia whose settlements formed a ring around the Czech area, had their eyes on Germany" (848). Europe continued to appease Hitler until 1939, when the Nazi invasion of Poland triggered the onset of World War II.

INTERWAR LITERATURE: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL NOVELS

The experience of the Great War dominated the modern American novel of the 1920s, until the Great Depression. In the postwar era, a generation of writers—the Lost Generation—influenced American fiction through their observations of WWI as servicemen, pacifists, noncombatant participants, or critics without war experience. John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, E. E. Cummings, and Edmund Wilson took part in the war effort as ambulance drivers (Bradbury 75). F. Scott Fitzgerald reflected the expatriate American perspective, postwar disillusionment, and European civilization. William Faulkner, however, portrayed the returning veteran's homecoming story and dilemma, without setting foot on European battlefields. In Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*

(1920), Amory Blaine represents the coming-of age of a new postwar generation who seemed to be "dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken—including the faiths of pre-war progressivism" (76). John Dos Passos's *One Man's Initiation—1917* (1920) tells the growth of a hero in the midst of European turmoil rather than European art, glorified history, and refined manners. As Hemingway's story "A Soldier's Home" implies, prewar hopes, dreams and social expectations seem meaningless to a returning soldier like Krebs. The rise of a new postwar individualism necessitated "new perceptions and modes of speech, new kinds of existential self-awareness—to survive" (76).

Cummings's *The Enormous Room* (1922) portrays his direct observations from a French prison camp as an autobiographical novel with pacifist views, whereas Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) reflects the disillusionment with the modern hero (Bradbury 77). The war novels reflect a new literary style and way of seeing the relationship between man, nature, machinery, and history. The postwar novel, however, concentrates on physical, psychological, and existential suffering through metaphors and images of "waste, decline, and sterility, of a downward historical curve" in European and American society, such as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), Ezra Pound's poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and the "Valley of Ashes" from Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) (77). The Roaring Twenties new youth explored the modern American city, mobility (class and cars), and consumption patterns. *The Great Gatsby* creates a catalogue of 1920s Americans with bootlegger gangsters, jazz club goers, the immigrant working class, the conservative upper class, and pleasure seeking flappers confronting traditional manners and morals in language, capitalist-materialist life, and fashion by challenging sociocultural norms about race, class, and gender.

The radical literature of the 1930s addressed the plight of the masses: working class strikers, union organizers, depression-drought-dust bowl refugees, New Deal social reformers, reporters from the Spanish Civil War, and people who foresaw another conflict rising from European shores, or what would become WWII (Bradbury 124). With a return to a progressive vision, writers embraced documentary and investigative journalism in their political writing. Sherwood Anderson, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, and John

Dos Passos turned to the economic crisis and unemployment, urban decay, and rural poverty in their portrayals of unorganized and underrepresented Americans (Bradbury 124). Thus, social and political novels dominated the decade, and focused on industrial and farm workers' strikes, urban poverty in factories and ghettoes, the class struggle, and the breadlines. These works of social realism and proletarian fiction also include Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930). Inspired by Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), it described the experiences of Jewish immigrants in New York's tenement houses and sweatshops, addressing the promised land, Americanization, identity, the disillusionment with the capitalist exploitation of the laboring class, and the urban vices of greed, corruption, and immorality (128–29).

Malcolm Bradbury argues that the literature of the 1930s literature showcased different interpretations of realism and naturalism in response to challenging socioeconomic dynamics. They depicted "proletarian realism and bourgeois realism, urban realism and rural realism, WASP realism and Dustbowl realism, white realism and black realism" (137). While writers adopted political voices lacking in formal and aesthetic concerns, their radical writing opened a new path for a diversity of authorial voices and experiences, and alternative historical narratives, as exemplified by Henry Roth, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, John Dos Passos, and James T. Farrell. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and immigrant narratives on the American dream also contributed to the politicization of literature during the Great Depression, offering insight into American society beyond "the world of Babbitt and the booboisie, of Midwest innocence and East Coast wealth" (Bradbury 138). In his writing, Steinbeck reflects a mythical vision of western movement to California valleys, portraying the American traits of individualism, land ownership, and freedom driven by biological and political motives, but most of all "primitive mysticism" (139–40). *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), in particular, represent these characteristics of his fiction (140).

Tracing the link between interwar social history and social novels, Warren French regards the post-WWI decades as an era of irrational irresponsibility in Europe and the United States (6). French argues that the grand imprudence of the 1920s is best depicted in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, which portrays the nonchalance of the "self-ordained aristocrats" and the disillusionment of "dreamers" who would wake up to European

totalitarianism and expansionism in 1939 (6). In the midst of rising global conflict, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Ernest Hemingway published *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), respectively, as social novel at the end of the interwar era. They address historical events in a way that necessitates historical knowledge for their interpretation, while providing the writers' unique perspectives on the Spanish Civil War, the Okie crisis, strikes and labor unions, race politics and lynching, and social problems of great consequence (French 7). The advent of WWII also signaled the decline of the social novel and the reform and activism it represented: "It is thus fair to say that 1939 and 1940 marked not only the end of an era in social and political history, but the end of a literary generation, especially in the creation of the social novel" (17).

The literary modernism of the interwar years canonized male writers such as Sinclair Lewis, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Steinbeck, as well as a select few women such as Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, H.D., and Willa Cather. However, many other interwar women writers explored issues of postwar disillusionment with war, modernity, industrialization, urbanization, and discrimination in their novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and articles published in the prominent journals and magazines of the time. Although many of them were popular mainstream writers during interwar decades, few of these authors and works are remembered today.

Chapter One will focus on Gertrude Atherton's *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* (1921) and *Black Oxen* (1923) and how they reflect the emergence of New American Woman beyond the acquisition of suffrage, as an individual who challenges the norms of the Victorian legacy and the cultural image of liberated flapper depicted in the novels of Fitzgerald. In Chapter Two, Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930) and Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) will articulate the conceptualization of working class rights, organized labor efforts, and the plight of the working class family during the interwar years, particularly with respect to the Loray Mill Strike of 1929 in Gastonia, North Carolina. In Chapter Three, Josephine Johnson's *Now in November* (1934) and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown: A Novel* (written in 1939 and published in 2004) will provide an insightful portrayal of the Great Depression and how it coincided with severe drought, dust storms on the plains, and New Deal policies for uprooted farmers. Unlike Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Johnson and Babb integrate their first-

hand experiences and direct observations of farm communities into these social and political novels, adding women's voices and perspectives. Lastly, in Chapter Four, Dorothy Canfield's *The Deepening Stream* (1930) and *Seasoned Timber* (1939) will critique American WWI politics, including wartime responses, relief work, the American expeditionary forces, peace agreements, and postwar tension with the rise of Nazi Germany, fascist governments, and anti-Semitic sentiments.

Gertrude Franklin Horn Atherton (1857-1948) was a prolific bestselling author of novels, short stories, and articles as a contributor to popular magazines and newspapers. She emerged as a highly acclaimed writer who focused on the history and culture of California, and women's struggle to overcome traditional sociocultural barriers in pursuit of equality. In her own life and writing, Atherton advocated women's fulfillment beyond the constrains of age, class, and gendered societal expectations. After her husband's death, she dedicated herself to her writing career and travelled between the United States and Europe. She encouraged American women to disown domesticity and the subservience of Victorian womanhood for self-awareness, experience, and progress in modern world. During the Great War, Atherton was an ardent pro-war, pro-Allied, anti-German writer, with her contributions to American propaganda through works such as *Mrs. Balfame* (1916), *The Living Present* (1917), and *The White Morning* (1918). In these nationalist and propagandist novels, Atherton expressed the importance of American women's economic independence, humanitarian initiatives and voluntary relief services, and political education, all of which would ideally prepare them to thrive in the postwar world, where they would improve their position through expanding opportunities and professional occupations.[1]

Chapter One discusses Atherton's New Woman and new morality through her social novels *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* (1921) and *Black Oxen* (1923). These novels trace the emergence of New American Woman and her values before, during, and after the Great War, when her wartime service and suffering, education, and experience lead her to the threshold of a new world where she encounters Victorian cautionary tales and vicious, self-centered flappers. Atherton forges a new path for American women

[1] See İlimen, Ezgi. "Gertrude Atherton's WWI Propaganda to the Home Front: *Mrs. Balfame, The Living Present* and *The White Morning.*" *Anglia*, vol. 141, no. 1, 2023, pp. 35–62.

through education and training for direct participation in socioeconomic life as smart, cultured modern women. In *The Sisters-in-Law*, Gora Dwight, a promising writer, trained nurse, and the owner of a boarding house serves as a mentor to her younger sister-in-law, Alexina, who is caught between the Victorian expectations of her traditional San Franciscan family and the revised gender roles of the rebellious flapper generation. Through the novel, Atherton asserts that American women are trapped in their lives as homemakers, with their legal, socioeconomic, and political status still undermined by patriarchal figures. With Gora's guidance and her own interactions with the world, Alexina achieves a "second youth" by means of her awareness about women's legal rights and equality. Her control over her property (economic freedom) and life (personal time and space) truly liberates her. Her "third youth" signifies her hopes about the postwar era, following her service as a war nurse in Europe. Atherton associates the liberation of the New American Woman with political consciousness, individual experience, and economic self-sufficiency, rather than the flapper revolution.

In *Black Oxen*, Atherton further elevates the concept of the New Woman and youth in postwar American society. Mary Ogden returns to New York as Madame Zattiany who looks inexplicably attractive, with her beauty, European manners, and aristocratic wealth. Madame Zattiany's uncanny youth and poise contest the sociocultural connections between gender and aging, a decline in beauty, and a lack of desirability for women. Her wartime service and scientific rejuvenation transform Madame Zattiany's vision and appearance in the postwar era into one of change and progress. She despises the flapper's reckless manners, delusional youth, and apolitical life without a purpose, while deriding traditional views and her generation of Victorian matrons. Atherton redefines the New American Woman through her personal wartime experiences and scientifically regained youth by means of a popular experimental treatment called the "Steinach rejuvenation procedure," which she received before writing this novel. *Black Oxen* signifies Atherton's faith in the progressive mission of rejuvenated American women after WWI through their growing awareness of economic independence. After her wartime nursing and suffering, Madame Zattiany finds solace in rejuvenation treatments that revive her exhausted mind and body for postwar philanthropy and politics in Austria and her "second youth." She emerges as an active and self-reliant American woman with a distinct agenda.

The Great Depression years epitomized the rise of radicalism in response to socioeconomic unrest, especially working class suffering, unemployment, poor labor conditions, and the struggle to organize. Radical women writers and activists of the 1930s remained neglected in history due to the domination of male figures in political activism and narratives. Mary Heaton Vorse (1874-1966) and Grace Lumpkin (1891-1980) were prominent labor reporters, activists, and proletarian sympathizers. Vorse closely observed and reported strikes, beginning with the Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912. Similarly, Lumpkin witnessed labor, class, and race conflicts as a southerner and labor reporter. Both Vorse and Lumpkin reported on the Loray Mill Strike of 1929, which signaled a turning point in the labor struggle, organized labor history, and the emphasis on the situation of mill families under industrial capitalism.

The second chapter of this dissertation addresses two of Gastonia novels, Vorse's *Strike!* (1930) and Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932), as examples of 1930s proletarian literature. These social and political novels underline the crucial place of women in strikes and local union efforts, specifically through their representations of Ella May Wiggins. As a mill mother and worker, Wiggins voices concerns about infant mortality, child labor, the condition of mill houses, and the "stretch-out" system. Both novels promote organized labor and working class solidarity to improve living and working conditions in mill towns. These works also allude to historical events such as the Loray Mill Strike of 1929, the involvement of the National Textile Workers' Union (NTWU), media coverage, striking, workers' low wages, evictions from mill houses, unemployment, encounters with state militia and police officers, and the lynching campaigns of local vigilantes. The novels also address the industrial slavery of poor whites and African Americans as mill hands, and the new capitalism of the industrial South, where in modern America, textile mills replace agrarianism and cotton plantations.

In the 1930s, the rise of agricultural production with mechanized farming and bank loans resulted in surplus agricultural production, lower prices for farm products, and farm foreclosures. Rural America suffered from economic and ecological disasters during the Great Depression and drought years, especially farmers on the Great Plains. American farmers were left with crop failures on mortgaged farms, facing heat waves and dust storms. The radical literature of the 1930s articulates the farmer's plight through proletarian writing and the reality that rural America remained neglected in the media and

politics, with the urban poverty, unemployment, and Hoovervilles caused by the stock market crash taking center stage instead. A writer and poet who published short stories in magazines, Josephine Johnson (1910-1990) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1935 for her first novel, *Now in November*, a bestseller depression-era novel that depicts the suffering of rural Americans. Sanora Babb (1907-2005), on the other hand, was a writer of novels, memoirs, short stories, and journal articles. Johnson and Babb were involved in interwar radical politics and literary activism, shaping their works around the plight of the American farmer and agricultural politics.

Chapter Three focuses on Johnson's *Now in November* (1934) and Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown: A Novel* (written in 1939/published in 2004), both of which deal with the forgotten people of rural America and the (in)efficacy of the New Deal. WWI mobilization transformed American society, economics, and politics by challenging the values of land ownership, agrarian freedom, western movement, and labor relations in the postwar era. Exacerbated by droughts, crop failures, mortgaged farms, and farm foreclosures on the plains, this inequality reached a tipping point when corporate farms and agribusiness started prospering in the West. In *Now in November*, Johnson depicts the flight from economic failure and unemployment in the city to a mortgaged family farm though the story of Haldmarnes. However, the Great Depression and Great Drought take its toll on rural America. Marget Haldmarne narrates the mood swings of farmers from hope, to denial and disillusionment in response to economic and environmental disasters, poor harvests, and farm tenancy. Gradually, food insecurity emerges as a constant daily concern, with unpaid bank loans, the threat of starvation, and biblical plagues with scorching heat, crop failures, the loss of livestock, and wildfires. Johnson depicts the absence of relief, federal intervention, and state level regulations in agriculture, which abandoned farmers to the mercy of natural forces and the greed of banks.

In *Whose Names Are Unknown*, Sanora Babb portrays 1930s dryland farm families, the Dunnes and their neighbors, in Cimarron County in the Oklahoma Panhandle and their migration to California labor camps as depression and dust bowl refugees.[2] Babb depicts

[2]Among the popular interwar women novelists addressed in this dissertation, Sanora Babb is the only exception; her significance remained unacknowledged until the publication of her depression-dust bowl novel in 2004. Her social novel was unknown for decades because it was

farm families struggling with loans, taxes, tenancy, and earning their daily bread. She is particularly critical of the monopoly of big banks and big farms, irrigation problems, and dust storms. Letters and news from the fertile fields of California encourage westward migration. For those who remain on the plains, nothing is left beyond dust covered farms, unfertile soil, infection and sickness, debt, malnourished children, and life in darkness during the black blizzards. In her journal, Julia Dunne keeps an account of her dust bowl days, including details about family life and neighbors, transforming Babb's novel into what reads as a first-hand account. After all, Babb was familiar with suffering of farm communities since her days of working with uprooted farmers in the FSA camps. The mistake of turning grassland to farm lots, wartime overproduction, soil erosion, and drought cycles were made worse with overgrazing and overplanting. In California's valleys, migrant workers were deprived of basic healthcare, education, and housing, and in some cases, totally segregated. Locals resented seasonal farm workers' demands for permanent residence and better conditions through union activism. In the process, poor, white, black, Mexicans and immigrant laborers gained working class consciousness, despite company mobs, local vigilantism, anti-migration policies, and anti-communist hysteria. Without federal recognition of agricultural labor, they were forced to choose between the exploitation of farm companies or a life on the road as vagrants.

Dorothy Canfield (1879-1958) was a bestselling novelist, educational reformer, and social activist in the interwar period who prioritized race, class, and gender concerns in her short stories and novels. Her fiction integrates her memories of wartime France, her dedication to humanitarian efforts during WWI, contributions to charities, and services to educational boards. In her social novels, her characters remain loyal to principles that reflect personal politics with an individual consciousness and sense of duty, even if it means opposing national political agendas and sociocultural norms. Her interwar works also allude to American responses to WWI, including public reactions to Wilsonian politics, American humanitarian and military interventions, and the peace settlements in Paris.

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overshadowed by the popularity and success of *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939. Babb's novel provides an insightful perspective on Steinbeck's "Okies" and the lives of migrant mothers, as photographed by Dorothea Lange, through Babb's first-hand knowledge of dust storms, farm communities, and migrant labor camps in California.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation analyses Canfield's *The Deepening Stream* (1930) and *Seasoned Timber* (1939), with an emphasis on post-WWI disillusionment and the threat of another European conflict as a result of Nazism, fascism, and anti-Semitism. Canfield's critique of the postwar peace settlements also indicates that the rise of totalitarian regimes, political polarization, economic resentment about war debts, hyperinflation in Germany, and discriminatory politics could culminate in WWII. *The Deepening Stream* reflects American involvement in the Great War from the perspective of Matey and Adrian Fort. The novel comments on the impact of war reports, relief services, philanthropy, political alliances, and the American military presence through the Wilsonian idealism of peace, security, and democracy. The Forts feel the dilemma of Quaker pacifism in the face of the Great War and their decision to move to Paris as noncombatant volunteers. They assist the ambulance unit and home front relief organizations, in collaboration with the French and American expeditionary forces, just as Canfield and her husband did. However, the novel also questions to what extent noncombatants are responsible for war atrocities and loss, despite their humanitarian organizations and intentions. The novel casts another light on war as an economic, political, and diplomatic investment under Wilsonian idealism, the active involvement of American bureaucrats, and American Red Cross (ARC) missions which combine humanitarian aid with business initiatives and diplomatic investments in war(s).

Seasoned Timber represents Canfield's warning about the upcoming Second World War, tracing European totalitarianism and anti-Semitism in the United States through nativism, anti-immigration policies, attacks on the working class, and the postwar illusion of progressive-isolationist security from European affairs. In interwar America, sociocultural crises, economic downturns, and political concerns coexisted with materialism and consumption, faith in progress, and anti-communist hysteria, with an ignorance of conservative nationalism, the class struggle, and white supremacist attacks on immigrants, especially Catholics and Jews. T. C. Hulme, the principal of the Clifford Academy, voices Canfield's concerns about war, education, and injustice with respect to class, race, and gender. Mr. Hulme runs a campaign against Mr. Wheaton, one of the wealthy trustees, who leaves a million dollars in his bequest, provided that Jews, girls, and working class children are to be excluded from the Clifford Academy. Mr. Hulme calls out anti-Semitic, elitist, and sexist totalitarianism in a small town as a microcosm of

the nation. The arrival of immigrants and communist ideology results in red and Jew baiting, and the association of Jews with revolutionary ideas and radicalism. The lynching of Leo Frank, discrimination against Jews through admission quotas in education, employment, housing, and public places, and the anti-Semitic media promoting a "Jewish problem" are all issues that appear in the novel. Canfield suggests that the American ideals of freedom, equal opportunity, and democratic principles remain under threat by cultural and religious intolerance, ideological attacks, and discriminatory politics. Her social novels represent the interwar progressive drive as Americans move from personal politics to public consciousness regarding the causes and consequences of social unrest and wars.

The interwar decades of radical activism and conservative reactions represented a growing rivalry between postwar promises of progress and a return to the prewar normalcy. Industrialization, urbanization, and modernity offered mass produced automobiles, electrical home appliances, and a variety of goods on consumer credit. Mass communication, mobility, and entertainment appealed to a wide range of Americans. However, women's changing roles in the family, industry, and politics, labor unrest, and waves of southern and eastern European immigrants were alarming to anti-immigrant, anti-radical, white supremacist, and anti-modern Americans. The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl tested class distinctions with growing unemployment, American myths of agrarian freedom and western migration, and the power of the federal government and its New Deal relief, recovery, and reform programs. In their understudied, politically-conscious social novels, these forgotten progressive American women authors address the true meaning of liberation, postwar political challenges, interwar sociocultural progress, and welfare for the New Woman, the working class, farm families, and Americans trapped by the threat of another world war. Through these novels of social activism, they call for renewed reform with respect to these political agendas.

CHAPTER 1

THE NEW AMERICAN WOMAN AND NEW MORALITY OF GERTRUDE ATHERTON

Gertrude Atherton (1857-1948) was a highly prolific writer whose publications include several volumes of short stories, essay collections, fiction writing for the popular magazines of the time, Alexander Hamilton's fictionalized biography and his letters, and a history of California. Charlotte S. McClure states that Atherton depicts "real and imagined" people of late-nineteenth-century California and New York in her romances, novels, and short stories which create "imagined circumstances" to explore her real life characters' hidden strength and capabilities (95). According to McClure, Atherton's apparent distaste for the dull and uninspiring realism of William Dean Howells encouraged her to "romanticize" reality and expand the traditional borders of literature in order to address unusual characters and problematic social issues through the literary forms of the historical novel and mystery (95). Furthermore, those who read and reviewed her works encountered new subject matter that directly addressed the concerns of the 1920s such as Freudian sexual repression and the New Woman, or as Atherton described her, the "agile, intellectual, and adventuresome California girl" (McClure 95).

Atherton was born Gertrude Horn in San Francisco, California. Her husband's family, the "socially conscious" Athertons, hindered her efforts to establish herself as a writer (Griffin 479). After her husband's death, Atherton began her fruitful writing career in New York, gaining international recognition with bestselling novels such as *Black Oxen* (1923), and spent many years abroad, mainly long periods in England and Germany (479). She was not a self-claimed or acknowledged expatriate American writer among her contemporaries such as Edith Wharton or Henry James. She befriended many of the prominent writers of her time, including Gertrude Stein, Carl Van Vechten, and Ambrose Bierce (479–80). Throughout her writing career (from 1888 to her death in 1948), Atherton's works addressed women's lives and interests in diverse literary forms (Forrey 194). Her novels became bestsellers in the 1920s and some of them were even adapted into films. As Carolyn Forrey articulates, her writing advocated women's liberation in every aspect of life and criticized cultural control mechanisms such as traditional gender

roles, values, and institutions that repressed women's self-confidence and unused potential: "As her work developed, she focused increasingly upon women's inner struggles, [and] their efforts to free themselves emotionally from old feminine ideals and dreams which narrowed their interests, limited their aspirations, and hampered their development as individuals" (194).

Atherton's "new character, an advanced woman," as McClure describes her, differed greatly from the general characteristics of American womanhood and the late-nineteenth-century New York girlhood of Henry James and Edith Wharton (95). Primarily, Atherton's California girl verbalized the New Woman's view of socioeconomic restraints. That woman desired the "active, influential, and courageous life" deemed proper for men and preferred this lifestyle over traditional roles and societal expectations (McClure 95). In this respect, Atherton's heroine was typically born into upper class California and sought a new democratic world where she would encounter liberal politics and social opportunities as a "career woman" and wage-earner. Atherton's commitment to this new type of American woman also evoked her faith in a new type of American man as her companion, who likewise sought change and progress for the world outside (95).

As a whole, Atherton underlines the promises of modern life for the New American Woman in the post-WWI era. In the first place, her social novels represent the Progressive Era legacy of social reform and political and intellectual activism for interwar American women. In this way, the New Woman's "true" liberation calls for the freedom of choice, socioeconomic progress, and political awareness during the revolution in manners and morals taking place in every aspect of life in the Roaring Twenties. Atherton's novels chronicle changes in attitudes towards the New American Woman and her future prospects of individual growth, economic self-sufficiency, political activism, and self-actualization. In her critique of the cliché flapper's materialism and aimless life popularly depicted in Fitzgerald's works, Atherton announces the rise of the educated, self-sufficient, and experienced American woman who eventually assumes the role of the social reformer in the postwar world.

This chapter focuses on Atherton's *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* (1921) and *Black Oxen* (1923), two novels that address the American woman's changing role, vision,

and participation in nation-building efforts in the 1920s. By underscoring the New Woman's socioeconomic awareness, educational opportunities, economic independence, and post-WWI agenda of self-reliance and scientifically rejuvenated self-making, *The Sisters-in-Law* and *Black Oxen* comment on female transformation through lived experience, self-education, and hard work. Her female protagonists are the exact opposite of the apolitical and hedonistic bobbed-haired flappers portrayed in popular magazines, films, and literature. Moreover, as Forrey indicates, Atherton's women also "stood in striking contrast to the ideal formulated earlier in the century (and portrayed, for instance, in the pages of *Godey's Lady's Book*, T. S. Arthur's *Home Magazine*, or the novels of Fanny Fern) of woman as pure princess of the home—devoted to serving the interests of family . . . and repelled by the coarse arena of the outside world" (195). Her female protagonists—Alexina Groome and Gora Dwight in *The Sisters-in-Law*, and Madame Zattiany in *Black Oxen*—reflect Atherton's criticism of the flapper as well as traditional restraints on women by refusing entrapment in domestic life and defying conventional cultural barriers.

1.1. POPULAR LITERARY DEPICTIONS OF THE NEW WOMAN

Published in 1929, Robert S. Lynd's and Helen Merrell Lynd's *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* is a sociological study of Muncie, Indiana over the course of the 1920s. Chosen as a representative American town, or Midwestern "middletown," Muncie became a cross-sectional window into the sweeping changes that were affecting the country, thereby serving as a microcosm of the United States during the decade. The study observed the impact of the economic boom, industrialization, and modern life on Muncie, and changes in traditional WASP American values such as family patterns, gender roles (the breadwinner husband and supportive homemaking wife), and socioeconomic concerns. The study also noted women's entry into workplace, the improved standard of living, enhancements in public education, class mobility, and the popular interests of the time such as driving, movies, and social clubs. *Middletown* also chronicled the changing manners and morals of the youth, changes in dating habits (from courting to petting), the meaning of freedom through cars and mass consumption, and the widening generation gap. The Lynds emphasized the substantial number of economically-independent New Women who were now supporting their families and who also sought

access to consumer goods, modern household appliances, and the opportunity to educate their children on their own terms. Mobility and dedication to the symbols of modern life—even among the working class—dominated this postwar world, as exemplified by this vignette from *Middletown*: "A woman who had just returned to the store a new winter coat because her husband had lost his job said she planned to cut down on 'picture shows'—'but I'll never cut on gas! I'd go without a meal before I'd cut down on using the car'" (Lynd and Lynd 63).

Women's lives in *Middletown* were redefined by these new circumstances and many middle class women now had access to hired help to do the cooking and cleaning, industrial help (bakeries, laundries, canned food, clothing, and cars) that reduced time spent on domestic chores, and new electrical home appliances (washing machines, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, ovens, and irons). Nevertheless, women were still occupied with childrearing (only the very wealthy could afford nannies and tutors), which required a large amount of time that was usually spent on education, training, nutrition, and social interaction for their moral development. Meanwhile, the older, more conservative inhabitants of the town, resented the new youth's liberation through petting parties, dancing, revealing clothing, drinking, smoking, consumption style, and driving sprees, characterizing cars as beds on wheels that promoted sexual promiscuity. In this respect, *Middletown* reflects the rivalry between postwar liberalism assisted by industrial progress, consumerism, and mobility, and conservative reactions to changes in traditional lifestyles, the American family, and the socioeconomic structure through the WWI mobilization of wartime services, women's expanding role in politics and the workplace, and the new values of the youth of the Roaring Twenties.

The literature of the 1920s also reflected this new lifestyle, and the women writers of the era contributed to depictions of the New American Woman just as much Fitzgerald and his contemporaries. However, unlike their male counterparts, female authors such as Gertrude Atherton, Edith Wharton, Edna Ferber, and Dorothy Speare provided a far more nuanced and complicated picture of the New Woman—one that transcended the superficial flapper stereotype and suggested the need for continued social activism, political participation, and contribution to the workforce in the wake of the Nineteenth Amendment. As Catherine Gourley states, Edith Wharton was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 after her success with *The Age of Innocence* (1920), a historical novel that narrates

the conflict between individuals and social conventions, including sociocultural restraints on women's lives through class norms, marriage, and the disapproval of divorce (27–28). In *So Big* (1924), Edna Ferber comments on the progressive ideas of Selina DeJong through her depiction of Selina's determination to improve both her life and farm community with her modern ideas. Selina represents the New Woman's courage and self-will, transforming American society through entrepreneurship and self-education in the midst of social criticism and industrialization. Thus, Ferber portrays the New Woman's position and struggle with change and progress: "These six or seven years of relentless labour had been no showy success with Selina posing grandly as the New Woman in Business. No, it had been a painful, grubbing, heart-breaking process" (217). Here, Ferber, who would win a Pulitzer Prize for her work, contrasts Selina's legacy of self-sufficiency and social responsibility, and the flapper's egocentric worship of luxury and material security. By doing so, she addresses woman's place in the public and private spheres.

Dorothy Speare's frequently referenced novel, *Dancers in the Dark* (1922), explores the world of unchaperoned college girls during the Roaring Twenties. Speare portrays the new youth in perpetual motion, driving their flashy cars and having parties until dawn, in a haze of alcohol. Joy Nelson, an idealist New Woman who tries to cling to progressive political values despite this atmosphere, is confused by modern manners and morals. Her socially-conscience Prince Charming has been replaced by possessive, aggressive, drunken, and hedonistic men who misinterpret and want to exploit her innocence. Rather than finding an equal partner, she is challenged by the expectations of modern men who, despite their alleged open-mindedness, are remarkably sexist in their emphasis on traditional gender roles for women. They are prejudiced against liberated New Women, refusing to see them as anything more than beautiful and attractive objects, and future wives and mothers. For Joy, members of this new generation are thus "Excitement-Eaters, dancers in the dark—all were only part of the wheel of progress that seems to go back at times before it turns forward again. But 'it takes time, and costs a lot on the way'" (Speare 277).

Depictions of the New Woman of the 1920s by popular male writers paint a very different picture. In these works, she is almost always a flapper, devoid of any political consciousness or even redeemable qualities. In *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Fitzgerald

portrays the post-WWI youth culture and its changing values and ambitions. Class consciousness, upward mobility, the materialist drive, social status, and relations between the sexes dominate the novel. Amory Blaine represents the confusion and disillusionment of American youth. He gradually loses his initial commitment to college education and success at Princeton University during the war, which is later exacerbated as he encounters restless flappers and confronts his failure to use his potential and artistic creativity for material success in business. Witnessing the conflict between traditional and modern values, he feels lost in this world of changing gender relations: "The 'belle' had become the 'flirt,' the 'flirt' had become the 'baby vamp.' The 'belle' had five or six callers every afternoon" (Fitzgerald 65–66). As a thematic precursor to *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and its cold-hearted, immoral, murderous flapper Daisy Buchanan, *This Side of Paradise* addresses postwar insecurity and the widening gap between romantic ideals and the crude reality of materialism. Rosalind, the flapper, chooses the safety of upper class marriage when she breaks up with Amory: "'Marrying you would be a failure and I never fail'" (Fitzgerald 208). Moreover, Eleanor's deep resentment of traditional gender roles indicates another sign of changing expectations: "'Look at you; you're stupider than I am . . . and you can do anything and be justified—and here am I with the brains to do everything, yet tied to the sinking ship of future matrimony'" (254–55). Clearly, the novel signifies the new empty morality of the era and the failure of American promises such as opportunity, success, and progress. In these works, vampiric flappers almost always emerge victorious, at the tragic expense of others. They rarely learn or grow in any significant way, or exhibit a trace of social or political consciousness. In fact, they benefit from and perpetuate the system, which is now focused on individual and not collective gain. They selfishly turn to their next victim, with the goal of personal profit.

Another popular flapper novel, *Flaming Youth* (1923), was written by Samuel Hopkins Adams under the pseudonym Warner Fabian. Fabian uses the perspective of a family doctor who has closely observed upper class women's lives in the suburbs. At the beginning of the novel, he addresses the ways in which the daring flapper challenges traditional manners and morals as he dedicates the following narrative: "To the women of the period thus set forth, restless, seductive, greedy, discontented . . . intelligent, uneducated, sybaritic . . . as she is trim of body, neurotic and vigorous . . . fit mate for the hurried, reckless and cynical man of the age" ("Word from the Writer"). As a novel and

film, *Flaming Youth* shocked the American public with the Fentriss family's defiance of marriage, the Victorian wife-mother role, and the innocence of youth. Mona's deathbed confessions reveal her adventures, her husband's affairs, and her identification with the new youth: "'I was born too soon. I really belong with this wild young age that's coming on the stage just as I'm going off; with the girls'" (Fabian 13). The novel reflects the new youth's petting parties and freedom through cars. The coming of age of the flapper, Patricia, suggests the wasted potential and restless minds of the new youth. Fabian critically comments on young women's wrong choices, failed marriages, and need for guidance. Touching upon the ideal of "trial" marriages, illegal abortion, and the (sexual) adventures of young women, the novel gradually affirms the value of love and marriage. The work was so influential that its title, *Flaming Youth*, has, much like Fitzgerald's Jazz Age, become a term that is synonymous with the 1920s.

One of the bestselling novels of the year, *Plastic Age* (1924) by Percy Marks, views 1920s youth culture through the lens of Hugh Carver's college life. The campus emerges as a setting for his encounter with class distinctions, discriminatory fraternities, anti-immigration sentiment, and changing morals, all of which contrast with his idealization of intellectual life. However, college life introduces him to bootleggers, sexually-liberated flappers, and gamblers. In the novel, Marks criticizes the new generation, in particular their ignorance of the complexities of life, their use of peer pressure as a weapon, and their devaluation of traditional values and virtues, such as the Puritan work ethic. In his opinion, the conformist culture and lifestyle of the 1920s has created a vacant and vapid American youth: "you are as standardized as Fords and about as ornamental" (Marks 195).

1.2. *THE SISTERS-IN-LAW*: ATHERTON'S NEW WOMEN

Set in San Francisco, *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* depicts this changing world through the manners and morals of its characters and the shifting socioeconomic power of American society; namely, the passing of the old aristocracy and the emergence of New Money. The relationship of Alexina and her mother, Mrs. Groome, represents a historico-cultural generation gap, as the American Victorian lifestyle, values, class distinctions, and cultural domination are challenged by the new youth: "Society has loosened its girdle . . . there were few rich people so hopelessly new that their ballrooms

either in San Francisco or 'Down the Peninsula,' were unknown to a generation equally determined to enjoy life and indifferent to traditions" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 4). In the face of change, Mrs. Groome resents the new generation and its rejection of tradition. Although she is dedicated to the propriety and serenity of her aristocratic society, she still sympathizes with the "unfortunate" members of the toiling class who "were forced to work for their living" and whose women "starved slowly" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 6). While she displays gender consciousness and to a lesser extent class consciousness, she maintains her loyalty to the genteel traditions of California and distains the new youth culture. To Mrs. Groome's chagrin, Aileen Lawton, a descendant of the old set and Alexina's close friend, embraces the flapper lifestyle. Aileen's manners, language, and appearance are totally reprehensible to Mrs. Groome: "'I disapprove of her in every way. She paints her lips, smokes cigarettes, boasts that she drinks cocktails, and uses the most abominable slang'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 17).

In *The Bankruptcy of Marriage*, V. F. Calverton elucidates the connection between the new morality and the New Woman, describing in detail this social and moral revolution. Calverton notes the emergence of the new youth with its nonconformist mindset and its opposition to traditional roles, expectations, and values: "This new girl, this modern flapper, with her lack of respect for the ideals of her predecessors; and this new masculine youth, with his disregard for the old responsibilities, his disdain for marriage, and contempt for virtue—both were born in the fury of their revolt, in the days of the World War" (13–14). While Calverton adds that the new youth's defiance of conventional manners and morals predated the war years, the war catalyzed "the change and tragedy of an epoch," accentuating the surviving youth's hostility towards traditional worldviews in general (14). The confrontation between Alexina and her older sister, Mrs. Abbott, epitomizes this cross-generational clash of the manners and morals. Alexina harshly criticizes the staunch defense of traditional gender norms by upper class women. She claims they resist positive change for women with their superficial dedication to class distinctions and total ignorance of progress and new opportunities. Mrs. Abbott is uncomfortable with the new, liberated, enfranchised woman, which is in stark contrast with Alexina's budding political awareness, advocacy of self-improvement, and openness to change:

> "You wouldn't have any wrinkles at your age, if you weren't so damn respectable—aristocratic, you call it. It's just middle class. And as out of date as speech without slang. As for me, I'd paint my lips as Aileen does, only I don't like the taste. . . . It's much smarter to make up than not to. Times change. You don't wear hoopskirts because our magnificent Grandmother Ballinger did. . . . All these people you look down upon . . . are more up-to-date than you are. . . . The newer people I've met here—their manners are just as good as ours, if not better, for, as you said just now, they don't put on airs." (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 42–43)

Through this exchange, Atherton also provides insight into the clash between elite white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and youth culture during the Roaring Twenties, and how supporters of the latter were seen as class traitors by members of the former group.

Alexina's sister-in-law, Gora Dwight, is an example of the New Woman in the novel. A role model and mentor to Alexina, Gora is born into a lower-middle-class family and condemns class and gender distinctions, and the family privileges of the San Franciscan old set: "That wealth or family prominence even in a great city or an old community should create an exclusive and favored society seemed to her illogical and outrageous. A woman was a lady or she wasn't. A man was a gentleman or he wasn't" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 58). With her support of freedom, equality, and the idea of an American meritocracy, Gora resents traditional society and its family structure. Richard Gathbroke consoles Gora with the possibilities of the New Woman: "'Women make fortunes sometimes, these days. And they're in about everything except the Army and Navy. Business? Or haven't you a talent of some sort? You have . . . a strong and individual face . . . and personality; no doubt of that'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 73). Here, Gathbroke refers to the New Woman's potential—entrepreneurship, social visibility and economic success. The New Woman will not only demand new opportunities, but will also make the most of her potential.

Clearly, Atherton's novel depicts progressive alternatives to the hedonistic, materialistic and superficial flapper. Unlike the parasitic flapper, Atherton's New Woman is capable of earning her own money. An ambitious and educated woman with future plans, Gora embodies this self-reliant spirit and the hope that the Puritan work ethic can survive despite what is really unprogressive change. Gora is also committed to self-improvement and self-actualization: she aspires to a writing career, and attends classes to satisfy her intellectual interests and sharpen her skills:

> "I'll tell you what I've never told any one—but my teacher; I've taken lessons with him for a year. He is an instructor in the technique of the short story, and has turned out quite a few successful magazine writers. He believes that I have talent. I have been studying over at the University to the same end—English, biology, psychology, sociology. I'm determined not to start as a raw amateur." (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 73)

Gora's economic independence (she runs a boarding house), self-confidence, and education render her a role model for the New American Woman who has prospects beyond marriage. As George A. Coe indicates, during this period of social change, education played a crucial role in raising well-informed American women with the necessary training and social awareness: "This is the way to produce citizens who are open-eyed toward social needs, and not terrified at the costs of progress; citizens for whom life, whether of the individual or of the state, is not a repetition of even a worthy past; for whom success is not a mere adding of resource to resource, but an ever-living adventure in readjustment" (47–48). Coe emphasizes how the American education system, which had also undergone progressive reform in the direction of pragmatism, valued the new youth's potential and the needs of the modern era while shaping the nation's future. Likewise, Atherton stresses the role of self-education, training, and economic freedom through the New Women in *The Sisters-in-Law*.

Alexina's marriage to Mortimer Dwight prompts her to contemplate the meaning of being a wife and mother, and the promises made to women. She views it as a form of domestic role playing for socioeconomic security, a bargain or tradeoff reinforced by ignorance: "Subconsciously she had always known it. She had had no cares, no responsibilities. She had merely continued to play, to keep her imagination on that plane sometimes called the fool's paradise" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 110). Even if she questions her marriage and her husband's failure to rise up the corporate ladder as a mere clerk, she clings to traditional idealizations of dutiful and supportive wives: "She had deliberately selected her life partner and she would keep her part of the contract" (117). She even consents to Mortimer's control over her social relations and intellectual life, which includes reading books "in his presence" (117). Thus, Gora Dwight's self-education, career plans, and commitment to freedom present an alternative to her sister-in-law Alexina's search for romance and stability through marriage.

According to Coe, young women of the 1920s were "unprepared" compared to the rest of society for the revolution in manners and morals because many did not have prior experience, education, or insight into women's place in the family, workplace or any other institution (5–6). After earning the right to vote, some women—especially those who had not been politically or socially active—had no idea how to form their own independent opinions and positions. Coe also notes that "the male sex," on the other hand, was "not prepared, either by nature or by experience, to prescribe to the female how to use her freedom" (6). In the novel, Mortimer Dwight is one of these clueless men, who underestimates women's capabilities and intelligence through his sexist views and paternalism. Gora despises his "masculine arrogance," which condemns any sign of brilliance in a woman because it is a threat to his authority. She also believes that Alexina is likely to wake up from her "beatific dream of youth" and "think" seriously about her life—that is, to confront her socioeconomic position and marriage (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 119). Mortimer attempts to manipulate his sister's financial freedom, just like he uses his wife's income for his own business investments. Gora's economic independence and career plans as a writer create a conflict of interest and rivalry with Mortimer. In turn, he devalues his sister's fame and success, and regards it as a tacky concern of the nouveau riche, or of social climbing working class women, rather than a value of their old money social set. Gora challenges biased views of traditional society with her efforts to publish her works: "'I shall use my name and ram it down their throats. They worship success like all the rest of the world'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 121). Mortimer exemplifies socioeconomic power over women; however, Gora's financial success and visibility deprives him of his patriarchal control over the family economy while also discrediting gendered limits: "'Ladies may unfortunately be obliged to earn their own living . . . but they have no business putting their names up before the public like men'" (121).

The period between the 1880s and 1920s reflected a new era of "change and expansion in roles and opportunities" for women (Matthews 4). Suffrage legitimized women's claims to equal citizenship and political participation. Thus, women could now, openly, pursue education and a variety of professions and jobs with economic independence and self-determination, even if they were still not welcome in many areas, and found "the promise and appearance of equality" deceptive (4). Nevertheless, many middle class women would benefit from the era's new mindset. Alexina's economic and political

awakening occurs when she realizes that Mortimer has taken control of every aspect of her life, including her income and household management. As Atherton indicates, "he had no faith in any woman's ability to invest and take care of money," even in the domestic sphere (*Sisters-in-Law* 127). As a businessman, he manages her share of her family inheritance with a power of attorney. He emerges as the legal representative of her rights, which would enable him to risk her investments to her total "ignorance of his business life" (127). Mortimer's domination renders Alexina a nineteenth-century *femme couverte* living in the twentieth century, a "young and superficial" wife on a pedestal who has thankfully been rescued from "the sordid responsibilities of life" (127). Mortimer's hostility towards "business women, intellectual women, women with careers" (127) thus compliments his adherence to the antiquated Victorian separate spheres ideology.

1.2.1. Socioeconomic Awareness and Self-reliance in *The Sisters-in-Law*

In his essay "Self-Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson emphasizes the values of individual choice, faith, and conscience. Emerson argues that individuals should take responsibility for their decisions and actions, regardless of social response, behavioral codes, and cultural norms: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion" (21). Emerson promises self-autonomy through nonconformity and the development of personal opinions: "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (23). In *The Sisters-in-Law*, Atherton's New Women, Alexina and Gora, likewise develop socioeconomic awareness about women's circumstances through their experience and observations. During their struggle with gender roles, tradition, and class norms, they learn to value individual opinion, self-growth, and independence as self-reliant women.

Alexina's "unchaperoned" visits to Gora motivate her to see the world with her own eyes. She observes the people of Fillmore Street, where young wage earning women spend time after working hours. These young women, "waitresses, shop girls of the humbler sort, servants, clerks, or younger daughters of poor parents" seek knowledge and experience

in the outside world instead of staying "virtuously in the kitchen every night" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 135). On Fillmore Street, Alexina also encounters a socialist thinker, James Kirkpatrick, who judges her "parasite class" and lifestyle (137). He harshly criticizes the socioeconomic gap between Alexina's prosperous life of comfort and working class wage slavery and poor living conditions. He views this disparity as "the crowning offense of capitalism" (137). He attacks her arrogant view of her life with Marxist references to the working class struggle, class antagonism, and even "the equality of the sexes" (139). Alexina's Fillmore Street adventure prompts her quest for independence and her gradual transformation after she escapes Mortimer's sphere of influence. She is impressed by working class people and socialist ideology: "'I'm tired of being kept in a glass case—being a parasite'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 140). She becomes more assertive with her own ideas and desires, which leads to her personal awakening and liberation: "'I look upon myself as Morty's partner, not as his subject'" (140). It is at this point that Alexina refuses to be the "clinging vine type of girl and the submissive type of mother, apostrophized in song and celebrated in sermon" (Calverton 35).

With the assistance of Gora, Alexina realizes her ignorance about her economic and legal rights. Gora questions Mortimer's total control over Alexina's property with his power of attorney: "'An allowance? But you have your own money? Or is it because the estate isn't settled? What has Morty to do with that?'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 145). Alexina is left to her husband's devices, and Gora forces Alexina to see this and the world beyond his essentialist teachings and classifications (the breadwinner/master of the house and homemaker wife/mother). Mortimer infantilizes her with an allowance and his authority over socioeconomic and legal matters, which contrasts with Gora's freedom in every aspect of her life. She opens Alexina's eyes about women's rights and how traditional marriage and conventions underestimate their abilities. Gora warns Alexina about her "chosen" ignorance regarding her investments and business affairs, and also suggests that she is partially responsible for husband's economic failure: "'[H]e is too honest to refrain from taking some unrelated woman's money, but as a matter of fact it is because she would send him to State's Prison as readily as a man would. One's own women are safe'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 147).

Gora gives Alexina many reasons to take control of her legal representation and investments: "'You are bored and want to take care of your money . . . intend to learn something of business, as all women should, and will in time. . . . Ring in the feminist stuff . . . wife's economic independence . . . women's new position in the world'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 148). Gora's words reflect the new opportunities for women in the public sphere, without the patriarchal cloak of fragility and gendered notions of propriety. According to Gora, women's awareness of their true circumstances, rights, and potential will pave the way for self-reliance, personal responsibility, and progress. Alexina's awakening, however, results in disillusionment with her marriage and position, and uncertainty about the future: "She felt something crumbling within her. . . . It was the last of the fairy edifice of her romance . . . of her first, her real, youth. . . . What was to take its place?" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 149). In need of guidance in this new stage of her life, Alexina relies on Gora as a mentor, for she appreciates Gora's dedication to independence and personal space—or, "a room of her own." Gora's investment in the boarding house and her nursing training secure her social status and economic freedom as a career woman.

Paralleling the portrayal of the New American woman by Atherton, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) underlines the significance of economic self-sufficiency and personal safe space for women, particularly women writers, who will transcend socioeconomic and cultural limits on gender and class norms. Prioritizing economic security over the political rights of women, Woolf gives an example from her own life as a wage-earning woman who was left a certain amount of money after her aunt's death: "The news of my legacy reached me one night about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. . . . Of the two—the vote and the money—the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important. Before that I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there" (37). She discusses a woman's chance to have a regular income and the way it totally changes her life. She indicates the connection between women's economic liberation and intellectual productivity by articulating women's opportunities and active role during the Great War. To this end, she comments on women's experience over time and their possible salvation: "Intellectual freedom depends on material things. . . . And women have always been poor.

. . . Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own" (108).

This social and political women's revolution was, nevertheless, observed with caution and skepticism. For many, the New Woman's liberation became notoriously synonymous with sexual permissiveness, high divorce rates, and low birth and marriage rates. At the same time, mobility through cars, urbanization, and industrialization also threatened the traditional socioeconomic structure. Alexina's cancellation of Mortimer's power of attorney reflects this change, as does her increased control—over her property, body, and selfhood. Her travels to Fillmore Street exemplify how she now desired to manage her own time, and physically and intellectually free herself of her husband's strict supervision and her oppressive middle class life. She undergoes a radical change in her vision of the future, especially with respect to women's abilities and place in society. Alexina's encounters with the people of Fillmore Street and Gora's mentorship initiate her awareness of her confinement to traditional gender roles and the existence of a promising world outside. The result is that she chooses to take responsibility for her life: "'We've been living in a sort of pleasure garden, just playing about, with mother as the good old fairy. But everything changed'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 153).

Alexina's transformation into the New Woman is based on the personal acknowledgement of her socioeconomic rights and freedom, a need for education and experience, and a desire to improve her life. During a class in socialist theory, Mr. Kirkpatrick takes a keen, almost scientific, interest in Alexina's circle of old money families, as if confronted by a collection of rare specimens: "Mr. Kirkpatrick realized his ambition to see with his own sharp puncturing little eyes . . . several of the most flagrant examples of capitalistic extravagance where parasitic femalehood idled away their useless lives and servitors battened" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 163). He is also uncomfortable with the women's lack of awareness about their wasted potential and minds. For him, capitalism and tradition dominate society, the economy, and cultural norms. They also manipulate gender roles for profit and, in the process, define women's perceptions, occupations and interests, and circumscribe their futures.

Mr. Kirkpatrick's classroom becomes a window into changes in women's appearance, manners, and morals. Their use of cosmetics, casual manners to the point of flirtation,

and smoking reflect the popular media image of the New Woman (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 168). However, he also admires Gora's mind, her ideas about class consciousness, and writing career. Still, he disapproves of her emphasis on gender issues in her writing, believing that she should channel her critical view of class into political writing: "'I don't like to hear you talk like that, Miss Gora. You ought to give that pen of yours to socialism. There would be all the revenge you could want—and it's what you're entitled to'" (172). Although his socialist agenda seeks to destroy the corrupt influence of capitalism and class privilege, it trivializes women's concerns and circumstances. He simply villainizes class as the root of social disorder and polarization, without paying attention to the ways in which gender intersects with class. Gora responds to this disregard of injustice beyond class, particularly his sexist underestimation of women's suffering: "'You mean material misery. What would you do with the other seven hundred different varieties?'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 172). Clearly, his political stance, narrow evocation of change, and hostility towards women's suffering render him silent with respect to the oppressive nature of gender roles and the challenges facing the New Woman.

New Women also experimented with a new dress code that allowed more personal control of the body. As Frederick L. Allen states, this involved rejecting corsets and restrictive cuts and fabrics, and embracing shorter skirts, leisurewear, fashionable stockings, cosmetics, and other beauty products (88–89). Alexina's control over her household and income gives her independence to pursue such trends and more pleasure than she anticipates. She even turns her bedroom into a room of her own, decorated according to her taste, which also underscores her decision to prevent undesired pregnancy and overwhelming child care expenses through birth control. No longer infantilized by her husband, she is now aware of her new life as an individual and is thrilled by her "second youth": "Subtly she felt she was happier than she had ever been even in those first weeks, when she had barred the gates of her fool's paradise behind her . . . and (miraculously finding her second youth quite as productive as her first) took no pains to conceive of anything better" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 179). She interacts with men and prefers the companionship of books, even in her husband's presence. Thus for Alexina, her "second youth" involves cultivating a free-thinking mind and a desire to preserve her personal space within her marriage (180).

Atherton stresses Gora's success as an educated, career-oriented, independent woman. Even San Francisco society appreciates her zeal as a talented nurse and promising short story writer. She establishes her place in business, as well as in the medical and writing communities, without the privileges of family name, economic patronage, or strategic marital relations:

> She had an air of assured power, rarely absent in a woman who has found herself and achieved a definite place in life. Besides being one of the best nurses in San Francisco, in constant demand by the leading doctors and surgeons, her short stories had attracted considerable attention in the magazines, although no publisher would risk bringing them out in book form. (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 200)

Here, Atherton expresses the long-awaited and deserved coming-out of the New American Woman, "She was 'arriving.' No doubt of that" (200), with economic and social freedom, and an air of self-reliance. Throughout the novel, Atherton underscores the striking difference between the sisters-in-law, as well as Gora's strong impact on Alexina's awareness and liberation. Unlike Alexina's traditional motivation for marriage (socioeconomic security, stability, and shelter), Gora is willing to choose marriage either for great passion, or for "a great position in the world" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 205). Gora cherishes her "complete personal freedom" and hopes that her writing career will support her needs and dreams: "'[I]f I succeeded with my writing I can see the world and attain to position without the aid of any man. If I don't, I don't, and that is the end of it'" (205). Gora conveys the value of self-determination and self-sufficiency through her own hard work, and after participating in these conversations, Alexina can no longer maintain her pretentious world: "Dreams had died out of her. For the first time in her sheltered existence she appreciated the grim reality of life. She was no longer sheltered, secluded, one of the 'fortunate class'" (206). As a married woman, Alexina discovers that ultimately, she cannot be protected from the crude reality of life. Her husband's failure in business and his theft of her bonds is the price she pays for relying on tradition. She thus begins to search for a way out of her unfortunate marriage and economic situation.

After witnessing working women's success and freedom, Alexina decides to become economically independent and live her life as she desires: "'I'll not be 'held up' any longer. I'll stand on my own feet—in other words get a job. No—I've some loose money. I'll start in business'" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 255–56). Clearly, the changing socioeconomic status of working women disturbed both class and gender distinctions in

society. Likewise, by entering the public sphere, new women also closed the gap between the lower/working class and the upper/middle class: "What did progress mean if women deliberately dropped from a higher plane to a lower? What had their ancestors worked for, possibly died for? It was their manifest duty to their class, to their family, to go up not down" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 257). Furthermore, the outbreak of the Great War offered employment opportunities, public visibility, and the satisfaction of volunteer work. American women assisted the Allied war effort, especially the British and the French, organizing at home and in Europe through humanitarian aid societies such as the Red Cross, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and other women's organizations.

The wartime humanitarian drive transforms the lives of Alexina and Gora, who serve as war nurses. As Atherton's brief portrayal of women's wartime mobilization indicates, and those who had served in the Great War as nurses and ambulance drivers already knew, "this was the beginning of their real independence, the knell of the old order. They were freed" (*Sisters-in-Law* 265).[3] Thus, the future looked promising for these New American Women: "Those with naturally serious minds were absorbed, uplifted, keen, calculating. . . . They realized that they had wonderful futures in a changing world. It was 'up to them'" (265). As the novel draws to a close, Alexina, who is now thirty, is in her "third youth" (278), and seems remarkably hopeful about the postwar world. Reaching a new state of awareness about her prospects, she thinks about divorcing Mortimer, especially as she develops a relationship with Gathbroke who, to her, represents the New Man.[4]

[3] In "Gertrude Atherton's WWI Propaganda to the Home Front," I address Atherton's portrayal of women's wartime mobilization in *Mrs. Balfame* (1916), *The Living Present* (1917), and *The White Morning* (1918), with an emphasis on American responses to the war and women's roles as "dutiful patriots actively engaged in home front struggle, war nurses and relief organizers in Europe and direct participants of warfare" (40). As I convey, Atherton underlines self-growth, raising political awareness, and the expanding opportunities of American women during the Great War, elaborating on their representation of American values and idealism, humanitarian interventions in Europe, and assistance to British, French, and German women (40).

[4] In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel draws a parallelism between the masculinity crisis of American men and American women's active involvement in domestic and public spheres: "The chief problem seemed to be women, both at work and at home, as coworker, as mother, and as symbol" (169). Kimmel discusses the impact of cultural and political changes, industrial and technological developments, and the post-WWI New Youth on the American family, gender roles, and class norms (169). Women's economic independence, expanding educational opportunities, and public visibility challenged traditional male domination in every aspect of life. However, Atherton's New Man emerges as the ideal companion for the New American Woman, since he

Gora's plans, on the other hand, integrate married life into her writing career, since, as she claims, "a woman could do two things equally well" (Atherton, *Sisters-in-Law* 324). For these New Women, liberation comes down to choice, and the freedom to chart the course of one's own life, beholden to no one.

1.3. ATHERTON'S POSTWAR NEW WOMAN IN *BLACK OXEN*

Like the Lynds' *Middletown*, Frederick L. Allen's *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (1931) also comments on the radical changes in American manners and morals during the post-WWI era. According to Allen, this involved the awakening of the American family to a new threat: the new youth with its nonconformist and almost apolitical stance, marching towards the destruction of domestic values and traditions. "The shock troops of the rebellion were not alien agitators," Allen notes in the nativist, xenophobic, militaristic language of the first Red Scare, "but the sons and daughters of well-to-do American families, who knew little about Bolshevism and cared distinctively less, and their defiance was expressed . . . right across the family breakfast table into the horrified ears of conservative fathers and mothers" (88). In his opinion, their collective confrontation of conventional morals posed a threat to the nation. Their defiance of the status quo and the codified relationship between the sexes was just as dangerous as foreign influences such as communism, immigration, and the drowning of the white race through unchecked reproduction among the "undesirable" classes in American cities.

In *Black Oxen*, Mary Zattiany, once married to Hungarian Count Zattiany, is "the beauty and the belle of her day" (Atherton 8). One of her admirers, Mr. Dinwiddie, recalls the last time he saw her in the Opera House: "'I caught a glimpse of her at the opera in Paris about ten years ago—faded! Always striking of course with that style, but withered, changed, skinny . . . her expression sad and apathetic—the dethroned idol of men'" (8). In her youth, Mary caused a sensation in European society with her beauty, charm, and intellect, and was known to possess a sizeable family inheritance and investments in the United States, which made her even more attractive to suitors. During the Great War,

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lacks traditional masculine insecurity or resentment towards women's progress and rising prominence in public life.

however, Mary served in the hospitals (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 9), an onerous task that eroded her beauty and vitality. It is no wonder, then, when a mysterious young woman with a striking resemblance to Mary, but young enough to be her daughter, suddenly appears in New York, gossip overtakes the former social circle of Countess Zattiany.

The young, elegant replica of Mary Zattiany stirs curiosity and attention in New York society. Magazines fuel speculation about her secret identity, with some implying that she is a "Bolshevik agent" assisting communists, or a "rich man's mistress" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 20). Unaccompanied by acquaintances or chaperones, she is a threat on many levels. Politically she was suspect, with the first Red Scare still within recent memory.[5] Moreover, her foreignness as potentially a Russian refugee or perhaps an American woman raised in Europe, made her a cultural menace, especially for nativist and xenophobic WASP Americans who feared immigrants and their ability to disrupt the social order (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 20–21). With her mysterious accent and suspicious wealth, she triggers a sense of hysteria. Could there be a Mata Hari in New York? Moreover, her self-confidence and solitary life contrast severely with the traditional behavior of a widow or the immaturity of a young woman. She rejects the romantic paternalism of men, disguised in a cloak of honor in order to monitor women's behaviors. She is also direct, which is perceived as being vulgar. As she responds to Mr. Clavering's comments on social propriety, "'[I]f I find you interesting enough to talk with you until two in the morning, I shall do so. Dine with me tomorrow night if you have nothing better to do'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 29). She challenges the social restraints placed on women, by men, through artificial politeness, and her socioeconomic position upsets the power balance between the sexes that exists in New York.

Madame Zattiany, as she prefers to be called, embraces postwar missionary work through her social influence and economic power. She concentrates her youthful energy and socioeconomic resources on the children of the war: "'My one temptation to enter Society

[5] The first Red Scare, or the wave of anti-communist paranoia that swept over post-WWI America, reflected socioeconomic fears, embedded suspicions of immigrants (especially those from Bolshevik Russia), and conveyed a general distain of labor strikes and leftist political activity. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer conducted a systematic witch-hunt for individuals allegedly associated with communist ideology or any kind of radicalism that was seen as a threat. The Palmer Raids resulted in the deportation of over 500 people, including Russian-born Emma Goldman, who was an advocate of women's rights, birth control, and the labor struggle. She was imprisoned and forced to return to Russia along with other radicals in 1919 (Roark et al. 561).

here would be the hope of forming a relief organization–drive . . . for the starving children of Austria. Russian children are not the only pitiable objects in Europe, and after all, the children of civilized countries are of more value to the future of the world'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 37). As an experienced and intellectual woman dedicated to a humanitarian cause, she makes a statement against flappers—pointless young women who waste their youth without any serious goals or intentions in their lives. She criticizes this reckless and noncommittal generation harshly, and scorns their indulgence in amusement: "'I shall never feel as young as that again. Nor will any girl who was merely sixteen at the beginning of the war ever be the same as your care-free young ladies here. I sit in the restaurants and watch them with amazement–often with anger'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 38). Madame Zattiany symbolizes Atherton's New American Woman, full of the postwar awareness of the world's devastation. As an activist, she detests the flapper's sole "preoccupation with youth" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 44). As a European, she prioritizes the appreciation of mature, knowledgeable women and the value of experience and psychological depth (44). Mr. Clavering recognizes these shortcomings in American society during one of their conversations. As he states, "'I am afraid we are too young a country to tolerate middle-aged heroines. We are steeped in conventionalism, for all our fads. We have certain cast-iron formulae for life, and associate love with youth alone'" (44–45). Madame Zattiany proves that there is much more to the modern woman than beauty, youth, romance, and consumerism. Being intelligent, having a moral compass, and fighting for a political cause without fear is really what makes the New Woman new.

The Great War nourished Americans with an "eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die spirit" (Allen 94). When soldiers and nurses returned from war-torn Europe, they longed for the carefree days of their lost youth and began to incorporate some of the freedom they had experienced overseas into their everyday lives. As Allen explains, "American girls sent over as nurses and war workers had come under the influence of continental manners and standards without being subject to the rigid protections thrown about their continental sisters of the respectable classes; and there had been a very widespread and very natural breakdown of traditional restraints and reticences and taboos" (94). Madame Zattiany endured a similar upheaval in her own life during the war, and gradually reveals the story of Mary Zattiany—her story—to Mr. Clavering over the course of their discussions. As she aged, she began to lose her husband and her admirers

to younger women. However, before it was too late, Mary opens her eyes to the modern world and its promises of progress and change: "'Mary was too intellectual, too brilliant, too well-informed on every subject that is discussed in salons, not to attract men always'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 47–48). This is Mary's motivation to regain her youth, beauty, and influence, since for women like her, a "second youth" comes with awareness. As she tells the story of her former self, Madame Zattiany elaborates on her suffering during the war and the Bolshevik Revolution, when she transformed her palace in Budapest into a hospital. In Vienna, she lived and worked under constant threat, especially with respect to poverty. However, Mary dies when she arrives in America, as she has no place in this exuberant new world. As Madame Zattiany confesses, "'Mary Zattiany will never be seen again'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 49). Madame Zattiany will forge a new path for herself with lessons learned in the past, rising like a rejuvenated phoenix from the ashes. For this reason, Madame Zattiany both fascinates and intimidates Mr. Clavering with her mysterious identity, European strength, and charm: "She gave the impression of a woman who had been at grips with life and conquered it, from first to last" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 61). Even if he is fond of such strong women, as a patriarchal and paternalistic figure, he feels uneasy with a woman of experience and wisdom beyond her seeming youth.

Madame Zattiany's foil in the novel is flapper Janet Oglethorpe, a New York high society girl who serves as a contrast to the older and wiser New Woman. The encounter between Lee Clavering, the representative voice of tradition, and Janet Oglethorpe reflects this critical view of the flapper. He encounters her in the middle of the night while she is returning home alone from a party. She is unchaperoned and drunk. Her whimsical and flirtatious behavior has a shocking effect on Clavering, who is appalled by her comment: "'I'll go home by myself. I've had too good a time tonight to bother with old fogies'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 97). A believer in chivalric social codes, he feels obligated to protect her honor and take her home safely, even though she is almost cartoonish in her representation of the flapper, with her smoking, heavy make-up, and playful manners: "Her short hair curled about her face. In spite of her paint she looked like a child—a greedy child playing with life" (99). More like Fitzgerald's Daisy or Rosalind, Janet bears no resemblance to exemplary New Women such as Alexina Groome, Gora Dwight, or Madame Zattiany.

Janet Oglethorpe voices the reason behind the flapper's desire for change and struggle against tradition. She believes that the young have freedom of choice in their lives now, and should take advantage of it before it is too late: "'We have more opportunities. We've made 'em. This is our age and we're enjoying it to the limit. God! What stupid times girls must have had—some of them do yet'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 99). As she argues her point, she criticizes the double standards between men and women when it comes to social relations, manners, and virtues. Young women have decided to remove the burden of tradition in the form of Victorian attire, manners, and morals: "'So, we made up our minds to compete in the only way possible. We leave off our corsets at dances so they can get a new thrill out of us, then sit out in an automobile and drink and have little petting parties of two'" (100). Relieved from corsets and chaperones, young Americans could now turn to automobiles and parties to escape societal norms and expectations.

With her beauty, experience, and intellect, Madame Zattiany neutralizes Janet's outspoken, childish, and mischievous mannerisms. After seeing Janet's outrageous behavior in public places, she even questions her mental health: "'It is a tragedy. An Oglethorpe! A mere child intoxicated . . . and truly atrocious manners. Why don't her people put her in a sanitarium?'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 109). Here, Atherton suggests that drinking has nothing to do with the New Woman, but is merely a habit of the pathological, alcoholic flapper, who should be hospitalized for her excesses. Smoking, on the other hand, "implied a promiscuous equality between men and women and was an indication that women could enjoy the same vulgar habits and ultimately also the same vices as men" (Fass 294). Smoking women endangered the higher moral standing of Atherton's New Women and the idealization of traditional women. Even though smoking and drinking gradually gained acceptance over the course of the 1920s with the increased emphasis on choice, change, and modern life, for Atherton, equal access to vices was not true equality, and she expresses this through the conflict between Janet Oglethorpe and Madame Zattiany.

1.3.1. The Self-Made New Woman's Scientific Rejuvenation in *Black Oxen*

Self-realization, hard work, and discipline are key features of the self-made man myth and to a certain extent, the American Dream. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791), Horatio Alger's rags to riches stories, the struggles of Frederick Douglass, and

narratives of former presidents and captains of industry as exemplary self-achievers have all glorified the self-made man. This mythmaking is repeated in *Black Oxen* through Madame Zattiany's tragic life story and her rebirth after WWI as a highly principled, ambitious, driven, determined, self-made New Woman stepping into the modern world. However, in this case, Madame Zattiany had a little help from modern science on her path to success. The secret to her youthfulness is in fact rejuvenation treatments which transform the meaning of self-creation in the novel. Instead of a "rags to riches" story of upward mobility, Madame Zattiany's tale is one of a scientifically constructed New Woman—one that is created and sustained not only by hard work, but also technological progress. Modern medicine has crafted this modern woman, replacing her exhausted, war-torn body with a more youthful version, ready to take on the challenges of the New American Woman in postwar society.

During the 1920s, Americans sought not only to rejuvenate their lives, but also their appearance. Scientific studies regarding the endocrine glands, specifically the sex glands' role in enhancing human life, drew public interest much like plastic surgery and body modification attract attention today. The medical discourse of the era promoted various "glandular techniques" that could be used to rejuvenate aging people. To this end, Austrian physiologist Eugen Steinach developed a "simple, vasectomy-like operation" known as "Steinach Operation" that was supposed to increase male virility and sexual energy (Sengoopta 122). The procedure became so popular that poet William Butler Yeats even sought the treatment for "physical and mental rejuvenation" at the age of 69, while "irradiation of the ovaries" emerged as a corresponding rejuvenation treatment for women (122). Gertrude Atherton received this x-ray treatment at the age of 66 and wrote *Black Oxen* in 1923 after her regaining her vitality (122). Chandak Sengoopta conveys that these procedures "claimed to make aging people vigorous, energetic and productive. Not age but energy was the point at issue" (125). Rejuvenation became a postwar craze because it arrived at the right place at the right time. As Sengoopta concludes, the world was ripe for renewal; thus, it "was not merely a medical task but key to reviving a tired civilization and redeeming humanity, especially after the First World War, which had robbed Central Europe of a large part of its young male population" (126).

However, such techniques also came with dangerous risks. During these treatments, irreversible harm to reproductive tissues could lead to complete sterility, which seemingly

happens in *Black Oxen* (Corners 18). The novel portrays the promise of scientific youth through Madame Zattiany's rejuvenation treatment in Europe. With her regained youth and energy, she assumes a progressive role in New York society and the postwar reconstruction of Europe as a New American Woman. Atherton offers a "second youth" to her New Women in *The Sisters-in-Law* through awareness and self-sufficiency and *Black Oxen* via scientific developments. Madame Zattiany's rejuvenation grants her a second chance in life; she staves off aging in order to fulfill her dreams and potential as a self-made woman. Specifically, it assists her agenda of helping the suffering children of WWI and contributing to the rebuilding of Austria by increasing her attractiveness (and thus the attractiveness of her cause), enhancing her mental acuity, and boosting her self-confidence and diplomatic skills.

During an encounter with friends from her youth, Madame Zattiany describes her personal restoration and rejuvenation treatments at a sanitarium in Vienna. She commits herself to these treatments at a time of exasperation and aimlessness after the war: "'The war—and many other things—had made me profoundly tired of life—something of course that I do not expect you to understand. And now that the war was over and my usefulness at an end, I had nothing to look forward to'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 136). She looks to science as a way to regain her youth and her reason to live. She wants to revive her "worn out mind and body" not for petty personal reasons, but to participate in the reconstruction of Europe (137), thereby drawing a parallel between individual and national rebirth. Thus, she explains her x-ray treatment and its impact on her body not as a tale designed to entertain friends at a party, but as part of her larger postwar social and political mission.

Julie Prebel reads *Black Oxen* in the socio-historical context of the 1920s: as an example of the promises of scientific progress and the popularity of eugenics. As Prebel notes, the social purity movements of the Progressive Era and the "survival of the fittest" ideology of Social Darwinism take a new turn with the rejuvenated body and mind:

> Rejuvenation discourse emerged in the 1920s and 1930s as another solution for social decline, but Steinach's treatment, rather than focusing on birthrates and breeding, offered a way to *restore* the "fittest" stock to physical and mental health. For a maturing population who had come of age in the Victorian era and were now witnessing the deterioration of its social ideals and laws of decorum, rejuvenation therapy seemed an appealing means of regaining a competitive edge in the youth-obsessed culture of modernist values. (308)

Black Oxen incorporates literary and scientific discourses to address the role of medical technology in individual and national progress. The novel not only provides insight into Atherton's scientific rejuvenation, but also exposes the complexities that accompany "the enhancement and prolongation of human life" (Prebel 308). Atherton's literary imagination and life experience reworks youth within the scientific and cultural context of the 1920s. Thus to a certain extent, the novel represents Atherton's challenge to ageism and the disempowerment of older women by American society. However, as Prebel notes, Mary Zattiany's Steinach therapy in Vienna also assures Americans that they will not become victims of "white aristocratic and aristogenic extinction" through the influx of young, vigorous, overly fertile immigrants (309). Rejuvenation could therefore regenerate both the individual and the nation by battling the eugenic fear of "race suicide," or the idea that WASPs would be outbred by newcomers. Prebel concludes that "[r]ejuvenation therapy, in *Black Oxen* and in Atherton's declarations of her own successful treatment, reactivates bodily youthfulness and personal agency while at the same time promising a more functional and progressive nation" (309), especially with respect to the maintenance of WASP hegemony.

The traditional circle of women in the novel reacts to Madame Zattiany's scientific rejuvenation with utter shock and disgust towards her "abnormal renaissance" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 139). They view Mary's youth as an act that transgresses Christian values and womanhood, since they believe that growing old gracefully should be an accepted "common fate" of respectable matrons (139). Therefore, Mary's continued youth and charm beyond her years threatens the social order and the women who have resigned themselves to aging with "virtue:" "It was not only mysterious and terrifying but subtly indecent" (139). Mary's treatment restores her body and mind to health and vivacity, and allows her to argue that rejecting change and resisting new ideas result from an aging of the brain that can now, thankfully, be reversed: "'People growing old are condemned to prejudice, smugness, hostility to progress, to the purposes and enthusiasms of youth; but this attitude is due to aging glands alone, all things being equal'" (140). As a result, "calm and scornful superiority" and "righteous conservatism" are merely defense mechanisms of aging people against the nonconformism of youth (140). Madame Zattiany emphasizes the primary reason for the rejuvenation of the mind and body: to broaden one's vision and enhance activism into middle and old age. Thus, her desire for youth is not connected to

physical beauty or attraction; it reflects her desire to engage in political advocacy in the postwar world. In this context, the iconic flapper becomes superficial, frivolous and selfish, occupied with materialism, consumption, conformity, and youth simply for personal gain.

Despite the jealousy of her peers, whose sons and grandsons propose marriage to the youthful Madame Zattiany, she dedicates her power, influence, and renewed self to charity work in Europe. In her second youth, she thinks about marriage only to benefit her postwar cause. Her youth is recovered, but she never loses sight of her goals, which are those of a woman who has endured decades of hardship: "'While my *brain* has been rejuvenated with the rest of my physical structure, my *mind* is as old as it was before the treatment'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 145). Madame Zattiany appreciates "the wisdom of experience" and resists the temptations of passion and love, believing that her past as a "Book of Life" enlightens her during her second youth (172).

As Prebel states, Atherton deploys rejuvenation treatment in the novel as an act of redefining the self, regardless of reproductive politics (328). In that, Madame Zattiany's status as a childless widow poses a social stigma; however, Atherton assigns her the task of "mothering postwar Viennese children back to health" with the assistance of her scientifically-renewed body, mind and energy (Prebel 328). In a sense, Atherton views "adoptive motherhood" as a progressive alternative to "biological mothering" (328). The writer's choice thus also challenges the eugenic idea that women's reproductive function was quintessential to the continuity and progress of the nation (328). Through her novel, Atherton gives older women the opportunity to assist "national progress and domestic security" through their socioeconomic power and political influence, beyond the traditional gender roles of wife and mother (328). Nevertheless, much of this is undercut by the reality that despite all of Madame Zattiany's wealth, education, and experience, a pretty face is still necessary to attract support for women's causes.

Overlooking this contradiction, Madame Zattiany celebrates the victory of science over nature in her defense of the rejuvenation treatments she has received: "'The isolation of germs, the discovery of toxins and serums, the triumph over diseases that once wasted whole nations and brought about the fall of empires, the arrest of infant mortality, the marvels of vivisection and surgery—the list is endless'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 176). In

her confessions, she glorifies her scientific youth, "'A man is as old as his endocrines'" (176), adding that unfortunately, she can no longer have children due to the cure, thereby reinforcing the significance of the novel's title (oxen are adult male cattle that have been castrated, which makes them calmer, more focused, and easier to control).[6] Though in all likelihood, she makes this comment about her infertility to obscure her age, which is probably postmenopausal anyway. Instead, she chooses to help the surviving children of postwar Europe through her diplomatic fundraising skills, rather than flings with the opposite sex.

In *Black Oxen*, rejuvenation enables women to regain their strength and influence in society, regardless of age. Madame Zattiany's treatments grant her an active space to explore social issues without the challenges of age, gender, and class politics, all of which usually deter women's success in the political realm. Thus, Julie Prebel notes:

> For Atherton rejuvenation not only reversed her mental sterility . . . but also effected a transformation of self that made her more socially visible. Moreover, this transformation could increase aging women's political vitality, she believed, in exchange for the politics of reproduction. This shift from women's reproductive power to political power is explored in *Black Oxen* through Mary Zattiany, who ultimately renounces romance with a young, virile American man in favor of a position of international political power through marriage to a savvy Hungarian diplomat. (311)

Mr. Hohenhauer's visit reflects Mary's hidden fears about her future: the end of her life as Madame Zattiany. He asks how she is planning to maintain her power and influence as a postwar diplomat in Austria: "'Do you imagine for a moment that you could play the great role in Austrian affairs you have set yourself, handicapped by an American name—and an American husband?'" (Atherton, *Black Oxen* 319). He needs her guidance in the reconstruction of Austria, and proposes a diplomatic marriage of convenience for a shared cause: "'I intend to rule and to save Austria, and I need you, your help, your advice, your subtlety, your compelling fascination, and your great personality'" (320). She is tempted by his proposal and the promise of righting wrongs, especially her past mistakes.

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[6] In *Adventures of a Novelist*, Atherton explains how she came up with a title for her novel *Black Oxen* after several attempts and correspondence with her publisher Horace Liveright. In the midst of a dinner with Avery Hopwood and Carl Van Vechten, Atherton suddenly recalled three lines of a dramatic poem by W. B. Yeats which she had read some years ago in Munich: "The years like great black oxen tread the world / And God the herdsman goads them on behind / And I am broken by their passing feet" (*Adventures* 541). When she returned to Liveright with the title, he was also pleased with it (*Adventures* 542).

Therefore, she returns Europe as Madame Zattiany, not out of romantic reasons, but for political ones.

1.3.2. Reflections on the Writing and Publication of *Black Oxen*

Black Oxen and its reception is closely linked to Atherton's own experience and afterthoughts on her rejuvenation treatments. The treatments obviously enabled her to rekindle her mind and writing career. As Henry James Forman conveys, Atherton discovered Steinach's rejuvenation cures in her sixties when she was having a hard time as a writer. After receiving the treatments, according to Forman, she regained her fame and vitality as an author, writing *Black Oxen* in less than five months (10). Paul Kammerer notes the connection between science and literature, arguing that Steinach's theories and studies on revitalization actually gave rise to a popular subgenre of fiction at the time, the "Rejuvenation Novel," as exemplified by Atherton's *Black Oxen* (viii). In the beginning, Steinach's Operation was criticized and discredited by postwar Europeans, especially by medical professionals (Kammerer 125) and clergy as an "interference with the Lord's own will" (126). However, Europeans soon overcame their prejudices against "playing God" as they observed the fruitful outcomes of the Steinach Operation. Interestingly, the same "opposition and support" happened when Dr. Harry Benjamin promoted Steinach's rejuvenation methods in New York (126).

In her autobiographical work, *Adventures of a Novelist* (1932), Atherton discusses the writing process behind *Black Oxen* and her own rejuvenation treatments. In this regard, she refers to Dr. Eugen Steinach's notable studies and experiments on "restored youth and reproductivity" in Vienna, which he conducted on animals and humans before World War I (536–37). After discovering Dr. Harry Benjamin, who once worked with Steinach and was responsible for bringing his techniques to New York, Atherton begins to contemplate the possibility of scientific youth for women: "He . . . added that women were running to the Steinach clinic from all over Europe, among the Russian princesses who sold their jewels to pay for treatments . . . that might restore their exhausted energies and enable them make a living after jewels had given out" (*Adventures* 538). While thinking about this new fountain of youth, Atherton encountered a mysterious woman of great beauty and manners in a theatre. Her European air and American upbringing triggers Atherton's curiosity, and she writes a story that would eventually form the basis of *Black*

Oxen (538). She then meets Dr. Benjamin, who encourages her to write a novel and pursue the rejuvenation treatments for her own "mental sterility" (539).

Atherton further elaborates on her rejuvenation treatments and the resulting novel. Dr. Benjamin's examinations revealed that she was a healthy candidate for the therapy: "I had the arteries of sixteen. What, then, was the matter? Possibly my pituitary and thyroid glands were deleted, and there should be a fresh release of hormones into the blood stream" (*Adventures* 540). After the x-ray therapy and a period of mental and physical inactivity, she recovers quickly and starts *Black Oxen*: "I had the abrupt sensation of a black cloud lifting from my brain. . . . Torpor vanished. My brain seemed sparkling with light. . . . I wrote steadily for four hours; marched that woman [Madame Zattiany] triumphantly out of the theatre, with a complete knowledge of who she was" (540). In the aftermath of the treatment and the writing process of the novel, she turned to Dr. Benjamin as a medical consultant (540–41). With respect to the conservative reactions to her bestseller *Black Oxen*, she engages in a harsh critique of the anti-modern and anti-progressive front of the interwar years that also targeted scientific developments:

> But, of course, anything so radical was bound to meet with disapproval in a country which dismisses professors for teaching the doctrine of evolution. The world, and the great and free United States in particular, is full of narrow-minded, ignorant . . . puritanical, hypocritical, prejudiced . . . atavists who soothe their inferiority complex by barking their hatred of anything new. The very word Science is abhorrent to them, and, if they ruled the world, progress would cease. (542–43)

Atherton's criticism directly brings to mind John Scopes, a biology teacher who was charged with violating the Butler Act, Tennessee's ban on teaching Darwin's theory of evolution in public schools. In 1925, the Scopes Trial, also known as the Scopes Monkey Trial because of its subject matter, indicated the rising conservatism of the decade through this conflict between Christian fundamentalism and secularism, and creationism and evolution. Ultimately, Scopes was found guilty and was forced to pay a $100 fine, but the case had the long-term effect of introducing Darwinism into public discourse, which eventually resulted in the lifting of the ban (Roark et al. 584).

1.4. CONCLUSION

Paula S. Fass notes that the 1920s cannot be reduced to the power of business, the mass production of cars, and sexual liberation since its scope and meaning surpass traditional

confrontations with modernity. As Fass conveys, the era also served as a transition period, "The structuring power of that primal modern age is too often lost as the decade sinks into insignificance, serving as a kind of comic relief between two crises—the Great War and the Great Crash—full of interesting signs but barren of deeper meanings" (3). Gertrude Atherton's social novels of the 1920s portray the New Woman and her struggle with this social upheaval, with its economic and educational opportunities, its transformation of manners and morals, and the clash between American Victorian ideals and postwar promises of progress. Atherton's women in *The Sisters-in-Law* and *Black Oxen* differ remarkably from the popular media and literary images of the flapper, mostly due to their socioeconomic awareness, self-sufficiency, and involvement in initiatives designed to actuate progressive change.

In these novels and those that will be explored in Chapter Two, the New American Woman emerges as a dedicated social reformer, worker, unionist, and labor activist. Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930) and Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) are radical proletarian novels that portray working women's economic exploitation and union activities through the Gastonia Strike of 1929. Specifically, Vorse and Lumpkin depict working women's activism as labor organizers modelled after Ella May Wiggins, the balladeer of the strike and the representative of the mill worker-mother. The novels address women's interwar industrial work, occupational segregation and the wage gap. Churches, mills, and the government condemned these strikers as being radicals who violated Christian beliefs and the social order through their activism. However, the postwar boom that expanded the mill system generated a new socioeconomic class structure through industrial slavery. As Chapter Two will argue, the social and political novels reflect the writers' call for reform to end abuses such as child labor, the stretch-out system, severe malnutrition, and inhumane working conditions in mill towns.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN AND LABOR: WORKERS' RIGHTS, UNIONISM AND THE GASTONIA STRIKE OF 1929

Mary Heaton Vorse (1874-1966) was a prominent American journalist and novelist, particularly a writer of women's fiction. Vorse emerged as a labor organizer and proletarian writer with her report on the textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. Vorse could not ignore the Lawrence strikers' sense of solidarity and strength in the face of "the terrible human cost of profit making" (Garrison xii). She worked with the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) during the radical union's unemployment protest in New York in 1914. Her reports also provided details about the Mesabi Range strike in 1916 and her collaborative work with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Vorse was not only a labor reporter of the Great Steel Strike of 1919 and a labor organizer who helped women textile workers in Pennsylvania, but she was also "a strike participant" with invaluable insight into unions and "commitment to accurate reporting" (xiii). As Dee Garrison underlines, "her most significant contribution to the journalism as well as the fiction of her time, however, was her consistent attention to the role played by women" (xiii). Vorse dedicated her years to labor activism and leftist politics, yet she avoided any affiliation with a political party or total submission to an ideology as a labor reporter, writer, and sympathizer. Her familial duties and breadwinner role also forced her to write "romantic light fiction" besides her labor reporting (Urgo 68). She carried her experience and vision in labor journalism to Gastonia in 1929 and closely observed mill families and their industrial exploitation in the textile industry, which culminated in her 1930 novel *Strike!* (68).

Grace Lumpkin's proletarian novel, *To Make My Bread* (1932), is regarded as an example of "social realism" and shares the obscurity of other radical interwar novels due to the conservative, anti-communist policies that targeted leftist writers during the Great Depression (Sowinska viii).[7] Lumpkin closely observed labor issues, class conflicts, and

[7] Lumpkin's life (1891-1980) was shaped by 1930s radicalism and later 1950s McCarthyism. As Suzanne Sowinska indicates, Lumpkin revealed the names of Communist Party members and sympathizers, which made her "a revolutionary and a scoundrel" (viii). Granted the 1932 Maxim

race relations in the South. Her journalism provided her with a medium to express her view of mill life and workers. Lumpkin was not a Communist Party member, but took an active part in radical activism such as a picket funded by the Sacco and Vanzetti Defense Committee in 1928. She also worked for *The New Masses* and supported the organization of black sharecroppers in the South and Gastonia textile strikes as a reporter and labor activist (Sowinska xii). In her debut novel, *To Make My Bread,* she addressed radical politics without neglecting "her prerogative to create art" while chronicling the working class plight (xiii).[8]

Women writers could not find a critical place in leftist political movements, organizations, and the media in the 1930s, but the proletarian novel served as a vehicle to express their views about current issues, women's social position, and women's radical potential. As Joseph R. Urgo states:

> In the absence of a women's movement in the 1930s, female writers did not have the structures toward which their characters could lean to express their feminism any more than did the women in the Communist Party of that decade. Proletarian literature, as revolutionary literature concerned with reshaping and redefining society, no doubt provided one literary framework in which female writers could legitimately express feminist protest. (65)

Inspired by the Gastonia textile strike in North Carolina in 1929, the Gastonia novels are historical narratives that rely on the details surrounding the strike, with slight changes. They unanimously address workers' complaints about poor wages and company-owned houses, along with their encounters with xenophobia and conservative ideologies in southern mill communities (Reilly 504). The mill owners, the local communities, and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) denounced the presence of communists during the strike. Nevertheless, the Gastonia writers created a balance between the evocation of radical politics and historical events in their social and political novels (504). Four Gastonia novels were written by women writers: Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930), Dorothy Myra Page's *Gathering Storm*, Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread,* and

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Gorky Award with *To Make My Bread*, Lumpkin sought to replace her radicalism with religion in her later years, which Sowinska attributed to her "southern agrarian and Christian roots" (viii).

[8] The title of *To Make My Bread* (1932) evokes the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike in Massachusetts, known as the "Bread and Roses Strike," due to the workers' demands for fair wages, better living and working conditions, and food to put on their tables. The strike's success encouraged labor activism in the textile industry, while emphasizing the contribution of women and children to the labor struggle.

Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart* (all published in 1932). They portray the Gastonia strike in relation to women's experiences with starving farm families, the migration to mill towns, women's entrance into millwork, high infant mortality, and female strikers' encounters with police, state, and mob violence (Urgo 67).

Ella May Wiggins, who rose to prominence in 1929 with the Gastonia strike, has come to represent "a martyr to the workers' cause" as a defiant female mill worker with a rural background (Hall 355). The balladeer of the Gastonia strike and union organizer, Wiggins emerged as a leading figure in proletarian novels, protesting the industrial exploitation of workers through race and gender codes. Wiggins criticized the patriarchal defense of middle class women's roles as homemakers and caretakers, while poor women were suffering in textile industries. However, Wiggins has remained neglected by labor historians. As precursors to the Piedmont and Gastonia strikes, the labor heroines of the Elizabethton strikes have been depicted as "pathetic mill girls." Consequently, historical narratives did not chronicle their struggle at all, which thus perpetuated "a one-dimensional view of labor conflict that fails to take culture and community into account" (355). In spite of working class women's overlooked labor history, they forged cross-class and cross-generational alliances in order to improve worsening labor conditions and claim their rights. Examining their accounts is crucial, as they narrate socioeconomic change and cultural transformation through industrialization and migration to cities.

This chapter focuses on Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) and Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930) as radical proletarian novels that depict the Loray Mill Strike through the journalistic vision of these labor writers.[9] Lumpkin and Vorse invoke the promise of change and working class revolution with class consciousness and a sense of community among the mill workers. They portray poor white southerners who seek relief in mills, yet encounter the conflict between the agrarian nostalgia of individual freedom and the industrial machinery of a rigid and overwhelming labor routine. *To Make My Bread* and *Strike!* engage in social and historical commentary on the industrial transformation of the agrarian South through changing values and life in mill towns, labor

[9] In this chapter, *To Make My Bread* (1932) will be discussed first because it explains the transition period to mill life for the southern poor white. *Strike!* (1930) primarily portrays the strike period and unionization efforts.

issues, race relations, class distinctions, and women's radical roles as mothers, mill workers, strikers, and unionists. The novels also depict the proletarian liberation of the submissive southern poor white through mill life, modern households, economic survival of the fittest, and labor organizations. Poverty, child labor, malnutrition, and high mortality in mills trigger the gradual awakening of the working class to the wage gap, workers' rights, manipulative class and race politics, and the collaboration between the paternalistic mill owners and the church. In these novels of social change, women mill workers, strikers, and labor organizers in mill villages embrace labor activism, the progressive role of the New American Woman, and her new morality.

2.1. THE GASTONIA STRIKE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

In the spring of 1929, mill workers' disillusionment with their heavy workload and poverty resulted in strikes in the textile industry of the southern Piedmont. The strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, created a sensation because Gaston County was known for its high number of cotton mills in the South specifically, and in the nation as a whole. The Loray Mill, where the Gastonia strike took place, was "the largest textile plant" in the county (Huber, "'Battle Songs'" 110–11). The international media attention to the strike was also caused by the involvement of the National Textile Workers' Union (NTWU), which was associated with the Communist Party USA (111). The strikers' resistance to various forms of violence, through the leadership of Fred E. Beal, and workers' demands for better working conditions and higher wages via organized labor appealed to other mill workers in Gaston County. Also a mill owner, North Carolina governor O. Max Gardner deployed the state militia to defend the rights of the mill owners. Later, the vigilantism of the community replaced the national guards through the interference of "Committee of One Hundred" (112). The night raid on the union relief store, eviction of families from mill property, and the police attack on the union tent colony, leading to the police chief's death, resulted in a series of trials and mob violence. The murder of Ella May Wiggins, a single mother of five children, the balladeer of the strike, and a local organizer, by a ferocious mob signaled the end of the Gastonia strike (113).

John M. Reilly states that Gastonia represented "a cynosure for radical sentiment," just as much as the Sacco and Vanzetti case (500).[10] The Gastonia strike inspired six novels, starting with *Strike!* by Mary Heaton Vorse in 1930. In 1932, Dorothy Myra Page's *Gathering Storm*, Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread*, Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart*, and Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire* were published. In 1934, William Rollins Jr's *The Shadow Before* provided another view of the strike. They addressed the Gastonia strike's promise for radical change, as they adopted "a political purpose" to assist "the cause of revolution" through their proletarian novels (Reilly 501). This kind of literature provided socioeconomic commentary on the class system in light of Marxism. Radical writers of the 1930s shared a faith in working class culture and literature as a response to bourgeois literature and the abuses of capitalism (501).

Gastonia novelists, with the exception of Sherwood Anderson, embraced Marxist views in their portrayals of the "modes of production" and their impact on socioeconomic relations, economy-based class construction, and the historic rivalry between the classes for sociocultural domination (Reilly 503). They believed that working class authority would gradually eliminate materialism, leading people to realize their true potential and desires. Their revolutionary "message" reoriented narratives and reworked literary devices such as style and characterization in order to depict a unique proletarian reality (503–504). Anderson's *Beyond Desire*, however, places the Gastonia strike in the characters' background, though he shares the Gastonia writers' occupation with the "intimate connection between personal and historical experience" (511). In this way, his novel deals with the plight of industrial workers, events surrounding the strike, and socioeconomic power dynamics. The characters do not develop a working class consciousness in modern America. As a result, Anderson's analysis of mill life lacks the political vision and collective class identity of other works of radical proletarian literature (512).

[10] The Sacco and Vanzetti case symbolized the anti-radical, anti-immigration, and nativist sentiments of the 1920s. Two Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were arrested for robbery and murder in 1920 and sentenced to death. Despite protests and public demonstrations, they were executed in 1927 (Roark et al. 583). Many radical Americans believed that they were wrongly accused and victimized for their anti-authoritarian political views and immigrant status during the First Red Scare.

As Robert W. Whalen also conveys, the southern textile strikes between 1929 and 1931 were depicted in six novels and also a play, Tom Tippett's *Mill Shadows: A Drama of Social Forces in Four Acts* (1932). As examples of the 1930s proletarian literature movement, according to Whalen, these works address working class encounters with mill owners who solidified class distinctions through paternalistic relationships within the southern social and economic order (376). Southern workers and employers were expected to maintain familial bonds. In these proletarian works, however, workers gradually acknowledge the absence of kinship relations in capitalist industries in which mill owners manipulate the religious, patriotic, and racial concerns of poor whites to exploit them in the New South (Whalen 376, 378).

Progressive Era women once deployed the maternal role to access public and political influence, fighting against high infant and maternal mortality, limited employment opportunities, low wages, and dependence on child labor. Molly Ladd-Taylor notes that the adoption of maternalist views in the face of socioeconomic injustice led to visible improvements in the 1920s through better health care, new educational and employment opportunities, and women's suffrage (5–6).[11] In short, it secured some gains for the New Woman in the interwar years that would eventually eliminate some of the major concerns of the maternalist viewpoint. Similarly, as union and relief workers during the Gastonia strike, women mill workers also voiced maternalist arguments as a justification of their activism. They acknowledged the domestic and industrial labor of women workers and, with their politicization of motherhood, they drew upon women's individual, collective, and political autonomy to demand working class rights during the strike.

2.2. *TO MAKE MY BREAD*: THE INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE AGRARIAN SOUTH

Overall, the Gastonia novels suggest that the strike resulted from workers' exhaustion and poor conditions in mill towns. Like Fielding Burke in *Call Home the Heart*, Grace Lumpkin underlines the strikers' passage from southern agrarian freedom to working

[11] Maternalism reworks traditional values and virtues associated with motherhood to legitimize women's participation in politics and public policies. In this way, women took active roles in demanding rights for themselves as wives and mothers, and for their children and families as social workers, reformers, and policy makers.

class life in industrial cities, and the suffering this precipitated (Reilly 508). Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* narrates the socioeconomic process that transforms the McClures into mill hands, strikers, and labor organizers, through their migration from the mountains to the Piedmont mills, where they are forced to accept poor working and living conditions, violence, starvation, sickness, and death. As Reilly conveys, most of *To Make My Bread* deals with "preparation though historical change" for which "certain individuals become mentally aroused even while economically depressed" (509). Characters who are aware of the industrial slavery of workers in capitalist mills emerge as strike leaders, union sympathizers, and labor activists.

Depicting the years between 1900 and the Great Depression, Lumpkin portrays the industrial transformation of the South through the pilgrimage of poor white farmers from the Appalachian Mountains to mill towns. A member of one of these farming families, Emma McClure struggles to survive with her children, in the midst of hunger, poverty, and harsh winter conditions: "Emma watched them. There was nothing for her to do but watch. Her eyes were bright like small kerosene lamps with reflectors behind them. And the lamps gleamed out at the children and at Grandpap and the boys when they came from the woods. . . . But they brought nothing" (Lumpkin 29). The mountain people's daily life reflects the constant struggle with starvation, high child mortality, and sickness. Grandpap feverishly defends his faith in agrarian freedom and supports his family as a bootlegger. The McClure family members cling to their Christian faith and American promises such as freedom and self-reliance. However, they ultimately forsake these values for what they think will be their salvation.

The mountain people, including the McClure family, sell their land to the lumber company, expecting payment, employment, and rent-free residence in their cabins. However, the company purchases their land and sends a representative to collect rent: "Grandpap met the company man at the door with his shotgun. It was useless for Emma to try to prevent him. He could only feel that somewhere in the transaction he had been fooled" (Lumpkin 134). The company representative informs them about new opportunities such as millwork and modern housing facilities "down in Leesville, [North Carolina] jobs, lifetime jobs, were waiting for people who would come down and work in the factories. Anybody could learn to run the machines. And those who did were given a house with a kitchen stove and electric lights" (136). The southern mill villages were

built after the Civil War as the agricultural southern economy was transformed by the booming textile industry. The antebellum South's plantation economy came to an end with the abolition of slavery, industrialization, mechanization, and urbanization. Many postwar southerners viewed this as a source of "political power and wealth in modern capitalistic society" as industrial power, access to mines and railroads, and having a suppressed working class could yield massive profits for those who could acclimate to the New South (Page 31). Poor southern yeoman farmers who could no longer afford to work their land were drawn into this system and, as the southern economy increasingly came to rely on cotton mills, became mill hands (31).

Emma's faith in the American dream leads her to idealize the mill town as a "land flowing with milk and honey, and gold growing on trees" (Lumpkin 136). The loss of their land to lumber speculators, starvation in winter, and the inability to survive as mountain farmers contribute to their decision to leave the Appalachians. Emma is also tempted by portrayals of modern life after hearing of the electrification of cities, cars, high production levels, and consumerism: "In Emma there was a hidden excitement at the thought of change, of seeing a city, and living there. The young man had said, 'There, the streets are full of houses, mansions.' Others had told her about them, and about the engines and automobiles. The outside had come so much nearer in the last few years. It could not be ignored any longer" (Lumpkin 138). Emma's projections about millwork and housing are shaped by the idea of progress, equal opportunity, and the merits of hard work. Emma imagines herself as a capable mill hand, surrounded by other women workers in a safe and content environment: "Sitting at the loom, she worked the heddles . . . and she thought of herself sitting in a factory beside a quite machine working it easily, talking to the other women. . . . It would be a very neighborly arrangement, as if neighbors had gathered to sit around and talk at a quilting. And she would get money for her work" (Lumpkin 140).

Lumpkin's southern proletarian novel emphasizes the naivety of the southern poor, their shattering experience in the mills, and the gradual coming of age through organized labor. The promise of a new life disconnects Emma from the reality of capitalist industries and the exploitation of workers. Raised with Christian teachings and agrarian freedom, Emma compares their long journey to the mill town to the exodus of the Israelites, destined to reach the promised land (Lumpkin 142). Emma hopes to leave their bitter experiences

(death, hunger, and shaming poverty) behind through (industrial) salvation, but instead faces a new set of bleak circumstances.

Similarly, in "We are Mill People," Ella Ford gives an account of a Gastonia striker who was once a mountain farmer, yet turned to millwork because there was no other means of employment or economic survival in the 1920s. In Ford's account, the Gastonia striker speaks for all, indicating the story of mill workers: "Once people were down in the city they got into the habit of living there. They liked the movie shows and the radios, and being surrounded by people. And they got to buying dresses and things on the installment plan, and that kept them working, too. So fewer and fewer mill people went back to the mountains" (3).[12] The McClures' first impression of the mill town, however, creates disillusionment for the mountain farmers as they recognize the poverty and disarray: "On each side of this street there were dirt sidewalks and beyond the walks unpainted shacks blackened by smoke. The children, who had wandered where they wished along the country road, came closer" (Lumpkin 143). The mountain farmers' first encounter with mill families begins a series of clashes between American myths and capitalist industrial reality.

According to Emma, at first glance, the factory seems like a paternal figure standing high among the identical mill houses of workers, which reminds her of "a hen with chickens that have come out of the same setting, all of one size" (Lumpkin 147). Thus, initially, the factory represents a protector and provider figure for the workers. At the same time, its colossal size inspires awe, with its chimneys, "towering into the sky, like two towers of Babel" (Lumpkin 147). The factory emerges as a tempting figure of majesty and sanctity that draws workers into its sphere, as Bonnie and Emma claim to feel "a throb in the air, a dull shake to the ground," which is coming from the factory like an invitation (149). Emma immediately recalls the church song, "'There's power in the blood'" and reinterprets it as "'there's power in the factory'" (149). People are lured by the mill's opportunities to the point of idolizing it in their craving for material and spiritual fulfillment. In return, millwork and houses are granted to mill families with able workers.

[12] During the Gastonia strike and trials, commentary from leftist magazines, such as Ella Ford's article in *New Masses*, shaped public opinion about the working class struggle for unionization in response to anti-communist attacks on labor activism.

Emma becomes a boarder since she is not sending her children, John and Bonnie, to the mill as child laborers: "'You must have two elders t' work if you get a house, two elders or four young ones working'" (Lumpkin 157).

Traditional southern values and virtues reassure the residents of the New South, especially those that cannot find work at the mills. An unemployed old farmer, Grandpap seeks consolation in a Confederate reunion. Congressman Hellman's speech to the veterans underlines the racial hierarchy and industrialization of the New South and the role of northern investors. He begins his address with the power of white privilege over black citizens, reassuring poor farmers and factory workers that they are still superior to people of color in the social hierarchy of the New South. He praises the arrival of northern industries and their collaboration with southerners: "Promoted by enterprising Southerners and friendly industrialists of the North . . . the mills had come to the South. Not the blue-belied abolitionists, but the industrialists were friends of the poor whites" (Lumpkin 186). As the Congressman's speech indicates, politicians routinely exploited patriotic feelings, religious sentiments, race concerns, and southerners' class resentment towards the southern aristocracy for personal gain: "'During the Reconstruction you proclaimed the triumph of Democracy and white supremacy over mongrelism and anarchy. Now you have made a New South, a South of prosperous farms, of smooth-running factories . . . where your children receive free education, are taught the beauties of religion, where you possess peaceful homes, and the freedom to work'" (187). The success of the mills depended on the hard work and perseverance of the southern work force, poor workers and farmers. Industrial capitalism legitimized the collaboration between the North and South, regardless of economic rivalry and political conflict, as a way to suppress the empowerment of African Americans, which was something that neither side desired.

Mill workers struggle to survive in mill villages with their meager wages and attempts to secure their children's future outside industrial labor. Since they do not have sick leave, they work under harsh conditions as their health deteriorates: "the management did not like people who stayed out on account of sickness. And since they were docked if five minutes late, a day's absence would take too much off the check" (Lumpkin 199). Health problems, the high cost of living in mill settlements, and poverty force the entry of other family members, mostly children, into millwork. Although Emma shields John from the

mill through education, the church collaborates with the mills, encouraging child labor to ensure mutual profit: “Emma knew from talking to others that the preacher would sign a paper that he [John] was old enough, as he had done for other young ones, but she felt what people told her was true: ‘once in the mill always in the mill’” (Lumpkin 199). Consequently, the mill administration adopts a paternalistic approach towards mill families with young children: “‘hit’s better for him to be working than running around loose, getting into trouble, or eating candy and making himself sick’” (200).

In *Southern Cotton Mills and Labor*, Myra Page indicates the traditional paternalistic relationship between mill owners and workers. The mill owner assumes the manner of “a benevolent but all-powerful father” to his children “who must be provided for, protected, and watched over” (44). With a sense of gratitude to mill life and services, workers are expected to be “faithful and regular workers” without any desire for organized labor, union activity, or better wages (44). Within this strict class system, the children of mill hands take their place in the mills at a young age. In his criticism of the mill policy, Grandpap compares child labor in mills to idol worshipping and sacrificing children to Moloch: “‘the young ought to be out a-playing and enjoying. Hit’s like in the Bible where they used to put babies in the red hot arms of the idol. I’m a-getting to believe the factory’s an idol that people worship and hit wants the young for a sacrifice’” (Lumpkin 201).

2.2.1. Southern Mill Workers’ Disillusionment with American Promises

According to Leslie Woodcock Tentler, between 1900 and 1930 “important precedents regarding women’s work were established or confirmed: enduring patterns of occupational segregation by sex, a consistently inferior female wage, a broadly popular interpretation of the reasons for female employment” (5). Emma works in the mill in order to keep her family sheltered and her children in school. She takes the twelve-hour night shift, working without a break. The strict supervision of the mill boss makes unbearable for her: “He sat near the toilets and frowned when anyone went inside. And he was shameless, for if he thought they were staying too long he called out to them to hurry up in there. He sold a drink that was five cents a bottle and . . . the drink kept them awake as nothing else could” (Lumpkin 212). As Tentler indicates, gender hierarchies dominated the factory setting, much like in the domestic sphere itself. Men were assigned positions of power over women, working them to the bone under sweatshop conditions: “When

men were present in the woman's workroom it was often as supervisors or elite skilled workers. Men rarely if ever encountered in their work the reverse of this sexual hierarchy" (28). Moreover, employers and unions were prejudiced against women and did not consider them as part of the long-term workforce, assuming that their employment was temporary, until marriage and/or motherhood. Thus, women were not promoted, trained, taken seriously in their jobs, or paid fairly. They were a source of temporary labor to be hired based on seasonal demand, in industries without job security.

In the foreword of *Southern Cotton Mills and Labor*, Bill Dunne directly relates the southern poor white's changing socioeconomic position, lifestyle, and cultural vision to agrarian freedom's replacement by industrial enslavement: "These mountaineers, who for three centuries retained the illusion of independence given by the ownership of even a poor patch of land, now are tied to the most highly mechanized industry in the highest developed industrial country in the world. They are the modern serfs" (4). Likewise, the meaning of mill life evolves with workers' exposure to tiring industrial labor and their bitter experiences under the strict supervision of managers. Ora and Emma observe the changing role of the mill in their lives from "the throb of a big heart beating for the good of those who worked under the roof" to "the sound of sinners' teeth grinding in hell" (Lumpkin 219). The mill, according to Emma, speaks directly to the workers, "'I'II grind your bones to make my bread'" (219). Thus, Lumpkin questions the capitalist machinery that exploits workers' hopes and lives for booming production levels and profits. The mill owners turn to economic surveillance and nepotism in order to have full control over mill life, controlling schoolboard services, paying preachers' salaries, and hiring social workers who collaborate with the sheriff to maintain submissive and morally upright southern workers. As Page suggests, in this system, mill owners occupy decision-making roles, commenting that "these people, who are 'mere children,' should be relieved of the responsibilities of corporate life" (11).

Lumpkin compares the status of poor white mill workers to segregated African Americans residing in the South. Mill workers and middle class mill benefactors (supervisors, managers, preachers, tradesmen, and white-collar professionals) reside in different sections of the mill town. Mill hands steer away from the prosperous section of the town due to class distinctions and their poor living conditions: "No mill people . . . liked to walk on the streets where the fine houses stood, though that was the quickest way. There

was a feeling that the rich didn't want the sight of poor on their streets" (Lumpkin 220–21). During their first visit to the town, Emma and Ora have a close view of the stockholder's mansion. They discuss the meaning of having stocks in the mill and a life of comfort. The hard work of the mill people, on the other hand, is repaid with low wages, child labor, poor and unsanitary living conditions, and sickness. Emma resents the class gap, adding that she has mistaken the stocks for mill hands: "'at first I thought the stock was us. You know how Hal Swain used t' say he owned twenty head of stock or thirty. I thought hit meant we was the stock and they owned us'" (Lumpkin 223). Here, Emma acknowledges the industrial slavery of poor white southerners. Her comparison of workers and stocks indicates the possessive control over the new capital in the mill system. The middle class residents of the city stare at them in a drug store, where a waiter refuses to serve them: "A boy in a white jacket went to other tables, bringing ice cream and drinks in high glasses. Emma wanted to call him or go up to him but she did not dare" (Lumpkin 225). Mill workers are invisible—an unpleasant sight as the starving class behind industrial prosperity. They belong to the identical mill houses and filthy streets of the mill village, not to the middle class world of owners and managers.

Still nostalgic for agrarian economic freedom, Grandpap buys a piece of land on loan, hoping he can farm cotton and attain the self-sufficiency of a landowner. Emma continues the millwork to help with the payments, while Bonnie and John work in the cotton field after school: "The farm made a light for Emma. For a long time she had been walking lost in darkness and suddenly she saw light ahead, which meant rest and hope. If they did well on the farm, then, sometime, they could leave the mill forever" (Lumpkin 239). Nevertheless, Emma's pellagra (a severe deficiency of niacin or vitamin B3) forces her children to work in the mill: "They said the children could go back to school later, when Emma was well enough to go into the mill again. Reluctantly Emma had to consent, for if the young ones did not bring in some ready money, there would be nothing for them or anyone else in the family to eat" (254). Due to Grandpap's failure with the cotton farm and Emma's inability to recover from malnutrition without medical care, John and Bonnie must remain in the mill.

2.2.2. The Mill Mother's Dilemma: Domestic and Industrial Labor

In the 1930s, radical women writers broadened the scope of the proletarian literature associated with the working class struggle and progressive agenda. These women's novels revised the literary norms of 1920s proletarian works, "written by, for, and about men" (Elfenbein 197). In their working class novels, women writers depicted class consciousness in factories and farms, and considered male workers' struggle with demoralizing conditions. Moreover, they portrayed the domestic sphere in which women wage earners and their families confronted the outcomes of industrial capitalism. This included struggles with unemployment, poverty, starvation, and the inaccessibility of proper education and healthcare services, especially birth control. They also witnessed the gendered power struggles involved in the development of working class solidarity between men and women who strove to improve their circumstances with a newly gained awareness and consciousness (197).

Bonnie works in the mill during WWI like other pregnant mill women: "Her baby was coming and with John's help they could keep Emma and Grandpap. She could work in the mill . . . until the last minute. Most of the women did this, though some of them died" (Lumpkin 275–76). The war economy and the absence of men enabled mill workers to be paid higher wages. As a mill mother, Bonnie wants to prove herself as qualified for postwar employment in order to secure her family's financial state upon her husband's, Jim's, return from the war: "Each night after hours when it was possible to be in the mills Bonnie went back after supper to learn. And when the time came that she was too tired to go, she sat at home by Emma and let the processes pass before her eyes" (Lumpkin 278). After Bonnie gives birth, she remains in the mill, yet her husband cannot find employment. When she asks for permission to breastfeed her baby within working hours, the mill manager's disregard of her concerns and rights startles her: "'I'd have to let every other woman who's got a young baby do the same. And there are plenty of babies in this village, Bonnie'" (283). As mill children die of maternal neglect and malnutrition, the mill management regards working mothers' demands as privileges. Mill mothers' condition constitutes the "first" spark of resistance in Bonnie's life against the authorities, with her protest of high infant and child mortality in the mill town: "It was the first time she had said such a thing to anyone in a long time, and the first time she had spoken in that way to one of the higher-ups" (Lumpkin 283–84).

Women writers of the Gastonia strike novels (Vorse, Lumpkin, Page, and Burke) portray working class women as mothers in mills and activists in labor organizations. In this way, radical women also legitimized their position and roles through "maternity" as they struggled to secure their children's future (Schreibersdorf 308). The emphasis on maternal voices and narratives reveals women's place at the crossroads of industrial production and reproduction through gender roles and class norms. Women experience the entrapment between industrial slavery and the domestic burden of raising malnourished children under the threat of sickness and millwork. Their husbands, however, are disillusioned transient figures who wander away from their families and homes. In these novels, women's suffering or death at young age is directly related to multiple pregnancies, the lack of medical help, and a poor diet (308). Bonnie criticizes Miss Gordon's lectures and social club meetings for mill women because her guidance regarding a balanced diet, sanitation measures, and childcare is so disconnected from the workers' circumstances of malnourishment, child labor, and the burden of the millwork and domestic duties on working mothers. Out of touch with reality, Miss Gordon advises, "'feed your children milk every day and plenty of eggs, for otherwise young ones will get pellagra'" (Lumpkin 302). Bonnie feels desperate to take good care of her family, despite her long working hours and poor wages: "'I'd like the best food'" and "'everything for my young one . . . but how to get them. . . . I don't know'" (302).

Whalen conveys that workers' struggle with mill owners in the Gastonia strike literature addresses the leftist challenge of capitalism and socioeconomic injustice, and embraces their opposition to industrial enslavement and entrapment into a lower social class:

> Even the most explicitly Marxist of the stories emphasizes ethical concerns for personal dignity and human rights, and not just economics. The works look forward not to a socialist state but to a revived democracy. They highlight not only Marxist class struggles between proletarians and the bourgeoisie but also the much broader, much more populist clash between "the people" and "tyrants." (381)

Emma's death and funeral trigger a gradual awareness about mill life. Her son, John, realizes that a mill worker receives comfort only after death: "They dressed her up in satin, when she was dead. They laid her back on soft pillows, satin pillows, to rest—when she was dead, and could neither see nor feel any more. And they let what she was down into the ten-dollar grave, so that she was finally gone'" (Lumpkin 308). He seeks consolation and guidance from John Stevens, a former mill worker and union

sympathizer. As Stevens comments on Emma's death, "'hit seems to stay in you bitter and hard, when somebody dies wanting a thing like she wanted a good life'" (311). He also adds that poor mill workers give up their hopes and dreams while dedicating their lives to rich mill owners' schemes of profit-making: "'I saw grown people, young children, and babies die from lack of right food, and from lack of the right way of living, and I lay their deaths to the owners of the mill, and all those that get money from the mills'" (311). Low wages, malnutrition, and poor living standards in mill villages lead to several health problems such as pellagra, tuberculosis, and a typhoid epidemic (Page 64). Mill families look for better working and living conditions in other mills. However, mill workers are paid lower wages for better equipped houses and facilities, which perpetuates a cyclical entrapment in poverty. There is no ideal mill or model town for workers as long as their rights are neglected and industrial labor remains unregulated.

As the sole breadwinner of the family, Bonnie cannot afford the mill house expenses and moves her family to a black neighborhood. While working at the mill, her children are left alone in the cabin, despite Bonnie's concerns about their well-being and safety: "During the day she left the children at home with five-year-old Emma. . . . Thoughts of them stayed with her during the day while she walked before her looms" (Lumpkin 317). Moreover, she spends her only rest day with her children, instead of attending the Sunday church service. The preacher, Mr. Simpkins, emphasizes the cult of domesticity, defends women's roles as homemakers and caretakers, and harshly criticizes their defiance of the family as wage earners: "the thing that really disturbed Bonnie was the preacher's insistence on the sacredness of the family, and his anger at those who did not keep their families together. . . . Mr. Simpkins seemed to think if they wished they could stay at home and have a life of comparative ease" (318). The preacher ignores the conditions of mill workers and the mill mothers' suffering.

The churches of the mill villages, as Page indicates, appeal to the religious sentiments of the southern poor to the benefit of mill owners: "Every village, with rare exceptions, has one or more company-owned churches and company-employed pastors" (48). Church control over the mill community was ensured by the minister and his family, with the help of social workers, teachers, and mill managers. In line with Baptist and Methodist teachings, mill preachers glorified salvation of the soul, the Puritan work ethic, worldly

suffering, heavenly rewards, and God's providence (48). They never addressed child labor or the conditions of workers or unions beyond red bating in mill villages (49). People also believed that women did not live on low wages or the minimum wage, but the family wage, since they were either daughters or wives of male breadwinners. They claimed that economic demands and organized labor efforts would distort women's domestic duties and self-sacrificing nature.

Bonnie exemplifies Marx's theory of alienation or, in this case, the gap between the workers' low wages and the high-priced textile goods they manufacture, which they could never afford to buy themselves: "'The cloth I make for fifty cents is sold for six dollars'" (Lumpkin 318).[13] She complains about the mill owners' investment in machinery to improve production levels while workers are deprived of basic needs: "'They pay themselves for wear and tear on the machines'" and "'hit seems I don't get paid for wear and tear on myself'" (319). In the midst of her thoughts on mill life, she loses her son to pneumonia due to her inability to provide sufficient care and money for her child's recovery. A black co-worker, also a mother, consoles her. Through Bonnie's close relationship with black workers, Lumpkin portrays a mutual ground and working class solidarity that transcends race. Bonnie and her African American brethren live and work in the same location and have more in common than Bonnie and her white employers. In this South, people collaborate for socioeconomic progress, since poverty and death do not discriminate among mill workers. Nevertheless, like Ella May Wiggins, Bonnie emerges as a target because of her support of interracial solidarity within the organized labor struggle.

The children in mill towns also grow up under the shadow of the mill, malnourished and exhausted, awaiting the day to replace their parents in the mill hierarchy. Bonnie observes this situation: "Little Emma . . . had the look of the mill on her though she had never stepped aside the factory but once" (Lumpkin 324). John Stevens regards it as "the mark

[13] In parallel to Marx's alienation, Bonnie reveals that mill workers are conditioned by the capitalist industrial system to produce high-profit goods while dealing with low wages, inhumane working conditions, and the marginalization of the working class. In their daily struggle for bread, mill workers are alienated from their own goods and services in the process of mechanized industrial production and the devaluation of laborers. Although working class labor secures economic prosperity in modern industrial cities, working class estrangement impacts their demands for a better life, higher wages, and class solidarity in the face of exploitation.

of the beast" (324) on the children of the mill as the inherited sign of industrial bondage within mill families. John also views it as an outcome of the mill machinery, built upon the youth, energy, and ambition of desperate workers: "He and Zinie would die without having really lived, and their young ones would do the same; and Bonnie growing old before his eyes would live and die, and her young ones would be mill hands like her" (Lumpkin 324). The inherited, indentured nature of millwork and the lifestyle that went along with it reinforces its connections to slavery and black skin politics. Lumpkin underlines the slavery of poor "white trash" in the industrial South and compares them to the enslaved of the antebellum world. In both cases, the cultural legitimization of socioeconomic advancement and southern prosperity rely on the exploitation of the working classes.

As a mentor figure, John Stevens informs John about the organized labor struggle and unions. Stevens alludes to the trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, who were condemned to death for demanding a better life for the working class poor: "'Both worked in a mill. . . . But they spoke in their own language, and part in our language to the poor. They spoke of life, and because they did the rich put them to death" (Lumpkin 326). Stevens suggests that workers have two options: accepting poverty and turning their eyes to heaven or fighting against injustice. The latter comes with a price to pay, such as imprisonment and even death, due to the hostility of the rich capitalists towards unionization and the collective action of workers. Stevens encourages mill workers to resist in solidarity against mill owners and demand their rights to a better life: "'We must work in a strike. . . . For it is our hands that have built, and our hands that run the machines. . . . And because we have worked and suffered, we will understand that all should work and all should enjoy the good things of life'" (Lumpkin 328). Hearing the revolutionary ideas of Stevens, John learns about people who have suffered, searches for solutions, and acts in solidarity. His faith in the possibility of change gives him the confidence to take initiatives for organized labor and union activism against the mill management. In this way, organized labor activities challenge the image of the submissive southern worker who complies with the traditional gender roles of the chivalrous gentleman and the demure southern lady.

The mill owners place even more pressure on workers through new control mechanisms allegedly designed to promote efficiency—"the speed-up" system and timers, which

regulate working hours and wages based on production levels and time management: "If one of them went for a drink of water, or something more important than a drink of water, the man stood looking at his watch, and put down something in a book when they came back" (Lumpkin 329). Later, workers are paid according to "hank clocks" on the machines (329). The mill management increases the workload using fewer workers and more machinery; however, workers are still overwhelmed by the demands of the mill. Mill workers struggle with distressing conditions, wage cuts, and the rising number of unemployed and destitute people. They are overwhelmed by utter exhaustion, malnourishment, and the absence of labor laws and regulations: "a feeling of misery came over the mill. Before there had been a feeling of deadness . . . a feeling of stolid endurance. Now the feeling was different. It was one of acute, active misery. People fainted, others became sick because of the hard work, and lack of food" (Lumpkin 330). Tentler states that the conditions of women workers indicated a cyclical pattern of "low pay, low skill, low security, and low mobility" as the norm (15). Therefore, women were expendable, "easily hired and dismissed" workers who did not risk any significant economic loss or political response: "No other group could be segregated into low wage employment with so few adverse social consequences" (Tentler 15). After the arrival of Tom Moore, a character based on Fred Beal of the Gastonia strike, the mill workers start attending union meetings. Along with several others, John and Bonnie are dismissed from the mill as participants of these gatherings.

The leftist politics and literature of the 1930s prioritized class concerns over other grievances such as gender oppression. However, the novels written by women such as Lumpkin, Vorse and others underline workers' struggle to build class solidarity, with searing commentary on gender relations (Whalen 389). These writers depict women mill workers' transformation into strikers and labor organizers through radical novels of proletarian realism. For them, female strikers and union workers symbolize the shockingly untraditional energy and courage of the 1920s New Woman: "Many women, in fact, were leaders and spokespersons for strikers in the main strike centers in Elizabethton, Gastonia and elsewhere. Newspapers often featured stories about the aggressive and provocative young women who filled the picket lines" (389). The New Women of the industrial South undertake responsibility for workers' rights, child labor,

poor diets, sickness, unionization, and collaboration across racial lines. In short, they represent change and progress in the New South.

Bonnie and Ora discuss women workers' rights and their role in organized labor despite society's critical views of women's activism: "'There'll be some who'll say women should stay at home, and not mix in men's affairs. But they don't say hit when we go out t' work, and I can't see why they should say hit now'" (Lumpkin 335). Bonnie emerges as a leading figure in labor organizations and strike activism. Thus, she sets an example for other women workers to articulate their concerns, demand their rights, and fight the mill's silencing tools such as patriarchal concerns and preachers' messages about gender roles. The overseer's wife, Mrs. Fayon, expresses the mill management's warnings to Bonnie and Ora in the form of sisterly advice: "'I want to tell you something as a friend. People are talking about you two. It's getting around that you want t' be like men. And people say the Bible says let women look to their houses and let men tend to the world. It's what I do'" (Lumpkin 336). A patriarchal woman, Mrs. Fayon reflects the concerns of the privileged class regarding the radical awareness of the working class poor, just as they are finding union support to challenge industrial slavery and socioeconomic injustice.

2.2.3. Maternal Politics and Labor Activism: Ella May Wiggins

The economic downturn in the southern textile sector that occurred in the 1920s resulted in large-scale unemployment, lowered wages, and the oppression of workers with new measures and machinery to manage high production costs. Ella May Wiggins denounced the hypocrisy of the mills, observing the abuses of the stretch-out system, poor wages, the false promises of a better life, and workers' inability to compete with consumerism and debt (Huber, "Mill Mother's Lament" 84–85). Her life as a single mother of five children represented the shared experience and concerns of mill mothers. Additionally, her decision to live and work with African Americans in the mill and in organized labor transcended gender, class, and race norms. The mill mob failed to dishearten mill mothers and young women like Wiggins during the strike, union parades, and picket lines. Moreover, the mill strikes in the southern Piedmont in the 1920s provided new active positions to women in local unions, strike committees, and relief organizations, increasing their power and authority within this context (89).

Like Ella May Wiggins, Bonnie sings her ballads for mill mothers who face the double burden of maternal and industrial work. As the mother of five children, Bonnie acknowledges the toil of mill mothers who lose their children to poverty and sickness:

> "How it grieves the heart of a mother
> You every one must know.
> But we can't buy for our children;
> Our wages are too low." (Lumpkin 345)

Bonnie's ballads express the mill families' suffering due to socioeconomic deprivation and offer a solution through organized labor:

> "But listen to me, workers:
> A union they do fear.
> Let's stand together, workers,
> And have a union here." (346)

During the Gastonia strike, southern mill workers nourished their labor activism through their union ballads. Patrick Huber notes that the social protest songs of Gastonia arose in the midst of regional strikes and the grievances of textile workers in the South, where the textile industry encountered an economic downturn due to "shrinking international markets, increased overseas competition, and soaring production costs" ("'Battle Songs'"110). As a result, Huber states that many mill workers lost their jobs and those who remained in the mills endured lower wages and "labor-saving" methods such as the stretch-out system through which workers ended up "overworked, underpaid, and stretched to the breaking point" ("'Battle Songs'" 110). The nonviolent resistance, peaceful collective action, ballads and speeches of mill workers gain other workers' support, and "they found that nearly all had come out. It was a great triumph. The Wentworth Mill was almost empty of workers" (Lumpkin 348).

In the midst of this, the mill management distributes handbills about the degradation of "white supremacy" among unionists, which threatens workers' commitment to the struggle. Bonnie firmly responds to concerns about race relations: "'The colored people work alongside of us'" and "'I can't see why they shouldn't fight alongside us, and we by them'" (Lumpkin 350). Women strikers also play an active role against militia violence on the picket line. Ora conveys the strikers' righteous action to young servicemen and attempts to reason with them: "'Why don't you go home and stop fighting against women and children? Air we not your people? Don't you have mothers that have

worked themselves to the bone for ye, and fathers that slaved? And don't you slave in mills and other places for low wages?'" (351–52). Strikers use the same strategy of kinship and the tactics of non-aggression to fight strikebreakers, or "workers from other states," and to prevent their entry into the mill (352). The mill responds with two choices: return to millwork or be evicted from the mill houses (352). The mill management tests the strikers' endurance and determination by forcing them to suffer with their families.

With the assistance of Fred Beal, a Communist labor organizer, the Loray mill workers issue their demands such as "a forty-hour, five-day week, a standard wage scale, the abolition of the stretch-out, and recognition of the union" (Cox, "Loray, North Carolina's 'Million Dollar Mill'" 268). In response to their demands, the mill management prohibits organized labor efforts and fires union supporters, which results in a strike on April 1, 1929. Strikers and union organizers encounter violence and hostility from the local community and media throughout the strike due to the presence of communist labor organizers (268). The mill intimidates strike leaders with threats of violence, lynching, and labelling. Bonnie becomes a target with the racist and sexist views of the mob, as she assists with the union's communication with the black community: "They addressed Bonnie as 'nigger lover' because she worked in Stumptown among the colored people. But Bonnie went right on, for she was strong in knowing that Mary Allen and the others there needed the message as much as her people did" (Lumpkin 354). The mob attacks the strikers' relief store, leaving wreckage behind them, whereas the militia guards the mill property: "They knocked in the door and came out carrying the precious bags and boxes of food. These they scattered on the sidewalk and in the mud of the road and stamped on them" (355–56). The militia arrives right after the mob's departure and arrests relief workers.

In the union tent colony for evicted strikers, women assume several roles, from domestic duties to relief work and labor activism. They visit farmers to distribute food to the strike families, accompany union representatives, and help with childcare: "Each day some of the women took charge of the children in the tents while the others worked at various things, going into the country, working in the office, and picketing. Bonnie had brought her furniture and young ones to the tent colony . . . and the children stayed there while she was out working for the union" (Lumpkin 358). In the union's tent colony, strikers also experiment with socialist-style communal life and collaborative work in their

struggle with industrial capitalism. They rejoice at the possibility of radical change and justice for workers through working class solidarity and union support, even if they have to live on union relief efforts. Bonnie speaks with Mary Allen, a black worker whom the mill plans on using as a strikebreaker. Bonnie states the mill's intention to manipulate race relations so that workers would be willing to lower their expectations and demands: "'They won't keep you long when they can get somebody else. And if we get a strong union hit means they'll take back workers, and the union will get better wages for you, too'" (Lumpkin 359). In this way, she keeps many black "scab" workers away from the mill.

Bonnie is regarded as a union martyr after she is murdered, on the platform, during her speech. Her funeral reflects the struggle of the mill community, with John wearing a "red band on his harm" and solidarity between white and black women strikers (Lumpkin 380). Throughout the novel, Lumpkin never makes overt communist statements or engages in propaganda. Instead, she conveys her criticism of capitalism through her commentary on race and gender dynamics, the righteousness of the workers' struggle for organized labor, and the importance of working class solidarity. Tom Moore addresses people at Bonnie's funeral and blames mill owners who have invoked chaos, misery, and death for strikers and union representatives, even if preachers have full confidence in their moral stance (Lumpkin 381). The strikers do not feel distraught after Bonnie's death. John Stevens informs John about the "secret meeting in the woods," adding that "'[t]his is just the beginning'" (384).

2.3. *STRIKE!*: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN SOUTHERN TRADITIONS AND ORGANIZED LABOR

Mary Heaton Vorse resided in Gastonia for an extended period of time in order to report the Loray Mill strike for *Harper's*, which inspired *Strike!*. Vorse chronicled historical events and portrayed leading figures of the strike in her novel: Fred Beal as Fer Deane, Ella May Wiggins as Mamie Lewes, and other labor organizers (Garrison xiv). The novel reflects the perspective of two northern journalists, Roger Hewlett and Ed Hoskins, who symbolize different stages of Vorse's life. Paralleling her experience at Lawrence in 1912, in this novel, Hewlett dedicates himself to raising the consciousness of prejudiced people during his "first strike" as a reporter. Hoskins, however, represents years of experience in

the labor movement as a prominent writer, like Vorse. Hewlett gains radical awareness about workers' suffering and emerges as a staunch defender of their rights that echoes Vorse's socialist coming of age (xv). Garrison believes that Vorse preferred male reporters' voices to express her views due to the sexist underestimation of women in labor organizations, journalism, and in writing in general. Furthermore, Vorse's portrayals of the strike indicate the "distance between self and subject," as Garrison notes (xv). Vorse, a northern born and bred writer, views strikers as an outsider from the perspective of northern labor organizers. Thus, she could not fully ignore the southern working class dialect and "conventional mythology," despite her sympathy and collaboration with mill workers (xv).

In the beginning of *Strike!*, Roger Hewlett is assigned to write an article about a strike in Stonerton in 1929. The workers of Basil-Schenk Manufacturing Company go on strike because "the speed-up system," known as "stretch-out," has transformed traditional labor to the dismay of southern workers. As a result, they express their discontent about low wages and high workloads through strikes in the region, but without organized labor (Vorse 3). Hewlett arrives on the scene to report acts of violence, mob threats about lynching, and the condition of arrested strikers. The strike leader, Ferdinand Deane, referred to as "Fer" by other characters and based on Fred Beal, returns after the mob has forced him to leave the state (3). Historically, middle class citizens who benefited from the industrial prosperity of the South formed the major oppositional force against the organized labor struggle, which often resulted in mob reaction. The Manville-Jenckes Company, the owner of the Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina, emerged as the embodiment of "the economic and political hegemony of the textile barons in the south" (Dunne, "Gastonia" 3). Through close bonds between government officials, the mill management and middle class citizens, such as "doctors, lawyers, teachers, preachers," many people benefited from the mill workers' capitalist exploitation (Dunne, "Gastonia" 3). In this way, the industrialists of the New South in textile mills took the place of the plantation aristocracy's revered patronage of the southern society, with their glorification of "patriotism, god, heaven, home, fundamentalism and . . . white supremacy" (Dunne, "Gastonia" 3).

Southerners do not have a long industrialized labor tradition, which leaves southern strikers and northern union workers hapless in the middle of local people's hostility, mill owners' power, and demoralizing living and working conditions of poor white workers. Another labor organizer, Irma Rankin, believes that northern strike leaders and unionists live with the threat of lynching, murder, and years of imprisonment in the South. She regards labor leaders' "martyrdom" as the natural outcome of their activism in the South (Vorse 9). After Irma's remarks about lynching, Fer encounters self-righteous southerners and their threats to outsiders with foreign ideologies: "This hatred, these open threats of lynching, was like nothing he had ever known. This was Mob. These people swearing at them were like the isolated drops of a flood. They were what made Mob. Put them together and they would go roaring down the street on a manhunt" (9). Irma senses xenophobic hatred and the drive towards lynching "in the air" (10).[14] The mob's vigilantism takes the form of random threats in the middle of the street, anonymous prank phone calls, and menacing letters to Fer.

The way Irma responds to open threats over the phone seems to challenge the local men. She believes that the mob specifically targets women's presumed weakness and fear of conflicts. Yet, the women are more courageous than they think: "'They've got fighting stuff in them, these women'" (Vorse 11). Women as strikers and labor organizers experience underestimation of their activism and strength due to the southern chivalric code, the view of southern white women as weak and dependent, and sexist dynamics in labor organizations: "There was an ancient animosity between them. Irma was trying to dominate Fer. . . . In a way, to diminish him. There was something arrogant and provocative in the way she met this menace coming over the phone. Roger liked her less but respected her more" (11). Vorse views sexism in the Communist Party as the implicit manifestation of individualism, and depicts Fer Deane in that way. She highlights the potential of women labor organizers and strikers when it comes to collective action and a

[14] Irma's commentary about "lynching in the air" evokes Faulkner's portrayal of the mob mentality of poor southern "white trash" and the resulting murder of a black citizen in his short story "Dry September." In *Strike!*, however, a white labor organizer and strike leader poses a threat to southern sociocultural norms and tradition with his radical agenda of unionism against industrial capitalism.

political agenda, even though prejudiced politics undercut women's progressive role and participation in the labor cause (Urgo 70).

The 1929 Loray Mill strike was distinct in that it gained the support of important groups, which ensured its ultimate success: the United Textile Workers, the American Federation of Labor, and the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU), founded by the American Communist Party. The NTWU had assisted workers during the Passaic textile strike (1926-1927) in New Jersey; however, unionization efforts failed to achieve a productive result (Baker and Baker 322). As the Textile Workers Union representative and strike leader in the novel, Fer feels the burden of the workers' lack of experience in organized labor and their total dependence on the union guidance during the strike. Southern mill workers gradually gain a working class consciousness while the comfortable class of mill managers unite around mob terrorism. Likewise, Roger Hewlett's initial view of the strike as a middle class intellectual and reporter is transformed by his growing dedication to the "proletarian struggle" (Reilly 506).

Nevertheless, in the beginning, Fer and Irma fail to comprehend the cultural dynamics and historical experience that nurtured southern poor whites. As a northern union organizer, Irma confesses, "'We're much more comfortable with the foreign workers, in the North. We understand them. We even understand their religious background better'" (Vorse 12). Fer indicates the socioeconomic connection between mill bosses and preachers through industrial capitalism and working class submission to paternalistic mill management and the church: "'mill hill preachers are fundamentalists and half their salary is paid by the mill. And they think unionism in any form is the work of the devil'" (12). In *Millhands and Preachers*, Liston Pope emphasizes the role of ministers and churches in expanding and securing the philanthropic authority of owners in mill settlements. Pope argues that workers were told to justify their loyalty to the mill management based on the idea of Christian paternalism. In return, mill owners would care for their workers like benevolent fathers caring for their families: "Were not mill workers ignorant, diseased, and living in dirt and filth until the mills came along? Would they not be in that same condition today if the mills had not provided schools, welfare services, better housing, and all the advantages of life in proximity to cities and towns?" (Pope 161). Ministers routinely coerced workers to display their gratitude to the mill owner, who provided them with their daily needs.

Roger Hewlett's short visit to the Parkers' house exposes the stark contrast between mill workers and "the comfortable people": "The house was white and set far back from the street; it was surrounded by a lawn. . . . The street was lined with pleasant houses. There was a sense of good living about them" (Vorse 17). Mrs. Parker and her daughter, Jane, represent the retaliation of the mob against strikers. With their hostility towards union workers, they underestimate mill families' grievances and toil in mills. As Jane states in a self-righteous tone, "'You have no idea how ignorant these mill hands are. . . . You can't get anything through those ignorant women's heads, and so, of course, when a clever agitator . . . like this Deane gets hold of them, why, he can do anything with such people'" (Vorse 18). Mrs. Parker blames mill workers for being ungrateful for their elevated standard of living in the mill town after their lives in the mountains: "'They came from their mud-floored cabins and now they are getting nice houses with electric light free. And lots of them have baths'" (18).

The comfortable people's criticism connects mill people's poverty to illiteracy, uninformed consumer habits, and failure in the household economy, rather than low income, harsh working conditions, unaffordable mill housing, or child labor. Moreover, Mrs. Parker verbalizes the lynching drive towards union workers and criticizes the mob's ineffective intimidation tactics: "'Why they didn't tar and feather him and ride him on a rail, I don't know. Men have no courage any more'" (Vorse 19). She also believes that union leaders pose a threat to the communal order with working class anarchism, fanaticism, and the chaos they create: "'these people are parading up and down with guns, setting off dynamite! No one's life is safe! Just because that Northern anarchist comes here and plays on their credulity'" (19). The mob mentality grows out of class concerns and the fear of losing the socioeconomic advantages of mill prosperity because of organized labor's challenges to the status quo.

2.3.1. Mill Women's Strike against Silence, Violence, and Politics

The four Gastonia novels authored by women reflect the Gastonia strike of 1929, with an emphasis on women's experiences and critical visions. These proletarian novels challenge the absence of working class women's voices and stories in the masculinist narratives of labor history. As Joseph R. Urgo suggests, these novels also demand proper critical attention and acceptance from the Left, beyond superficial views of women as

"frustrated activists battling the same sexism and sex-role traps" in labor organizations and capitalist paternalism in workplace (82). According to Urgo, in *Strike!* Vorse depicts gender role conflicts between communist union organizers. Nevertheless, women's experiences, especially in labor organizations, encourage them to persist through collectivist leadership and multi-voiced labor politics (82).

During the strike, older women and young girls talk to the state militia as negotiators and mediators. In this regard, they use their sociocultural position (as aunts and mothers) and the energy of the youth to leverage cross-generational power: "The boys laughed uneasily. Girls came down the street grinning. The troops looked a little sheepish. They hadn't expected old ladies and girls. They had come for mobs and riots. The old ladies . . . like their own women in the mountain villages, called out: 'Now you be good boys, an' be keerful with yore baynits'" (Vorse 32). The girls and boys in picket lines also prevent the arrival of strikebreakers from other towns. As Jacquelyn D. Hall notes, women's labor activism took various forms: "women's initiative and particiation [sic] in collective action is instructive. Even more intriguing is the gender-based symbolism of their protest style. Through dress, language, and gesture, female strikers expressed a complex cultural identity and turned it to their own rebellious purposes" (372). In *Strike!*, Vorse chronicles "the lost world of the mill family and the southern poor white woman" as a response to "strongly masculinist cast of the cultural theory and practice of the Left in the thirties" (Garrison xx). With this in mind, Vorse narrates working class poor women's experiences and collaboration across two generations: "the haggard older mountain women" with maternal affection and flappers with sexual appeal, both on the picket lines fighting against soldiers (xx). By doing so, Vorse reflects the changing socioeconomic dynamics in southern society and also suggests women's growing prominence in labor activism and social criticism.

The textile industry changes the face of Piedmont though mills that invite northern investors to the region so that the southern workforce and northern capital could flourish together through an industrial revolution. When mill workers desire their share of industrial progress through higher wages and better living conditions, the middle class evokes violence and red baiting: "Here was an industry as new and as powerful as anything the West could show in the new automobile towns—and now the workers had checked this progress with their demands. The answer had been Fury and Terror" (Vorse

34). Strikers attempt to gain their demands and enforce their rights through control over production levels. However, workers are not aware of the forces behind the mills: the Textile Manufacturers Association and organized employers of the South (34). Mill owners acknowledge the role of organization in the textile industry for economic domination and success. They organize themselves, yet deride the labor efforts of workers, union activism, socioeconomic awareness, and class collaboration because they are well aware of their inherent power.

Literary portrayals of the Gastonia strike indicate the change in "the gendered nature of power" that circulated in mills and society through the cultural view of relationships (Whalen 391). Millwork provided women workers with unpredicted economic freedom and a sociocultural awareness that far exceeded what middle class women experienced at the time, even though they received poor wages and lower positions in workplaces where men served as supervisors. Women mill workers became part of the wage earning class and obtained power with masculine overtones. In this sense, *Strike!* also portrays the rivalry between working class men and women during the strike and women's challenging domination and strength (391). These women defy the essentialist view of gender and the masculine basis of power, authority and experience via their organizational skills and contributions to strike and union efforts.[15]

Vorse reflects the crucial role of the young girls' courage and older women's mentorship within organized labor activism. During the strike, mill worker and mother of four children Mamie Lewes is one of many representations of Ella May Wiggins. Mamie assists the picket lines with workers from other mills in order to unite their voices and power against mill owners. Her position as a mill mother and local labor organizer signifies women's place in the labor movement and in union ranks, beyond the gendered caretaker role. Her activism reinforces women's changing roles as industrial workers, activists, and organizers: "'I nat'chally jist had to leave 'em [her children] when I was

[15] Gender essentialism ascribes quintessential attributes to women based on their physiological sex and deploys it to position them in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers (what Freud called "anatomy is destiny"). In these novels, women who transgress gender roles with their social and political initiatives often encounter prejudiced responses and discriminatory practices. In Gastonia, women mill workers, strike participants, and union organizers challenged the traditional expectations of patriarchal mill owners, preachers, and middle class society, and usually paid the price for overstepping gender boundaries.

aworkin'. Sense we struck I ben with 'em more'n ever I could. I reckon ef I kin leave 'em to work I kin leave 'em to picket'" (Vorse 35). Through her encounters with strikebreakers and state troops, she overcomes her fear and insecurity with her confidence in the workers' struggle. As she warns them, "'Youall oughta be fightin' fer us instead of agin us'" (36). In "The Story of Ella May," Margaret Larkin indicates that similarly, Ella May Wiggins assisted the strike efforts of the National Textile Workers Union and emerged as a strike leader through union meetings and picket lines as she "learned to speak; she worked on committees; she helped give out relief " (3).

The ballads of the Gastonia strike of 1929 were "protest songs" that encouraged collective strength for political labor activists (Huber, "'Battle Songs'" 110). The American South had a long established ballad tradition of social protest; however, the Gastonia strike inspired its own labor ballads based on the suffering of mill workers and the poor conditions of strikers. Labor reporters like Margaret Larkin helped preserve the Gastonia strike ballads as examples of the southern oral tradition (110). The labor ballads and the act of collective singing reflected the strikers' alliance, desire for unionization in the mills, and faith in the organized labor's solution to their problems. Singing Gastonia ballads during the strike, they resisted the "brutally repressive campaign" conducted by the mill management and the local community who sided with state government authorities (110). Mamie Lewes's ballad tells of the grievances of a mill mother who feels helpless about her children's care due to long working hours, low mill wages, and the mill owner's indifference to her suffering:

> "And when we draw our money
> Our grocery bills to pay,
> Not a cent to spend for clothing,
> Not a cent to lay away." (Vorse 53)

After hearing her ballads, workers identify with her concerns as a mill worker and mother, and participate in the union struggle. As an orator, Old Ma Gilfillin addresses strikers with respect to police brutality, mob attacks on labor organizers, and arrests during the parades and picket lines. They are united in joy and pain through their class solidarity and endurance in mills. Women strikers also state their experience with authority figures, from the mills, church, militia, and government through ballads and speeches about the working class struggle. Thus, they bind the mill community together to improve their living and working conditions: "They felt a sense of companionship and power. The

crowd has its own powerful vitality. . . . These people, individually so poor and so weak, were strong" (Vorse 53).

Media reports on the Gastonia strike of 1929 depicted the New South, while acknowledging the burdensome legacy of the past. The industrial setting of mill owners and workers integrated mob violence, the possibility of lynching, paternalistic landowners, the gentile tradition, the brutality of enslaved labor, and the prosperity of the cotton economy into the modern South. As Pope describes, the New South contradicted the glorification of the content lower classes, individual freedom, and agricultural wealth with images of the starving working class, protests of southern women, capitalist alliances between the church, mills and the law, and portrayals of poor mill villages:

> It was revealed that many Southern children were nursed by spindles rather than corpulent Negro mammies; that "delicious Southern cooking" was not enough to forestall pellagra when there were only "fat back" and "corn pone" to cook; that the gentile mistress of the old plantation had a granddaughter who could be a hellcat on the picket line. . . . Public officials were portrayed as hirelings of industry. Preachers were indicted as "moral police for the mill owners". . . . The traditional picture of a columned mansion with magnolias in front and slave quarters behind was replaced by that of a low, oblong cotton mill with a picket line. . . . (3–4)

The conversation between Mamie Lewes and another mill worker, Daisy West, reveals the fate of mill wives. They become single mothers and breadwinners after their husbands' disillusionment or death leaves them all alone in mill villages. Despite their hard work and struggle with poverty, they lose their children to malnourishment and sickness. Consequently, they support the strike to guarantee their children's rights and future through unionism. As Daisy West, once a child laborer in mills, says, "'they'll be treated better'n what I was when I was in the mill. I was treated like a dawg down there in South Ca'olina. Many and many a time I been stretched on the flo' 'cause I didn't clean up fast nough'" (Vorse 55). Mill people have similar experiences in textile mills where child labor, low wages, and inhumane treatment are the norm. Through organized labor efforts and unionization in textile mills, they hold on to the promise of progress.

Women strikers' crucial place in relief work, picket lines, and parades encourage the workers' struggle and peaceful protest. Their correspondence with the militia redresses the accusations of violence and public disorder associated with unionism. Thus, young girls and older women, such as Ma Gilfillin and Mrs. Whenck, instruct soldiers to respect the workers' cause, their rights and demands, and to end violence against women and

children. These women recast the narratives of mill owners, local newspapers, and the state government regarding the alleged communist threat in the South. One of the soldiers confesses with shame, "'I aim fer to do my duty, but I didn' know I was agoin' to be makin' a war on old women an' kids. They got a right to strike. Hit's constitutional'" (Vorse 60). Witnessing mill strikers' endurance and rhetorical arguments against anti-union attacks, conformist members of the community call on the mob to serve their duty. They attempt to break the strike with violence and intimidation tactics that target primarily northern union workers: "'Something ought to be done about this Union. If the laws and the military couldn't do it somebuddy else ought to'" (61). Their implied references to the Ku Klux Klan—especially the intimidation and lynching of blacks—reveal their motivation to maintain socioeconomic order through the submission of southern poor whites in the name of industrial prosperity in the region.

The "Committee of a Hundred" emerges as a potential solution to labor and social unrest, through vigilante justice: "'It's fer perfectin' the people. It's fer stoppin' these yere Union leaders tearin' up our city an' makin' incitements to riot'" (Vorse 62). As the voice of the comfortable people in the novel, Mrs. Parker and Jean appreciate the involvement of "Committee of a Hundred," which takes pity on "poor misguided" mill workers with paternalistic sentimentality (62). The masked and armed mob attacks the relief store to intimidate union members and demoralize striking workers: "They started in tearing down the little building with fury, chopping it with axes, pulling its timbers with grab-hooks. And now they started throwing the flour out in the street" (63). The mob vandalism resonates in newspapers throughout the country, which describes the "wanton destructiveness" of the committee in the relief store (69). The critical media reports force southerners to denounce the mob's devastation of a building and destruction of food meant for impoverished citizens: "A shout had gone up all over the country from the newspapers. Every one throughout the South clamored for arrests. It gave the South a bad name, that it was possible for a company of over a hundred masked men to wreck a building and destroy food intended for women and children" (69).

The spring of 1929 witnessed textile workers' protests in Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Worsening working conditions, poor wages in mills, and complaints about the "stretch-out" system resulted in strikes in Elizabethton, Tennessee. Textile centers such as Gastonia and Marion, North Carolina, and many other mill towns, also

rose in protest, but it did not make a radical difference (Baker and Baker 321). Mill owners' dedication to "entrepreneurial autonomy," local police and state government efforts to maintain "traditional" authority, and xenophobia as the ultimate threat defeated the organized labor struggle (321). The international media, however, featured the violent response of southerners to mill families and unionists. The Loray Mill strike in Gastonia carried the workers' struggle into the headlines of American and foreign newspapers with "vivid expressions of concern and dismay," resulting in supportive action through "petitions, mass demonstrations and marches of protest around the world" (321).

After women strikers' success with the national guards, empowered deputies defend the mill against strikers and union activism. Local authorities pass a decision to prevent parades and picket lines where strikers—mostly women and children—are arrested. Women's activism (older women and flapper figures with make-up) reveals the gendered tension between female and male strikers who resent women's prominence and leadership in labor activism: "The men held back a little, their dignity was wounded that little girls dressed in overalls and with painted lips should be given the honor of leading the parade. The young Northern organizers had not understood this" (Vorse 71). Laurie J. C. Cella views the treatment of gender roles and the meaning of the power struggle in the Gastonia novels in this way:

> A careful analysis of the literary texts written in response to the Gastonia strike reveals a gendered difference around the issue of sexuality: male authors view the sexual undercurrent of a workers' strike as a threat to masculine agency in the contest between management and workers, while female authors view expressions of female sexuality as a site of potential resistance and political strength. (38)

When men resent nonviolent labor activism and women's leading role in union activities, women and children on the picket lines encounter irrational police violence as unarmed but dedicated participants of the strike. Vorse depicts women strikers and union workers who challenge mill authority and male domination in the public and private spheres. Their defiance of traditional authority figures such as mill managers, preachers, co-workers, and patriarchal family members demands socioeconomic justice and cultural recognition, which is what *Strike!* was meant to provide.

2.3.2. Mill Women's Contribution to Working Class Solidarity and Activism

The eviction of strikers from mill houses results in the public shaming of the families left on the street, exposed to the mercy of charity work. The mill management warns them about the organized labor struggle and the potential outcome for poor striking families: "Neighbors peeking through windows . . . some scabs and some Union people, watching Basil Schenk's lesson on what price unionism" (Vorse 114). As Lisa Schreibersdorf articulates, the symbolic, metaphoric, and functional role of women as the "mothers" of the Gastonia strikers in proletarian novels authored by radical women is particularly significant at this juncture:

> The maternal figure becomes integral to the union because of her potential to signify and to create unity and due to her ability to help members through a symbolic rebirth. She enacts this symbolic birth by drawing individuals into her presence and binding them together into a new entity. The novels metaphorically connect maternity with the union in two ways. In some cases, the union is depicted as a mother figure for strikers; in others, a character is required to play mother for the group. (310)

Therefore, union and relief workers like Mamie Lewes take action to help evicted families, providing medical care, food, and shelter with the assistance of volunteers. Some of them offer a place to stay, others share their food supply, and some give speeches about resistance to the mills: "In the picket line and parade . . . it is easy enough to be militant, but when you are alone in the dark and your things all out on the ground being rained on you'd expect people's spirits to be dampened. But these people's were not" (Vorse 118–19). Mamie Lewes, Mrs. Robertson, Irma, Doris and others run domestic errands such as caring for sick people and children, without neglecting their daily routine. Their relief work, labor activism, and collaboration resist silence, mob threats, and mill management.

Police harassment of the strikers' tent colony and the death of three officers incite mobs to lynch strike leaders and destroy everything that symbolizes the union effort. Strikers are hunted down for torture and arrest, and are also accused of the murders. The comfortable people believe that the tent colony attack is simply Fer's plan: "Fer had lured the policemen to the place. . . . Then, the strikers had lain ambush and shot them down. It was a conspiracy, a plot of the anarchists and bolshevists" (Vorse 153). Public allegations and fear simply mirror the Red Scare with the expectation of conspiratorial foreign influence (immigrants and ideologies) circulating in American society. Labor issues further add to the anti-communist hysteria, xenophobia, and irrational action against

nonconformists. As Hoskins suggests, the comfortable people assisted the mob's public punishment since they believed that foreign "agitators and Reds" targeted the American government and industrial progress through "simple-minded workers' confidence" (Vorse 158). Pope emphasizes the mill owners' efforts to represent the strike as a form of political attack on the state government and the nation with the involvement of communist affiliated unionists. In this way, as Pope suggests, people would be biased against the strikers and their demands of economic rights within a conservative atmosphere that feared foreign influences such as socialism and communism (247).

To assist their imprisoned leaders, strikers rebuild tent colonies and raise money for their defense. Mamie Lewes sings ballads for her comrades, who face the death penalty for the murders. The strike community also sings her ballads in order to gain strength against the mill people and police brutality:

> "We're going to have a union all over the south,
> Where we can wear good clothen and live in a better house.
> Now we must stand together and to the boss reply,
> We'll never, no, we'll never let our leaders die." (Vorse 167)

The ballad infiltrates the hearts of strikers and isolates them from the surrounding hatred, ignorance, and rampant crimes of the mob and the mill deputies. The ballads turn into a prayer of solidarity and hope against the comfortable people's claims that unions preach "anarchy, free love and negro equality" (Vorse 178).

According to Annette Cox, the Gastonia strike ballads of Ella May Wiggins and her murder at the hands of the mill mob immortalized her labor struggle as a mill mother and labor organizer in proletarian novels and social protest songs:

> During the 1929 strike at Gastonia's Loray Mill, Wiggins became the campaign's "poet laureate" through the ballads she composed using melodies from contemporary hillbilly music. Her murder by a mill thug made her a martyr for the cause and led proletarian novelist Mary Heaton Vorse to transform her into a heroic figure. Folk music collector Margaret Larkin took her songs north where they became inspiration for Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. ("Not Forgotten" 112)

Her death at the hands of the mob reveals that anti-union, socioeconomically secure, conformist people supported her murder in cold blood. The mob consists of the minister's wife, editors of newspapers, well-off residents, poor ignorant southerners, and the state government, all of whom sided with the mill owners, regardless of the rights and freedom of workers (Vorse 203).

Vorse's proletarian novel indicates that the failure of the Gastonia strikers in seeking justice from the mill owners still serves a higher purpose. Mill women's and children's suffering and unionization efforts contributed to a working class consciousness, which was a success in and of itself. The organized labor experience also united them around the never-ending labor struggle. With this message, Mary Heaton Vorse elevates Roger Hewlett's experience with mill strikers and his recognition of the working class plight in capitalist industries as an example for unsuspecting readers who develop a gradual intimacy with the strikers through the act of reading the novel:

> What Roger Hewlett feels, any reader might feel also. His conversion through imaginative apprehension of workers' lives and the application of reason to understanding their cause replicates the conversion of a middle-class author or intellectual to radical politics and authenticates the role of the so-called fellow traveler for readers aware of the gap between their lives and the lives of the class supposed to embody the progressive thrust of history. (Reilly 507)

After strike leaders are released due to a lack of evidence to charge them with the murders of police officers, they plan to continue their labor activism; yet, they encounter deputy violence. Fer Deane and a few others are murdered. Eventually, the survivors of mob attacks, deputy violence, trials for murder and disorder, and the terrible mill conditions are vindicated. They stand by the dead with a firm belief, "'These men shall not have died in vain'" (Vorse 232), finding strength in the sacrifices of the victims. To this end, Vera Buch Weisbord, who was a prominent labor organizer during the Loray Mill strike, viewed the Passaic strike of 1926 and the Loray Mill strike as pivotal to the organized labor struggle of workers, leading to the establishment of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1935 (McCurry and Ashbaugh 202).[16] She believed that union efforts in the South needed more funding and dedicated organizers during the mill strikes; however, the A.F.L. and the Communist Party failed to help in the face of organizational problems, the power of the mill owners, and draconian governmental measures. Still, the strike effort against the "ferocious exploitation" of workers paved the way for "the long struggle for freedom" (203).

[16] "Gastonia, 1929: Strike at the Loray Mill," edited by Dan McCurry and Carolyn Ashbaugh, brought together parts of the unpublished autobiography and interviews with Vera Buch Weisbord.

2.4. CONCLUSION

The Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, in 1929 inspired radical proletarian novels during the Great Depression. Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) and Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930) depict the working class struggle and solidarity for unionization in textile mills where poor living and working conditions, child labor, and the exploitation of southern poor whites resulted in the organized labor efforts of mill hands. Alliances among paternalistic mill owners and preachers, the conservative media, and the conformist middle class oppressed and silenced the southern mill workforce. The industrial transformation of the South through mechanization and investment in booming textile mills contributed to the socioeconomic reconstruction of southern society after the Civil War. Cotton plantations and the gentile traditions of the agrarian South were replaced by prospering textile mills, the industrial slavery of "white trash" laborers, and strict class distinctions in mill villages. Mill owners manipulated patriotic sentiments, white supremacist concerns, Christian morals, gender roles, and American values such as the Puritan work ethic, equal opportunity, and self-sufficiency for their own gain. The Gastonia strike of 1929 threatened capitalist industry's growth, fueled the flames of communist hysteria, and exacerbated fear of foreign ideologies and immigrants.

To Make My Bread and *Strike!* depict the struggle of strikers for unionization and against the southern tradition of child labor, the submissive southern worker stereotype, the violent retaliation of the mob and police, and the political attacks of the local media. These social and political novels underline women's quintessential roles during the strike as mill workers, mothers, and local union organizers, with allusions to Ella May Wiggins of the Gastonia strike. The social realism of *To Make My Bread* and *Strike!* indicates the promise of radical change through the progressive function of mill women, particularly their politicization of motherhood and working class activism. Their strike ballads, speeches, relief work, marches, picket lines, and union meetings address the plight of starving mill families, the dire conditions of millwork and housing, and the inhumane treatment of workers by mill managers, through the reformist demands of Lumpkin and Vorse.

With the Great Depression, the 1930s signified a major shift from the materialism, consumerism, and mass production of the Roaring Twenties towards the economic survival of the unemployed, particularly starving farm families. The next chapter, on

women and the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and the New Deal will analyze Josephine Johnson's *Now in November* (1934) and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown* (written in 1939 and published in 2004). The expansion of mechanized farming to the Great Plains, the failure of farms during the Great Drought, and severe dust storms resulted in high-interest farm loans, soil erosion, and unjust governmental policies. In Johnson's and Babb's novels, farmers also struggle with bank monopolies, natural disasters, and health problems. *Now in November* reflects the constant anxiety of farm families with mortgaged farms and tenant farmers who are tested by disasters of biblical proportion. *Whose Names Are Unknown* is a dust bowl refugee novel that focuses on the experience of farm families in Farm Security Administration camps, their encounters with hostility against Okies, and the exploitation of migrant workers in the West Coast farming industry. In their interwar social novels, Johnson and Babb portray the plight of the farming families in the midst of economic and ecological chaos. Their novels call for economic solutions, political action, and agricultural and labor regulations to help displaced farmers and migrant workers during the New Deal.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN IN THE 1930s: THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE DUST BOWL, AND THE NEW DEAL

Josephine Johnson was an ardent writer of poems, short stories, essays, and novels from a young age. Her debut work, *Now in November* (1934), portrays the Great Depression in America and the harsh experience of a family on a mortgaged farm after they escape from economic failure and unemployment in the city. In the introduction of *Now in November*, Laura Rattray appreciates the "rare balance" Johnson creates in her "timely and timeless" political narrative of the depression and the drought years (v). Johnson's literary talent was compared to Emily Dickinson, Katherine Mansfield, Willa Cather, and Emily Bronte due to her concise, poetic, and inspiring imagination, language, and depictions of tragedy (Rattray v). Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the novel in 1935, *Now in November* not only elevated Johnson as a writer and carried her novel to the bestsellers list, but her success also increased readers' expectations for *Winter Orchard* (1935), a subsequent short story collection (ix).

Johnson was part of the radical political activism and writing of the Great Depression. She dedicated her voice to social justice through her assistance to unions and the political activism of the "victimized and disposed" (Rattray x). Johnson criticized the abuse of sharecroppers in her newspaper articles and was arrested for "encouraging" cotton workers to strike (x). To her publisher's chagrin, she concentrated on radical politics and activism; however, her political sensibilities shaped the content of her fiction. Johnson's second novel, *Jordanstown* (1937), for example, portrays the proletarian struggle with capitalist society and the police, and does not display the "intricate balance" between depression politics and literary concerns found in *Now in November* (Rattray x). The hardcore politics of her second novel were harshly criticized for its literary weakness. As a result, Johnson concentrated her efforts on politics, unions, and mural painting while working on government-supported rehabilitation farms and addressing issues such as marriage and children (xi). According to Rattray, Johnson's writing career was negatively affected by her political involvement during the depression years, which curbed her success after *Now in November*: "her fiction at a crucial period was subsumed by fervently

held political convictions and a twenty-year silence at what should have been the pinnacle of her career" (xii–xiii).

On the other hand, Sanora Babb dedicated *Whose Names Are Unknown: A Novel* (written in 1939 and published in 2004), which portrays the trials of plains farmers during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl years, to "the people who do the work of the western valleys." In the foreword, Lawrence R. Rodgers appreciates Babb's portrayal of Cimarron County in the Oklahoma Panhandle during the 1930s (vii). Inspired by her childhood in the dry farm territory, the novel also addresses migrant labor camps in California. For Rodgers, Babb's novel compliments Arthur Rothstein's photographic documentation for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) with its insightful grasp of the decade (vii). As Rodgers conveys, historians have narrated the severe outcomes of the dust bowl years; however, Babb's account reflects the "human dimension of this ecological nightmare" through the Dunne family and their fellow farmers (vii).

Babb's personal story of the common people and their daily struggles differs from the popular bestsellers of the time in that it draws readers' attention to "suicides, dust storms, the threat of tornadoes, labor violence . . . subsumed by the mundane, more powerful drama surrounding the characters' day-to-day activities: how to pay bills, . . . help needy neighbors, get work, plant crops, keep a house clean, take care of children" (Rodgers viii). Therefore, Babb's novel emerges as a "more intimate and familiar" narrative compared to other "allegorical, symbolic, or grand" portrayals of the decade (viii). In 1938, she volunteered to work for the Farm Security Administration in the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys. She assisted the governmental efforts to create camps for the uprooted migrant farmers, wrote down her observations in her diary, and began the manuscript of *Whose Names Are Unknown* (Rodgers ix). She integrated her mother's detailed account of dust storms in Kansas into her manuscript, which appears as Julia Dunne's daily struggle with "dust and blackened skies" that force the Dunne family to migrate the West Coast as dust bowl refugees in the novel (x).

This chapter focuses on Josephine Johnson's *Now in November* and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown* as examples of radical depression literature. Through these social, proletarian, protest novels, Johnson and Babb depict the forgotten people of the Great Depression and criticize the political response to, and economic pressure on, rural

America, particularly the American farmer. They articulate that the independent, self-sufficient farmer relied on a mythical safety net in the face of drought, crop failure on mortgaged land, and dust storms in the Midwest and on the Great Plains. When they discovered that this net never really existed, the Okies migrated to the West Coast to work as seasonal laborers, often facing poverty, discrimination, and other tragedies in the process.

Much like John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), these novels demystify agrarian life during the Great Depression, exemplify how the social and political system failed the small farmer, and debunk the pastoral myth that land ownership would provide Americans with shelter and nourishment. Both writers reflect an insider's point of view since they grew up in farm communities and voice the injustices committed against their people through their radical writing and activism. Babb's novel complements Johnson's novel that traces the American farmer's struggle with economic and environmental disasters in the Midwest. Providing narrative continuity to farmers' experiences, the portrayal of "migrant laborers" in Babb's novel takes this project one step further by examining dust bowl farmers' migration from the plains. It challenges ideas concerning western movement, inhumane treatment, and violent encounters with migrant laborers. Johnson and Babb also chronicle the domestic, economic, and ecological disasters of the 1930s while advocating progress, communication, and soil conservation, in contrast to the economic and political distance of policy makers, government reformers, and American society with its class distinctions, social inequality, and capitalist-industrial interests. Ultimately, their novels of social realism serve as a counterpoint to government-funded depression documentation, such as that produced by writers and artists employed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), supplementing their accounts with the genuine voices and portrayals of farmers and dust bowl refugees.[17]

[17] The Dust Bowl created a push factor for the plains farmers' migration to neighboring states and eventually California. As a general reference, they were "depression and dust bowl refugees" since many migrants sought employment with(out) a farming background in the 1930s.

3.1. HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DEPRESSION AND THE DUST BOWL YEARS

Media portrayals of depression and dust storms migrants conveyed their conditions and suffering to the general public. As Charles J. Shindo conveys, Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* exposed the migrants' stories and accounts through visuality. Lange's photographs also accompanied the analysis performed by her economist husband Paul Taylor in *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (1939). Similarly, Carey Williams' *Factories in the Field* (1939) addressed migrant laborers in modern industrial agriculture, providing insight into the plight of agribusiness workers, whereas Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and John Ford's cinematic adaptation carried migrants into American households. In addition to the film and radio programs that discussed the predicament of migrant families during the dust storms, Americans listened to the folk songs of Woody Guthrie from his album *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940) (Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants* 3). Shindo also notes the "victimization" of migrant characters in the works above with "sympathy toward the displeased and oppressed" in the face of "inhuman treatment and exploitation." This contributed to the dominant, and stereotypical, refugee image, with the related "populist values, traditions, and concerns of the Okie migrants" (*Dust Bowl Migrants* 3).

Reformers, artists, and writers also called for solutions to the social, political, and economic injustices in California, as they placed the blame on "industrial capitalism" and turned their eyes to "democratic nature of the migrant" (Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants* 4). In reality, migrants' agenda did not address the "social democratic ideal" of such popular portrayals, but desired to "recreate" the glory days of American virtues (4). One government reformer, Dorothea Lange, addressed the destruction brought by mechanized farming in rural America through her photographic documentation (5). Lange's photographs of depression victims urged for government initiatives and political action as a remedy to voiceless migrant mothers' concerns (5–6). Likewise, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* reworked literature as a medium to showcase migrants, while neglecting their identities and personal needs through the reformer's "self-righteous" pose: "The elitist nature of literature, combined with Steinbeck's view of the migrants as backward and uneducated, resulted in a book that distanced itself from the migrants and supported reforms inconsistent with the migrants' own desires. For Steinbeck, as for Lange and

Taylor, the migrants needed to be educated into a democratic America" (6). Despite the documentation of migrants' silent suffering and victimization under industrial capitalism, agricultural corporations, and natural disasters, they were eventually saved by the historical moment—the outbreak of WWII and the rise of war industries in California, rather than such reform efforts (8). After they were employed in the war industries and the political agenda shifted towards global issues, migrant agricultural labor would be neglected for years, with relief efforts far removed from the scope of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and New Deal legislation (9).

Josephine Johnson's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Now in November,* would also be neglected and forgotten as a work of 1930s literature. Her later writing remained in the shadow of her depression novel's literary prominence and her dedication to radical politics and writing. Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown* gained prominence with its story of "abandonment" and "recovery"—popular themes in depression-era radical literature (Wixson 215). Babb challenged gender and social restrains on women seeking professional careers, such as journalist Martha Gellhorn and writers Tillie Lerner Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur (215). Tom Collins, the FSA camp manager, valued Babb's camp notes on refugees and believed that her observations would reach the public through John Steinbeck, who published articles on migrant camps in the *San Francisco News*. Just as Steinbeck was completing his novel *The Grapes of Wrath,* Babb began writing her novel in the camps and travelled to New York upon the invitation of Random House. However, Steinbeck's critical success and publicity in 1939 cancelled the publication of her debut work (216).

In his comparative review of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Whose Names Are Unknown*, Michael J. Meyer acknowledges some parallelisms in the writers' depiction of dust bowl years, farm families' plight, and the Okie experience with natural disasters, banks, and hostility towards migrants. Still, as Meyer suggests, Babb's novel seems "unique" and "differs solidly" from Steinbeck in her "more specific" depiction of several farm families and dust storms over a longer period of time, not to mention her promising ending with labor union activism among the migrants (138). As Douglas Wixson further conveys, Steinbeck and Babb both addressed the "Dust Bowl exodus" in their novels of social criticism (216). Yet, according to Wixson, Babb's novel portrays the dryland farm community through the "critical realism" of her own observations, whereas Steinbeck

creates a multi-dimensional journey for the Joads, a sharecropper family, blended with "folk conventions, Biblical allusion, and biological metaphors" (216).

3.2. TOWARDS THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE GREAT DROUGHT IN *NOW IN NOVEMBER*

Sara M. Gregg states that World War I politics and the changing economy model drew attention to the modernization of agriculture and its rising importance in national and international markets. As Gregg indicates, the US Congress had been discussing the necessity of interventionist agricultural policies for a while, the government's role in providing and promoting "mortgage credit to rural producers," and modifications in the banking system, despite concerns about "farm consolidation" and mechanization in rural America (129). In addition, farmers' criticism of "limited local credit" further encouraged Congress to embrace a "radical" economy model, which would become the 1916 Federal Farm Loan Act (Gregg 129). As a result of this legislation, the US Treasury would fund "a network of regional land banks" to distribute "government-seeded, long-term, low-interest rate mortgages" to farmers (129).[18] WWI economic politics enabled farmers to improve their land with machinery and modern farming methods in order to contribute to American wartime production. However, WWI policies and agricultural investments would also result in an unprecedented agricultural surplus, low prices, and farm foreclosures due to unpaid loans and environmental disasters on the mechanized fields of the Great Plains during the Great Depression.

Now in November portrays a white middle class family's trials as starving farmers on mortgaged land during the economic crisis, particularly the drought years. Marget Haldmarne narrates her family's toil on the farm in flashbacks. She recalls her parents' sense of insecurity while casting their eyes upon the promising land around them: "It was beautiful and barren in the pastures, and the walnuts made a kind of lavender-colored shadow, very clean. . . . Here was the land and the spring air full of snow melting, and yet

[18] In 1916, President Wilson reevaluated his view of providing rural credit because of the upcoming presidential election, as Midwest farmers voiced their need for federal support, saving their votes for the candidate who would take legislative action. Thus, the Great War in Europe drastically shaped American economics and politics with serious repercussions for postwar America (Gregg 135).

the beginning of fear already, —this mortgage, and Father consumed in himself with sour irritation and the future dread" (Johnson 4). Marget's father, Arnold Haldmarne, is not a typical, experienced farmer who dedicates all his efforts to the land with patience and future projections: "He hadn't the resignation that a farmer has to have, —that resignation which knows how little use to hope or hate, or pray for even a bean before its appointed time" (5). As a depression era farm novel, *Now in November* depicts the Haldmarne family's life on the farm in Missouri after Marget's father loses his job in a lumber mill. However, the mortgaged farm does not turn out to be "a safe refuge," but rather a source of fear, failure, and loneliness that haunts the family, exacerbated by the imbalance in weather conditions and the market economy (Haytock 135). Economic failure and unemployment force the Haldmarnes back to the land with an unpredictable future ahead: "It's a queer experience for a man to go through, to work years for security and peace, and then in a few months' time have it all dissolve into nothing; to feel the strange blankness and dark of being neither wanted nor necessary anymore" (Johnson 5).

Reflecting on the overwhelming disillusionment and sense of failure during the Great Depression, Marget's family strive to leave behind all the trials of the city and the urban economy. They take shelter in the agrarian security of rural America after their experience in the unforgiving city: "We left a world all wrong, confused, and shouting at itself, and came here to one that was no less hard and no less ready to thwart a man or cast him out, but gave him something, at least, in return" (Johnson 5–6). They observe the human relationship with nature as they live and work through the seasons, with the mortgaged farm, the land itself, assuming the role of an umbilical cord that binds farmers to life, nourishing yet fragile in its own right given the environmental and economic challenges of the era. Marget views the farmer's experience with land in this way: "even then we felt we had come to something both treacherous and kind, which could be trusted only to be inconsistent, and would go its own way as though we were never born" (Johnson 7).

The Great Drought transformed farm families' lives during the depression as it contributed to economic insecurity and distrust in agrarian values. Marget witnesses her father's concerns about the mortgage: "The debt was still like a bottomless swamp unfilled, where we had gone year after year, throwing in hours of heat and the wrenching on stony land, only to see them swallowed up and then to creep back and begin again" (Johnson 25). The farmers' moods parallel the inconsistent weather conditions and

harvests, which further depresses her father after his economic failure and return to the family farm. The farmers' struggle with economic tension and natural forces is a Sisyphean struggle with relentless effort and poor outcomes. Consequently, the narrative highlights the constant anxiety and weariness of farm families: "We never seemed able to make much over. All that we saved above what it cost to live—and live by mouth and mind only, with nothing new but the seasons or thoughts we had—all went into the mortgage-debt" (Johnson 27). Still, they embrace some hope for a better harvest in order to continue their farm routine. As Marget adds, "It was queer how little rain came that month, and we thought that the next would bring a flood" (28). They simply overlook the signs of severe drought and impending dust bowl just to carry on.

Marget voices the overwhelming sense of social and economic oppression from a gendered perspective through the experiences of the Haldmarne daughters. Their ambition to balance female domestic duties and male farm labor reflects women's struggle with poverty and gendered limitations as they perform their dreaded duties despite their underestimated potential, strength, and vision. Her older sister, Kerrin, is frustrated by the conservative community and the lack of opportunity, which consumes her sanity as a small town teacher and farmer. She criticizes farm children's designated future of being a farmhand, clerk, or housewife, without other prospects or a chance to achieve any more than that: "The girls were already vacant wives, she said . . . but already bounded tight with convention, a thick wall between them and the unknown things. . . . '—Hillbillies and tenant farmers,' she said. . . .They only want to know enough so they can clerk in a store some place and ride in a Ford on Sundays. Want to be able to read the magazines and catalogues" (Johnson 30–31).

Depending on the economic boom and bust cycles, people mostly circulated between farm communities and cities, trying to take advantage of both urban and rural opportunities for survival. As Marget notes, "People weren't born and fastened to earth any more. They came and went, returning and leaving. . . . People came back to the land as we had come, after years of another life" (Johnson 31). Marget and her sister, Merle, appreciate their farm life, unlike Kerrin's entrapped energy and resentment towards poverty. As Jennifer Haytock indicates, *Now in November* "portrays one woman's experience of the mounting pressures of capitalism, consumerism, and urbanity on the farm family. As the narrator Marget Haldmarne experiences years of hard labor, isolation, and family tension, she

suffers damage caused by gender roles in the context of the industrial ideal, resulting in an emotional strangulation of desire" (132).

3.2.1. The Failure of Agrarian Security and the Rural Economy

The quintessential characteristic of the Great Plains settlers was faith in a better future that would be the reward for long, sorrowful days of fear and loss. Therefore, many of them remained on their farms and ranches, believing that they had seen the worst and had no other chance to live somewhere else: "THE AMERICAN PLAINS are a 'next year' country. This season the crops may wither and die, the winds may pile up dirt against the barn, but next time we will do better. . . . If there is drought, it will rain soon" (Worster, *Dust Bowl* 26). The drive towards success, the self-assurance of one's promising future, and the unrelenting hope of the common man had brought people to the West. However, such life-threatening optimism and "dangerous naiveté" in the face of 1930s environmental disasters resulted in "a refusal to face the grim truths about oneself or others or nature," without "critical self-appraisal" or a call for "substantive reforms" on the plains (26).

The Haldmarnes struggle with weariness, economic uncertainty, and restlessness on the mortgaged farm land. Marget watches her father's dilemma day by day and describes the farmer's plight and constant hope for a better harvest. This is manifested in the form of a prayer as she looks at the frozen, dead earth admitting "This year, I thought, will be different . . . better" (Johnson 39). With high hopes for the next harvest, the Haldmarnes hire Grant as extra help on the farm. He indicates the exasperation of farmers with poor harvests, "'We're tired of feeding out husks instead of corn'" (52). They try to disregard the poor crop quality as they continue to toil on the land. Nevertheless, Merle conveys the severity of the situation and their struggle against bankruptcy and starvation, "'Black smut and corn-boils. We didn't dare look what we dumped to the steers. Just pretended that it was corn'" (52). They celebrate Grant's arrival with a feast for which Willa, their mother, opens her preserves with faith in a better harvest: "'We'll have food enough to eat anyway. Food enough if nothing to wear'" (53). Marget perceives her mother's need for reassurance that they will be able to pay the mortgage debt and survive the depression. As coping mechanism to protect herself against her deepest fears of failure, Willa ritualistically attempts to "recount the jars" in her tragic effort to multiply food for her

family (Johnson 53). As Haytock suggests, the Great Depression indicates the failure of the American social and economic system that once encouraged Albert Haldmarne's migration to the city, leaving the family farm for industrial labor, that later forces him to confront economic (in)security through a return to agrarianism (136).

The depression years left many people unemployed, mere vagrants, looking for temporary jobs in order to take care of their starving, sickly families. As Marget observes her parents' strife over providing food for their children, she recalls a stranger's visit to their farm. He wanders around and offers help as a farmhand: "'Any picking or digging you aren't done with yet?—something I could crate up and get what's left?' He pulled a couple of sweet potatoes out and showed them. They were dry and warped-looking with bad spots on, but pieces that you could eat. 'Got these from the last place,' he said" (Johnson 55). He is willing to work for leftovers to feed his family, which leads to Arnold's distain for the vagabond because he is the embodiment of his nightmare, the failure of the American man. Marget sees the hobo walk away with empty hands: "The man . . . turned back down the lane, crept off like something that wasn't a person or an animal,—more like a sick and dirty fly" (Johnson 56).

The depression robbed people of human dignity through poverty and despair, and lowered them to the position of scavengers on the road, the residents of Hoovervilles or squatters' camps. With a sense of pity and shame in her recollection of the wanderer, Marget looks at Merle, who opens the "last" jar of corn for dinner (Johnson 58). With the scarcity of rain, low production levels, and debt to the bank, food insecurity emerges as something more than a daily concern; it necessitates constant surveillance of the food stock. Marget recalls one occasion when her father has lunch without any concern for the amount of food: "Father seemed less impatient and screwed with worry, and ate two of the pickled peaches, forgetting to ask how many were left. I saw him put a whole half of one on his bread, and grin at the sweet-sour taste" (58).

With the expectation of spring rains, the Haldmarnes naively believe that the restoration of natural order will solve the problem of farmers and their helpless denial of ecological imbalance. As Arnold conveys, "'Three years of drouth [*sic*] never come together'" (Johnson 60). However, they are challenged by the unexpectedly chilly weather and low precipitation levels. Marget articulates the farmers' forced recognition of disheartening

weather conditions: “The beginning of understanding. A cold dry month. . . . No rain, and dust coming up behind the plough. Cold dust is a sort of ominous thing, and Father began to worry over the shrunken pond” (67–68). Moreover, even relatively well-to do, debt free neighbor farmers, such as the Rathmans, complain about unpredictable weather, dry land, and dying crops. Marget notices Old Rathman’s repressed anxiety about the future: “This day he was not so sure of himself, but still not fearful. ‘Two acres of strawberries shrivel up like leafs do,’ he said. ‘Hard . . . dry. . . . No rain! Is one to water by hand? *Nein! Let* them shrink up!’” (68–69). The conversation between Marget and Old Rathman reveals the situation of Ramsey, a black tenant farmer, who asks for a loan from the neighboring farmers in order to pay his rent: “‘this colored man Ramsey’ (Rathman always spoke of him in this way . . . as of a creature from some other earth. . . . Ramsey had come to him and asked for money to pay his rent, ‘But I ain’t got any money,’ I told him. ‘I got land and vegetables, but no money!’” (69–70).

As farm families are tested with long periods of drought and low production levels, Marget reflects upon the effects of ecological imbalance on the domestic and local economy. She observes her mother’s concerns about the preserve stock, almost depleted or spoiled. Moreover, the shortage of milk and dairy products in the marketplace creates another economic burden. With great concern, she prays for the rainfall that might revive their harvest and hopes: “‘I wished to God it would rain. I could walk in the stream beds by the quarry, and only the ghostly plantain grew stubbornly in the fields. The ground was cracked wide open and Dad was beginning to get more desperate, seeing the pastures start to yellow’” (Johnson 72). As time passes without rainfall, the farm families are forced to acknowledge the beginning of the long drought that has already affected the harvest. Marget views the depressing change in weather with “a kind of awful fascination in the very consciousness of this drouth [*sic*], a wry perfection in its slow murder of all things” (79). They attempt to preserve their crops and discuss giving away the surplus to other farm families who can barely afford their expenses and farm loans.

Marget’s family offers to help the Ramseys during the corn harvest in exchange for farm equipment. She visits Christian Ramsey, a black tenant farmer, with this purpose and describes their neighbor’s struggle to survive, despite poor harvests: “For ten years Ramsey had rented land and expected to buy, but all that he ever did was make his rent-money and put up half the crop to go over the winter” (Johnson 85). She adds that her

white family looks relatively secure compared to black tenant farmers; however, white Americans' relative prosperity is just another illusion and source of disillusionment, for the drought and depression does not discriminate based on race or class: "we seemed to them as the Rathmans did to us. Safe. Comfortable. Giving appearance of richness, with our dairy and corn and chickens, our steers and team and orchard—although each thing was barely paying to keep itself" (85).

3.2.2. The Great Drought: A Plague of Biblical Proportions

As David K. Fremon indicates, the residents of the Great Plains experienced cyclical drought years, approximately "one drought year in every six" (70). However, coupled with the economic depression and overgrazing, mechanized farming on dry land, and unpaid bank loans, the Great Drought and dust storms had a particularly devastating effect (Fremon 71). Unregulated farm production created a surplus with low prices, despite farmers' attempts to reduce the flow of products into the market to raise prices and their struggle to persuade other producers to do the same. One such farmer was Mike Reno, who established the Farm Holiday Association and took action against farmers sending their milk to the markets in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1930: "Some farmers needed escorts from deputy sheriffs to get to Sioux City. Eventually, the Association members and farm producers reached a truce" (71).

Likewise, the persistence of dry weather inevitably leads to irreversible harm on the farming community. Marget observes the outcomes of "heavy heat" on their farm, livestock, fields, and on the environment in general: "By seven the birds were still as at noon, and the sun was a weight of fire on the leaves. No rain came at all. Aphis killed most of the radishes, covered them over so thick that the leaves were hidden, and black ones stuck like lice on the lettuce-heads" (Johnson 89–90). Farm families discuss solutions during their meetings. Grant, who helps the Haldmarnes on the farm, attends one of the meetings and informs them: "There was talk of strikes, rumors of meetings in Carton and down near the river. And then the unrest crept nearer, spreading out like a slow tide over the farms around us" (90). Arnold is told to hold the milk in stock to assist with the farmers' collective action. He does not agree with this approach, even under the threat of starvation and unpaid loans: "Even if we had tried not to join the rest, it would have been of no use. They lined up the roads and ditched over a hundred gallons. 'One

shout isn't enough,' Grant said" (91). Instead of throwing away the milk, they decide to give it away to starving people. Despite the farmers' strike and a relative rise in prices, farm families fail to gain any economic relief or advantage with the new added tax. As Marget indicates, "Prices went up a cent and we started selling again, but there was another tax to pay and a change in the graded value which cancelled the feeble rise. The quiet and masked way it was done drove Grant into a rage of helpless fury" (92).

Through her portrayal of the Haldmarnes, Johnson depicts farm families' trials with banks, the drought, and economic crisis without any protective measures or governmental relief, which further deepens their resentment and sense of helplessness during the agricultural depression. As Haytock conveys, the Haldmarnes are tested by "the market regulation of prices and the weather" in their struggle to survive against those "outside forces" (137). The farmers' alliance, which strives for higher milk prices and unionization, further isolates them from the world around them since they do not fully understand the motives behind collective action and its outcomes (137). Meanwhile, the merciless drought continues, scorching their harvest and vegetation: "By July half of the corn was dead and flapped in the fields like brittle paper. The pastures burned to a cinder. . . . Milk shriveled up in the cows. Prices went up . . . but Dad got no more for his milk and got less for the cows he sold, since nearly all other farmers were selling off" (Johnson 100). The neighboring tenant farmers, the Ramseys, are forced to move away since they can no longer pay their rent and expenses due to severe drought and crop failure. Marget's fear of a bleak future is intensified by the Ramseys' life on the road.

The severe drought seems like a biblical curse from the Old Testament when plagues arrive. Marget observes the pestilence caused by the heat, as she sees her environment slowly dying: "The creek stopped running altogether, and the woods were full of dead things—leaf-dust. . . . In places the grasshoppers left nothing but the white bones of weeds, stripped even of pale skin, and the corn-stalks looked like yellow skeletons. . . . Even potatoes were black as after a frost or fire. The cucumbers curled up and wrinkled. Tomatoes rotting" (Johnson 121–22). The surroundings resemble a post-apocalyptic wasteland that consumes natural resources and people's hopes. Biblical level plague, suffering, fire, and dust storms endanger farm families' lives and the livestock that has survived the scorching heat. Swarms of grasshoppers and aphis appear, and the fires ultimately reach the Haldmarnes' farm and fields. Marget comments that "[t]he heat was

terrible. We fought it along the edge where the bushes were low, but the smoke stung like wasps and poured out over us blind in clouds, and our skins got raw with the heat" (Johnson 134). Marget's mother is burned by the fire and is left with deadly wounds. Furthermore, the family is devastated by oldest daughter Kerrin's suicide, adding to the destruction of this farm family.

The tax assessor, Braille, visits their farm and evaluates their equipment and livestock. Johnson's critical depiction of the officer, who as his name suggests turns a "blind eye" to their suffering, indicates the federal government's neglect towards the downtrodden farmers: "'Ain't this where you want to live?—Well, you got to pay for it then'" (Johnson 156). Alluding to the title, in November, Marget is left without any hope for better times because drought and mortgage payments force them to work for the rest of their lives: "We have had our mortgage extended, but it does not mean that we are free. . . . Only a longer time to live, a little longer to fight, fear showed off into an indefinite future" (160). Their resentment of modern life and the economy, and their desire to recover from this depressing sense of failure, further disarm the family, which is now faced with intrusions by the bank, tax assessor, and coroner: "To imagine the farm as untouched by modernity ignores the impact of markets, government policy, and bureaucracy's panoptic gaze on the characters' lives and fundamental sense of identity" (Haytock 136–37).

In *Dust to Eat: Drought and Depression in the 1930s*, Michael L. Cooper notes that the election of 1932 and Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency raised the hopes of destitute Americans through his legislative actions in the "First Hundred Days" (32). The regulation of industries, banks, and agriculture, was followed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The WPA addressed rural poverty through construction projects for the unemployed and AAA initiatives targeted crop prices. As Cooper states, "The AAA, starting with $ 134 million in 1934, paid farmers to reduce the amount of wheat and other crops they grew in order to end the glut of farm products on the market. . . . The AAA proved to be one of the more successful of the New Deal programs. By 1936, farm prices had risen by 50 percent" (32–33). AAA programs also adversely affected and led to the unemployment of tenant farmers in cotton growing states like Texas and Oklahoma, where the reduction of the cotton crop and the introduction of mechanized farming with tractors helped land owners, but destroyed the livelihood of sharecroppers (Cooper 35).

3.3. *WHOSE NAMES ARE UNKNOWN*: THE PLAINS FARMERS' PLIGHT IN THE DUST BOWL

Sara M. Gregg states that the WWI economy and American soil politics contributed to the federal monitoring of "transportation networks, food policy, and political dissent" (130). Wartime literature, commentary, and economic analyses tended to overlook the new dynamics between agricultural producers and the government. Overproduction of grain and cotton radically changed the American landscape, US relations with the allied powers, and postwar agricultural policies. According to Gregg, WWI promoted a modern and industrial view of life, without expecting any "economic and ecological consequences" in the following decades (130). Due to uncontrolled production and productivity in wartime global markets, postwar Europe no longer demanded American grain. Generous wartime farm loans led to crop surpluses and an overdependence on staple crops. Agricultural mismanagement exacerbated the 1920s and 1930s boom and bust economic cycles, which were worsened by severe droughts and dust storms (Gregg 131). No one could not foresee that the transition from a wartime to a peacetime economy necessitated new federal policies and relief programs, and farmers paid the price during the Great Depression.

The beginning of Babb's novel addresses the dryland farmers' concerns about living expenses, taxes, and the need for profitable crops. Old man Dunne's broomcorn hardly helps the family pay their debts and basic living expenses, despite its relatively high market price. As the narrator states, "This was the way every dry farmer lived from year to year, earning only enough for food and clothes and little enough of these. Good seed must be bought for the next season, and taxes were due" (Babb 3). Farmers plant winter wheat, seeing that the investments of big farms and farm debts to the banks threaten small farmers' lands with limited capital, unpaid loans, and taxes:

> It might be a way to keep up a little better with the big farmers who could afford irrigation for alfalfa and who made money raising hogs. . . . the well-to-do ones made it hard on the poor ones, buying up their land for past-due taxes, and renting it back out to them. Brennermann . . . owned thousands of acres he had bought up from farmers. . . . Brennermann was also a power in the Flatlands Bank, which held the farmers' loans. (3–4).

From the beginning, Babb points out the small farmers' struggle to cope with the declining economy, banks, and the monopoly of big farmers who control the flow of

capital, production levels in the market, and the overall rural economy. Thus, farmers are more concerned about economic woes and are in total ignorance of drought cycles and dust storms.

During the WWI agricultural boom, wheat farmers of the Great Plains benefited from the new federal land banks' mortgage grants, which was designed to lead to "unprecedented expansion of wheat acreage," or "the Great Plow-Up" (Gregg 130). At the time, low interest mortgages accelerated the mechanization and industrialization of agriculture on the Great Plains and the federal government's assistance assuaged investors' hesitations about environmental and economic fragility in the region. The wheat craze on the plains, motivated by the conditions mentioned above, would disconnect the fertile layer of soil from the dry land during dust storms (130). Farmers turned to hearty crops because of the unpredictable weather and the depression economy. Thus, when old man Dunne and Milt Dunne plant winter wheat, the whole family's life revolves around the field and the changing weather, with concerns about young plants and unspoken anxiety about the future: "Sunday, Milt and the old man walked over their field, as every other farmer did on that day, watching the new leaves grow, kicking the dry clods apart. Every morning, every night, they looked at the sky to see the coming weather" (Babb 6). They can barely afford their expenses and taxes due to the fluctuating harvest when the first signs of dust over the fields appear. Milt's wife, Julia, reflects on the balance between domestic concerns and economic decisions upon realizing the lack of rain and sifting dust on the land: "'No garden this year for the dust even when we got water. But the creek's drying up so I guess it's best we got the well'" (12). They invest in wheat in order to improve their living conditions and the future of the children, who are being homeschooled by the old man, but do not encounter the prosperity they envisioned.

The conversation between old man Dunne and Julia reveals the economic struggle of farm families on the plains. Babb underlines female sensibility and suffering, despite the traditional emphasis on the male breadwinner role, because all members of farm families worked together in the fields in order to survive. Old man Dunne takes pity on the Starwoods, who fail to pay their rent after poor harvests, and sympathizes with the economic pressure on men during the depression: "'They say Starwood is two years behind in rent with two crop failures. He's afraid Brennermann will put him off the place if he can't make it next season. Starwood's an easy-going man, but a hard worker. Four

young ones, six mouths to feed, keeps a man's nose to the grindstone these days'" (Babb 31). The traditional emphasis on male heads of households causes Julia to assert that women feel the same pressure on the farm. She voices women's unacknowledged struggles during the economic crisis and dust storms, particularly as wives and mothers.

As the novel conveys, small plains farmers either depended on the farm tenancy system or on bank loans. Anna Brennermann is disillusioned with her well-established family's economic reliance on banks that have lost their creditability. Witnessing the closing banks, mortgaged farms, and the farmers' struggle to pay their loans, she criticizes the capitalist system that forces farmers into the vicious cycle of hard work, betrayal, and loss due to the abuses of agribusiness, investors, and monopolies. Anna gains awareness about the alliance between farm investors and banks through her father's connections: "She heard her father discussing these things with the bank manager who sometimes took Sunday dinner with them. Few clear titles remained in the possession of the farmers who worked the land" (Babb 32). Anna develops a new perspective as she sees banks in a different light with their ruthless exploitation of farmers' needs: "a monster gorging itself on the farmlands and crops of the people she knew, who had lost their independence either through accidents of nature or through the fluctuating prices for crops and animals and—in general—the depression" (33). Although women are underestimated in business and farming, Anna foresees the outcomes of the banking system and farmers' heavy reliance on land. She appreciates the Brownells, who farm on their manageable fields with their own machinery and keen interest in scientific methods (33).

The farmers feel forgotten by the government and church, as they are left to the mercy of natural forces, high loans, and big farmers waiting to encroach on their land. Old man Dunne questions a life that forces young people to work until old age and struggles for bread instead of having comforts: "A man forgot his youth in securing his old age. . . . Had he himself not worked hard since he was a boy? Had he not done right, save for the years when he struck out savagely against things that were more than he could bear?" (Babb 38). He feels disillusioned with the teachings of the church and its encouragement of redemption through faith. Christ becomes another victim of the social and economic system of his time, just as the poor of the depression suffer due to social neglect, political ambition, and the economic downturn: "Was not Christ a man, with blood in his veins and a heart for people? He did not die that they might be saved; he was murdered, as good

as lynched, for his ideas that woke the poor enduring people . . . he was killed for his ideas that threatened the enthroned greed of the times" (38). This evocation of Christ reinforces the notion that they are indeed living through a time of biblical level suffering, and that self-sacrifice was required for salvation.

Milt Dunne is worried about irrigation problems and the outcomes of the dust storms on the harvest: "'we'll start drilling tomorrow. It'll be dry enough by then. . . . If the dust storms get any worse next year we won't have a field. We'll be starved out. This land is going back to desert'" (Babb 42). Moreover, poor living conditions, improper nutrition, and nonexistent healthcare facilities make it impossible for them to bear the burden of this life. Since nothing can survive on this infertile land, Julia gives birth to a still-born boy in the shack with the help of Milt and the old man. The fragile body of the dehydrated, malnourished child reflects the family's frail existence and exhaustion on the dry plains: "The little boy was curled up, wrinkled and queer-looking as if he had been alive along time. Milt had not felt this before about the baby being dead, but only as if he had had no being at all" (Babb 44–45).

The Longs experience the worst economic failure: they have lost their livestock as a result of destructive government policies, cannot pay their bank loans, and are being ravaged by the drought: "They had never recovered the losses of livestock suffered under the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which paid farmers to not produce. Due to the poor condition of their cattle, many were shot, and after paying the process tax on the ones they shipped, they had no return at all" (Babb 53). Moreover, when they purchase feed on loan, the bank confiscates their remaining herd, which forces the whole family to live in unspeakable destitution: "Folks all knew that one winter they had to rip the floor out of their small house for fuel, leaving them to walk on the dirt" (53). In a conversation with Julia, Mrs. Long states that they are considering moving to California since they cannot afford another year on the plains with crop failure. The migration of uprooted farmers like the Longs is encouraged by the alleged prosperity and opportunities for agriculture laborers on the West Coast. As Mrs. Long conveys, "'they have to have somebody to do the work and there's lots of farmland with fruit and vegetables and cotton and all kinds of things we've never seen'" (Babb 54).

California was a popular destination of migrants in the mid-1930s. Encouraged by the promise of employment opportunities and prosperity, people flocked to the San Joaquin Valley with the leaflets of labor agents and letters from relatives in hand (Cooper 37). Westward migration in the 1930s, however, differed from previous tides of internal migration in search of land, gold, and fortune. As Gregory indicates, poor white laborers of the depression and drought were not seeking the fulfillment of grand myths and lofty ideals, but survival against the everyday deprivations of life: "Contemporaries decided that they were witnessing something unprecedented in the history of white Americans: a large-scale refugee migration, a flight from privation of the sort Americans read about elsewhere but hoped never to see in their own land" (*American Exodus* 10). Thus, the westward migration of Okies challenged the American mindset as it was shaped by historical encounters with Mexican migrants, immigrant workers, and African Americans. The flow of poor white Americans to the West Coast, where they were hired as temporary seasonal laborers, would transform race, labor, and social relations over the course of the 1930s.

3.3.1. The Dust Bowl Diaries: Sickness, Starvation, and California News

The letters of earlier migrants created a pull factor for the interstate migration tide in the 1930s, especially from the southern plains. As Gregory views, "families who had settled there in the 1920s wrote to relatives in the Southwest telling them about their circumstances and the opportunities that might be available to others. . . . From the Central Valley, others told of the wages being paid for field work" (*American Exodus* 27). The letter from Bess, Mrs. Long's sister in California, reflects this glimmer of hope. Bess's family lost their farm and livestock due to their unpaid mortgage. The severe drought destroyed their harvest and means of paying the loan: "when the note came due they came out and took our teams and wagon and harness cows calves everythang we had but my chickens for $100. Just left us sitting there no way to do anythang" (Babb 55). Unable to find a job, they camped on the roadsides until they reached an FSA camp: "we got help from the guvment FSA $27 a month and commodities ever two weeks beans and dried apricots and sometimes oranges and dried milk. A Workers Alliance got us some lard too" (56). They work as farmhands, yet hunger in the land of plenty: "You ought to see the fruit and grape vines big fields of them sure a pretty sight. . . . It seems funny

sometimes seein so much to eat and not dare touch a thang" (56). Reading the letter from California, Julia is terrified about the future prospects of farmers and people on the road with starving children: "*It is pitiful the way people have to fight nowadays to make a bare living, roaming around over the country like a pack of wolves hunting something to eat and begging people to hire them for any money. Which way is a poor man to turn if there isn't even work and honest pay*?"[19] (56). Mrs. Long considers moving to California, even if she is aware of limited opportunities: "'Drought'll come to an end, I reckon, always has before, but this time the depression don't end. Nearly ten years long now. My kids never lived in good times'" (57).

From their wheat field, Milt and Julia look at the upcoming dust storm with awe and terror: "they watched the high moving wall of dust spread from east to west in a semi-circle that rose into the sky and bent over at its crest like a terrible mountainous wave about to plunge down upon them. The cool spring air held a sudden faint smell of dust" (Babb 77). The dust storm's threatening encroachment on dryland farms seems to be the "new attack of nature": "It was an evil monster coming on in mysterious, footless silence" (77). Waves of dust cover the wheat field and the Dunne shack "in a monotonous soundless deluge." Milt predicts farmers' inability to raise any crops on the dust covered top soil in the next harvest (79). David K. Fremon states that the dust storms of the depression years paralyzed people's lives, as the frequency of such environmental disasters increased, especially in Great Plains states. Looking back on the dust storms that blew away the fertile top soil of the plains, Eleanor Williams from Kansas articulated that "'If a roller came from the north we could recognize the rich black topsoil from Nebraska and Colorado. If it came from the south, we'd get the red dust of Oklahoma. Our topsoil would be exchanged in a day or so as it blew away to a neighboring state'" (qtd. in Fremon 69).

During the dust storms, plains farmers resisted economic loss and crop failures, but they also struggled to maintain their psychological well-being despite poor nutrition and life in the bleak wilderness. As Worster conveys, "The emotional expense was the hardest to accept, however. All day you could sit with your hands folded on the oilcloth-covered table, the wind moaning around the eaves, the fine, soft, talc sifting in the keyholes, the

[19] Italics from the original text.

sky a coppery gloom; when you went to bed the acrid dust crept into your dreams" (*Dust Bowl* 23). After a few clear days, the dust storm once again buries everything and forces the Dunnes to stay indoors: "The sky was obliterated. Julia hurriedly took the damp clothes from the line. . . . Old man Dunne nailed gunnysacks over the windows outside. The children were sent home from school at the first sign of the rising dust. . . . At noon, they ate a dusty meal by lamplight and then sat about afterward" (Babb 86). As the dust storm continues the next day, it takes its toll on the farm machinery and wheat field that now lay buried under the dust. During his inspection of the wheat lots, Milt realizes that the storm has carried away the top soil, creating a dry and barren land: "This was a rich, organic loam, torn from its bed because it was without root and moisture to hold it. If no rain came and the wind kept on, this same precious layer of his own field would rise and follow the great dark clouds to other land" (87). Julia prepares masks from pieces of clothing so that they can breathe properly while sleeping indoors and walking outside in the dust, which would otherwise be impossible.

The black sand blizzards that plagued the Great Plains in the 1930s added to the economic burden of farmers struggling to survive in dust covered fields and homes. As Cooper conveys, "Each big storm left victims choking and spitting up clods of dirt. They rushed to their local hospitals. But the only treatment was to rinse the mud out of their mouths with water, swab the dirt from their nostrils with Vaseline, and wash the grit from their eyes with boric acid" (25). Julia's dust storm chronicles indicate the dryland farmers' entrapment in darkness, their loss of long awaited crops, and sick days with dust infections. She takes a note of dust drifting into their houses, lives, and minds in her journal:

> *April 4.* A Fierce dirty day. Just able to get here and there for things we have to do. It is awful to live in a dark house with the windows boarded up and no air coming in anywhere. Everything is covered and filled with dust.
>
> *April 5.* Today is a terror.
>
> *April 6.* Let up a little. We can see the fence but we can't see any of the neighbors' houses yet. No trip to town today. Funny how you learn to get along even in this dust.
>
> *April 7.* A beautiful morning. Everyone spoiling the happiness of a clear day by digging dust. Sunday afternoon we walked for miles to see other places. It was a sight. It looks like the desert you read about in books, desolation itself. (Babb 90)

Julia's journal entries portray the dust bowl farmers' sense of loneliness as they cope with environmental disaster. They feel isolated from the outside world without any means of communication beyond the radio. Julia's anecdotes acknowledge the rise and the fall of their hopes and indicate the dust bowl farmers' misfortunes and dust related sicknesses, accidents, and deaths: "She [Mrs. Long] said Gaylord's ceiling fell in with the weight of the dust in attic. Just heard on radio of 24 deaths this month so far. . . . Some people get lost in the dust and choke. A lot of dust pneumonia. Suppose the effects of the dust will be showing up on a lot of people later" (Babb 94). Besides Babb's childhood years in Colorado and Oklahoma, her voluntary service in the migrant worker camps in the 1930s contributes to the authenticity of her novel and accentuates the "documentary realism" of her work. In fact, she even incorporates documents into the writing process, such as her camp diary and her mother's letter about the dust storms (Annas 10). In her novel, the journal writing thus "establishes Julia's voice and the need of Babb's characters to write and speak their own reality, to be more than those 'whose names are unknown'" (11).

During the farmers' meeting, Pete conveys that they have experienced the worst dust storms because they have turned pastures into farm lots without paying attention to the dry climate and the possibility of soil erosion: "'first it's grassland, and if we don't keep enough grazing country the soil will blow. We've been here for years and the dust wasn't so bad before the land was mostly all broken'" (Babb 97). Before the Great Drought and dust storms, pioneers and farm communities endured frequent dry seasons on the Great Plains, but with optimism about the future. As Donald Worster states in "Grass to Dust," WWI and the postwar period transformed "western grassland" into "a vast machine-age frontier, mass-producing wheat and cotton," despite the threat of high production levels (4). The primary focus of the plains settlers was the effective use of tractors, and plowing and planting without considering the market's need or the ecological balance. As a result, the 1930s drought led to severe dust storms blowing away the topsoil: "All along the farmer had ignored the essential grass that shielded the soil from the constant wind. His mastery over the land, consequently, was turned once more into defeat" (Worster, "Grass to Dust" 4). Babb's novel suggests the dryland farmers' need to recover vegetation and have access to affordable irrigation systems on the plains. Moreover, Max asserts that governmental assistance is not enough because dryland farmers need to unite under the banner of the working class, "'one thing sure, farmers have got to realize that they belong

with others who work. We've got to wake up and find out about things and stick together more, the way the workers do in the cities'" (Babb 97–98).

Old man Gaylord, another plains settler, views populism as one of the foundational principles of the US government through its duty to represent its citizens, especially underrepresented and ignored farmers. He criticizes the government's neglect but he also puts the blame on their own ignorance of political participation and activism, "'govamint for the people, by the people, of the people. I reckon we been taking it for granted that it was for the people without their recollecting that part about by the people'" (Babb 98). Furthermore, he refers to the masses who live below the poverty line during the economic and environmental crisis, and the few who still lead a life of prosperity. His comments indicate the widening income inequality in the country: "'Powerful lot of money tied up somewheres, and old Moon was telling me Saturday he heard on the radio the president told how a third of all the people is poor like us, some worse—not enough of things. He says the rich has got it'" (98).

Old man Dunne voices the older generation of dryland farmers' sense of insecurity during the depression years. He states that landless people have nowhere else to seek relief or a living in old age, as there is massive unemployment in the cities. His words on the failure of farming represent the end of the plains myth, and freedom and resilience of the yeoman farmer: "'I may lose my farm and then there's no place to go. No more new land, no more free gold out west, besides I'm too old to be tramping around hunting day work. . . . And all of a sudden in the cities . . . the big ones that have been eating up the little ones have got profit indigestion and belched up millions of men. They don't need 'em anymore'" (Babb 101). Another farmer, Long, reminds them of the collective action of milk producers in the East. However, Hull retorts that it is not possible for Great Plains farmers to unite under a common cause as they are spread across a vast geography: "'We can't strike against dust . . . and us farmers in western Kansas, Oklahoma, eastern Colorado, New Mexico are a different lot. Must be thousands of us but we all live farther apart than the farmers over east'" (101).

Abigail G. H. Manzella critiques the absence of Native Americans in Babb's white world of Cimarron County, Oklahoma, where they had been relocated during the Trail of Tears and denied land rights under US expansion policies (75). However, Manzella states that

the plot was actually set in southwestern Kansas and southeastern Colorado, another region of the Dust Bowl. Here, she refers to email correspondence with the writer of the book's foreword, Lawrence Rodgers, who stated that the location became Oklahoma at the time of the book's publication by the University of Oklahoma Press. She emphasizes the outcome of shifting the location from Colorado to Oklahoma—only a few miles east, yet significant as it exposes the exclusion of Native Americans and people of color from the Okie experience (76). Above all, Babb's story elaborates the plight of white farm families during the Depression, dust storms and internal migration to the West. Thus, white dust bowl refugees' encounter with African American, Mexican, and Asian workers takes place not in Oklahoma but in the California farm fields, primarily corporate farms, where they collaborate to improve agricultural workers' rights through mutual understanding, union meetings, and strikes.

While some of the farm families stay and attempt to raise new crops after the failures during the dust storms, many others leave in search of jobs such as the Hulls, heading to Arizona to be cotton pickers (Babb 120). The conversation between Julia and Mrs. Brownell reveals that the dust bowl migrants and depression refugees feel deeply concerned about their future at the mercy of total strangers:

> Sometimes they would stop for a drink, but mostly they drove past, the cars piled high with household goods and children. . . . Their thoughts were too close to the homes they were leaving. They were going out of the country, to the *outside* with a hostile hope in their hearts. They went out together and alone, like the animals moving with their backs to the storm, moving to shelter they knew was nowhere, yet they could no longer stand still in their stricken lives. (120)

The promotion of farm mechanization, the dependence on bank loans and mortgaged land, and profit-minded farming that neglects the ecological balance result in bankruptcy, farm foreclosures, and a mass exodus to the West Coast. The farmers and ranchers of the plains had radically transformed the dryland through overstocking, overgrazing, and overplanting. In turn, mechanized farming paved the way for destructive soil and wind erosion during the severe drought and dust storms. However, as Donald Worster indicates, few people sympathized with the experience of the Okies, and regarded "agriculture evolving" towards "agribusiness" or "business farming" investments as the major cause behind the economic and social crisis: "one had to seek an understanding of the refugee squatting by an irrigation ditch. He was there not because of the dust, but for

the same reason that the dust was blowing so violently: both calamities were consequences of commercial agriculture's aggressive energies" (*Dust Bowl* 54).

3.3.2. The Dust Bowl Migrants on the Road and in Labor Camps

During the 1930s, the migrant labor problem was discussed by academics, communities, and chambers of commerce, addressing the issue in speeches, at conferences, and in mass media through newspapers and radio programs (Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants* 12). Primarily, they planned to maintain migrant populations as settled agricultural workforces (12). Government organizations such as the State Emergency Relief Administration, the Resettlement Administration, and the Farm Security Administration took the responsibility of providing basic housing and sanitation, which was built upon a "pervasive and one-sided image" of Okies as freeloaders and opportunists (12).

As the dust storms persist on the high plains, the Dunnes leave their farm along with the Starwoods. In Arizona, Milt and Julia pick cotton as they literally live on the road, having only a car and a piece of tent. With all the cotton picked, they drive towards Imperial Valley in California and accept work as seasonal farmhands (Babb 133). Myra Dunne sadly indicates the public perception and treatment of dust bowl refugees as "tramps," while Julia feels offended by their reception (134). The Dunnes and Starwoods reach a camp, run by the Farm Security Administration, on the outskirts of California: "In front of them was a row of tents, marking one side of a large open square, hemmed in by three other neat rows. . . . They read the small signboard nailed to a post, saying *Federal Emergency Migratory Camp*" (136). In the FSA camp, migrant laborers rented a place to put up their tents and look for seasonal farm work such as pea picking. They dread federal relief because of the pervasive Okie stereotypes. As Mrs. Starwood notes, "'None of us people wants relief if we could get work. God knows, a man could earn more with working and be a lot happier. We've seen hundreds of people in the last few months and ain't a one of 'em wouldn't rather work his way, and trying hard to do it'" (137).

As James N. Gregory conveys in the introduction of *American Exodus*, dust bowl refugees and migrant laborers moved from the southern plains states of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri to western lands, believing that they could leave behind the effects of drought and depression economy (xiii–xiv). Their quest became a disenchanting testing ground of American cultural values and historical experience around westward

expansion and the frontier thesis, the success of the rugged individual, and the idealization of the yeoman farmer. In short, their trials were "a pathetic failure of the American Dream" (xiv). The Dunnes and Starwoods still deal with hunger and unsanitary living conditions in the FSA camp. They encounter other people's tragedies such as Virgie giving birth in a tent without medical assistance. Milt starts running errands with other camp residents to help them, and himself: "He forgot his hunger and his hungry children, seeing the woman lying in the dark corner, under the sloping oily wall of the tent. . . . Milt came back with an armful of old newspapers and handed them through the flap to Woody. He could hear them spreading the papers on the bed" (Babb 141). Virgie delivers her child after hours of suffering and curses poverty and people who remain silent to starving children and families: "'I have to suffer like this because we're poor, that's why, only poor! They don't have babies without doctors, starved babies they don't want. Where is God's wrath?'" (141). Many migrant women share Virgie's bitter experience because hospitals refuse to treat agricultural laborers: "'That poor Woody's had to deliver a lot of farm workers' babies when they can't get a doctor. Country hospitals won't take our women 'less we been in the state a year'" (142). The baby starves to death despite the camp people's efforts.

African Americans, Mexican migrant workers, and the dust bowl refugees all encounter similar social and economic marginalization, illustrating that their plight transcended difference. Seen as a temporary work force on the West Coast, they remained unprotected "second class" laborers, forced to live and work under poor conditions: "these transients were not received with open arms by the social, economic, and political establishment on the west coast. Signs declaring 'Niggers and Okies Upstairs' and 'No Mexicans allowed' in public places spoke very clearly of their subordinate status in California" (Theobald and Donato 30). The Dunnes witness a violent attack on a migrant farm worker, a lynching attempt due to his so-called improper behavior towards a woman. The farm workers who side with Martin are called Okies and "white niggers" by the attackers, terms considered to be equivalent racial slurs (Babb 154). Migrant women are also involved in the violent scene: "The women were dragging the two men through the door and out in front. The farmers were angry, but they were trying to hold off their wives, but the women were wild and furious" (154). They learn that the mob actually works for the railroad

company and harasses farm workers who advocate farmhands' rights against the interests of agribusiness investors.

Dust bowl refugees encounter corporate farming and the unionization struggle among agricultural laborers as they seek shelter and employment in the FSA camp. Milt explains the concept of agribusiness in California to his daughter Tessie, who has only seen the dryland farmers of the plains:

> "It's different than at home where every man has his own farm. Here it's bigger than a factory, with the boss way off someplace sitting in a fancy office. . . . The farmers do the hard work for as little pay as they can make 'em take, and the companies hire brutes to beat up men like Martin—beat 'em up and maybe worse. Remember how that big oil company in Arizona had their vigilantes tar and feather that poor devil?" (Babb 155–56)

Martin becomes a target for his struggle to improve farm workers' living conditions and low wages because they remain unprotected without union support. As Milt notes, Martin bears the burden of this struggle with open threats, harassment, and unemployment, "'He don't even get paid by the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] union, 'cause it seems they can't afford to help the farmers right now, but he goes right ahead anyway, working in the field, getting fired and beat up and put in jail'" (156).[20] At night, the camp manager Woody removes the deputies who threaten unionizing farm workers with vigilante justice and red baiting. With the rising tension between farm workers and agribusiness owners, one of the workers speaks up about the violence committed by growers, "'See how they beat up a man for trying to organize us into the CIO union? Where do you think you'll get with these big growers going round like a bunch of goddamn zombies? We ought to get 'em where we want 'em now and strike the peas'" (Babb 158).

James N. Gregory notes that the growth of agribusinesses in California surpassed other farming regions in the US with industrialized corporate farming's long established roots and organization in the West. As Gregory continues, the alliances between investors and

[20] The organized labor struggle of the 1930s benefited from New Deal legislation such as the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which allowed workers to engage in collective bargaining. The 1935 National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act) emphasized labor unions' right to negotiate with employers, leading to the recognition of workers' unions rather than company unions. The changing political atmosphere encouraged the CIO's break from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its organization of unskilled workers through strikes ("Labor Unions").

benefactors such as "corporate outsiders, land syndicates, water companies, railroads, [and] canneries" were solidified by the integration of "public water agencies, cooperative marketing associations, and networks of local and regional growers' organization" (*American Exodus* 55). They reacted to the organization of farm workers with the anti-radical vigilantism seen in Gastonia in the previous chapter.

3.3.3. Migrant Laborers and Organized Labor Efforts

California, particularly the San Joaquin Valley, was a notable fertile farming region in which migrant workers were employed during the harvest season. Farmhands and fruit pickers were mostly Filipino, Chinese or Japanese immigrants, as the dominance of Mexican seasonal labor ended with the immigration restrictions of 1929 (Cooper 47). Anti-foreign policies and the depression unemployment sent many Mexican citizens from the southwestern states back to Mexico, which necessitated Californian growers to employ distressed migrant workers from the dust bowl area (48). Once they started to work in the fields, they moved back and forth between the San Joaquin, Salinas, and Sacramento valleys on a seasonal basis (49). Moreover, as Charles J. Shindo states in "The Dust Bowl Myth," the rising number of dust bowl migrants working alongside those foreign born farmhands stirred concerns about white Americans' suffering, poor living conditions, and potential race mixing, which contributed to the construction of government camps for migrant workers and the documentation of the depression years by the Resettlement Administration (27).

In addition to white migrant farmhands like the Dunnes, the company owners employed "fast-working, and nimble-fingered Filipinos, the resident hard-working Japanese and Mexicans" in their vegetable fields (Babb 160). The immigrant workforce finds some relief with the CIO's presence: however, union efforts among seasonal farmhands do not have funds for "a vast and shifting population: great ragged armies of hunger-driven people" (160). The industrial farms exploit the struggling migrant laborers in the absence of unions to monitor their rights and conditions during the massive population shift: "Two hundred fifty thousand people moved—moved north, moved south—with more people coming in. Through harvests, through heat and cold and hunger, sunshine and floods, sickness, birth and death, violence and fear" (160). The Dunnes and the Starwoods

become part of this shifting migrant population between harvest seasons and suffer from the same conditions.

During the Great Depression, many migrant workers were forced to live in "squatters' camps" as they searched for seasonal employment in the agricultural fields and industries of California. In "Life in a Migrant Laborers' Camp," John Steinbeck describes the general characteristics of such a camp in California: "It is located on the banks of a river, near the irrigation ditch or on a side road where a spring water is available. From a distance it looks like a city dump. . . . You can see a litter of dirty rags and scrap iron, of houses built of weeds, of flattened cans or of paper" (141).[21] In this piece, Steinbeck portrays one of the families, newcomers to the camp, who were corn farmers in the Midwest but lost their property and livelihood due to the drought. He predicts malnutrition and pneumonia during their first winter in the paper shack (141). Faith in harvest time labor, dignity under poor circumstances, and the struggle to send their children to school symbolized the resilience of migrant laborers.

Likewise, in Babb's novel, migrant agricultural workers search for a place to stay and employment during the harvest seasons. With the beginning of the summer, migrant families end up in camps and orchards as farmhands, while many of them remain homeless: "Outside and beyond the trees, waiting, were the people who did not find work, who looked every day for odd jobs, who asked every day to pick fruit, who lived with the fear of winter, and slept every night with this fear tramping up and down in their dreams" (Babb 162). Thus, some unemployed migrants settle down in an apple orchard across the Feather River where they merely live on apples and fishing from the river in a squatter camp: "They suffered from dysentery from the green apples, but this was better than hunger. And something good happened: for one reason or another, none of the women got with child. They thought it was the dysentery. They were all glad, but some of the men . . . became suspicious of green apples" (163). The Dunnes and Starwoods are

[21] In 1936, Steinbeck published a series of articles on the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers in California. "The Harvest Gypsies" was published between October 5 and October 12, 1936, in the *San Francisco News*.

employed in the orchards along with their children and learn to hide their resentment of poverty, poor living conditions, and marginalization by Californians.

In *Proud to Be an Okie*, Peter La Chapelle indicates that more than 350,000 migrants who ended up in California in the 1930s encountered the native white population's displeasure and attacks, even though many Okies were born and bred Americans with European and Protestant backgrounds (22). Once they were glorified as "sturdy pioneers" from the Great Plains; however, the depression and dust storms stigmatized their presence, and many Californians now saw them the poor "white trash" of the southern plains and the southwest (La Chapelle 22). Furthermore, the migrants were exposed to "race talk and eugenic baiting," applied to immigrants and nonwhite minority groups by means of political action, biased media responses, vigilantism, and pseudoscientific myth making (23). According to La Chapelle, the history of California reveals forms of "racial and ethnic scapegoating," which reformulated the mainstream opposition to migrants in social, economic, and political contexts (25). Using xenophobic and the white supremacist "demonization of racial minorities in [the] legal code and public discourse," anti-Okie activists argued that the Dust Bowl refugees were a "social threat" (La Chapelle 25–26). The Dunnes and the Starwoods find work as cotton pickers and are grateful that their children have at least access to the school bus to the town. However, Milt is offended by the drive for segregated schools, as he tells Julia about a conversation with a local man, "'over in the next county they forced the government to build a school for the migrants, and the town people 'round here're trying to do the same. He said they don't like their kids mixing'" (Babb 171). Likewise, Julia recognizes the hostility towards migrant families as she recalls some women's clubs that promoted the sterilization of migrant women (171).

On their first day, the camp manager Mr. Hinkle reminds Milt of the cotton quota for each family: "'We got a rule here in camp, you remember? To live in the cabin, you gotta average nine hundred pounds a day. Women usually always pick with the men'" (Babb 172). The Dunnes and the Starwoods live together so they can gather the required amount of cotton and stay in the company house. Meanwhile, they find a leaflet prepared by "a farm workers' committee" about workers' rights, the Wagner Act, which encourages their collaborative action (174). Mrs. Starwood is excited by the promises made in the leaflet: "'Better hours, better wages, better living conditions. All hours we can see, wages not

enough to eat decent on, and two families in one shack! We got a *right* it says, made by the govamint'" (174). The depression years brought the lowest wages to farm workers in California history, despite rising agricultural production and high prices, due to a surplus of laborers. The living and working conditions of migrant workers triggered "a profound wave of discontent and unrest," which materialized in a series of strikes and the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 on labor regulations and unionization efforts (McWilliams 211). Between the years of 1929 and 1935, various strikes took place in California: "Never before had farm laborers organized on any such scale and never before had they conducted strikes of such magnitude and such far-reaching social significance" (211).

Poor white Americans, called "white trash," worked together with low paid blacks, immigrants, and other agricultural migrant laborers. As Milt picks cotton with a black worker, he perceives that the dust bowl and depression have not discriminated among the poor: "*We're both picking cotton for the same hand-to-mouth wages. I'm no better'n he is; he's no worse*. The memory of being called a white nigger in Imperial Valley lay in his mind unforgotten" (Babb 185). The tension between migrant laborers and growers triggers strikes in the cotton fields through the collaborative action of agricultural workers. However, many return to the fields not to lose their meager incomes and company houses. New sanitation regulations force migrant workers to stay on company property instead of living on the road after the closure of squatters' camps. They also learn about the striking cotton pickers in other camps: "This was just one of the H & B camps, but over two-thirds of the workers in their other camps had come out" (Babb 192). As a result, agricultural workers plan to organize a union with the assistance of migrant women workers. The Dunnes and the Starwoods are forced to leave their company home after their meeting with labor organizers. As one of the company men says, "'We got orders to move all you strikers out. . . . Only way is, I guess, if you want to go back to work, you can stay'" (197).

Californians refused to accept the permanent residence of dust bowl refugees and Mexican migrants after the harvest season. Migrant workers from the plains, however, sought stability and improvement in their lives after a long time spent on the road and in the camps. As Theobald and Donato indicate, "Okies had no intention of adopting a perpetual migratory lifestyle and had no place to which they could return. While many

Mexicans returned (many against their will) to Mexico, Okies set up ditch bank camps when the work was done and tried to get their children into schools" (35). People were also concerned about the unhealthy living conditions of the "roadside settlements," as malaria and tuberculosis in the refugee camps triggered "fear and prejudice" (Theobald and Donato 35). Although politicians and state officials were concerned about the poor living conditions in the camps, seeing "segregated 'Little Oklahomas,'" which looked like "Little Mexicos" and other ethnic ghettos in California, their situation tested the local population and increased their desire to send migrant children to segregated camp schools (36).

As Cooper states, in 1936, the Los Angeles police attempted to prevent the arrival of new migrants through a border control policy, known as "bum blockades": "It was illegal for city policemen to use their authority outside Los Angeles, but few Californians objected. For six months, the officers stopped the cars of migrants and turned away the poorest—frequently those with less than fifty dollars" (8). In Babb's novel, local governments develop various measures to control the movement of the migrant population by means of a strict record of their residence in the state. The state monitored workers' shifting places and rights, because a minimum of six months of residence in a county would make them eligible to register to vote: "If convenient for the crop at hand, the worker was let out just before that time. As he moved on asking for work from other farmers, their records showed he should be on his way to another county. Unless he was fortunate enough to get work from a small independent farmer . . . he found the county an unwelcoming place" (Babb 200). Although workers on strike resist and form a committee to negotiate with the company, the scab workers are afraid of leaving the relative safety of the cotton fields and company houses. They deride living in tents with sickness, hunger, and poverty in winter: "There were colds and flu and pneumonia, and babies being born and unborn, and school, and shoes wearing out. There were old men and women dying" (201). Nevertheless, people have faith in the migrant workers' strike and send clothing, food, and a small amount of money to the union through their fundraising activities and solidarity. In turn, migrant workers resist with their belief that they deserve more than "bread and sleep," but a decent life and fulfillment of their dreams (203).

Californians also regarded the southern upbringing of Okies with displeasure because of their association with "farm work, poverty, and rural backwardness" (Gregory, *American*

Exodus 78). In depression-era California, Dust Bowl migrants' social, economic, and regional backgrounds aroused Californians' "protectionist mood" and the "exclusionary outlook" they had long practiced in state politics (78–79). Although many other states developed reactionary politics regarding immigrants and interstate migrants in the 1930s, California practiced strict anti-migration measures towards nonwhite residents, which was historically built upon aggressive politics against Chinese citizens, Japanese immigrants, Mexican workers, and later Filipinos (79). The failing economy, tense political atmosphere, and poverty complicated migrants' status as white American laborers who were working side by side with immigrants and living in squatters' camps. It was hard to locate them within the social hierarchy and interpret their experience through white American cultural values and narratives.

Migrant strikers and labor organizers, including Milt, are eventually arrested on several charges including vagrancy and disturbing the peace. In jail, their strength is tested by beatings and threats of long prison service. Once they are released, they encounter deputy violence and vigilantism due to their strike and union support: "The deputies shot tear gas into the crowd and then into the packed headquarters. Some women escaped, but the whole thing was so well arranged that most of the workers were headed off to jail" (Babb 204). With the strike leaders and participants in jail, workers return to the fields without better wages, and distrust union promises of ending hunger and securing their children's future. The company men are proud of their victory over migrant workers, who would be replaced by cotton picking machines with industrialized farming. Moreover, federal projects such as the FSA camps are blamed for inviting migrant workers and their economic burden: "'Look at these federal camps around. Flowers in the yard, bathhouses, playgrounds, pretty little dollhouses to live in, washing machines! Pretty swell, eh? But who pays for all that?'" (Babb 205).

Other factors, such as race, seasonal employment, and migration also problematized the agricultural workers' ability to organize through unionization (McWilliams 264). A major problem was the dichotomous relationship between the urban and rural economy that distinguished industrial labor from farming. However, Carey McWilliams acknowledges that "there is slight if any difference between labor employed in a Pennsylvania steel mill and labor employed in a California cannery; or . . . between the type of unskilled labor employed in the mass-production industries and the type of field labor employed in the

California farm factories" (265). Thus, migrant laborers were kept unaware of a working class consciousness and organized labor efforts through this distinction between farm and factory work during the rise of agribusinesses in California. As Milt concludes, "'We ain't farmers anymore'n a man who works in a shoe factory is a custom boot-maker. We're like the fellas on the belt manufacturing automobiles only we're making food—mile-long refrigerator trains full of food, cross-country highway trucks full of food'" (Babb 215–16). He realizes that the big growers hold onto economic and political power through the capitalist machinery that exploits the working class poor: "'They're looking out for the Almighty Dollar, and if they have to starve us to get more'n they can count, they can do it because there's more where we come from. . . . We ain't human, we're figures on the books'" (216). The dehumanization of migrant workers by profit-minded industrialists remained intact through the collaboration of railroads, banks, agribusinesses, and farm machinery distributors. Only the unionization of agricultural laborers could defend the interests of migrant workers against capitalist-industrialist schemes and alliances.

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) took action to organize farm and cannery workers in California before 1929, but unionization attempts failed due to high membership dues and federation leaders' antagonistic view of migrant farm laborers and their economic and political status. In the meantime, some Japanese workers attempted to organize through "protective associations or clubs," while some Mexicans relied on trade unions (McWilliams 212). Two strikes occurred in the Imperial Valley in 1930 among Mexican and Filipino vegetable and fruit pickers, and white American laborers from packing sheds, for better wages and living conditions. The Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) organized the workers of the valley under the Agricultural Workers Industrial League, but agricultural workers and their delegates to the union conference were arrested after their failed strikes (213). A group was put on a trial for violating the Criminal Syndicalism Act and some labor organizers served prison sentences in San Quentin. Nevertheless, the organized labor attempts and aggressive responses strengthened the agricultural workers' struggle for better conditions (214).

The ending of *Whose Names Are Unknown* reflects collective activism and a radical awakening, rather than submission or defeat. Despite the red baiting of farm company owners and their vigilantism, the refugees speak and act through committees in order to

seek “health clinics, education, and birth control” (Wixson 217). In Babb’s novel, the eviction notice sent to “John Doe and Mary Doe, whose true names are unknown” by the management of Hayes and Berkeley Company indicates the situation of agricultural workers after their strike attempts (Babb 220). Babb’s legal eviction notice provides “presence and voice to the unknown women and men of the high plains” (Annas 10). In this way, Babb underlines the sense of community and communal identity of the working class, behind individual suffering and the struggle on the plains and the West Coast, during the drought, the depression, and the dust bowl (10).

The Dunnes, the Starwoods and other migrant laborers are united against the power of companies, and the brutality of deputies and hired company men, in order to achieve radical change and permanent progress. One of the characteristics of the proletarian novels of the 1930s is an enlightening transition from individual suffering in “relative isolation and silence,” to collaborative activism through a process of “social, economic, spiritual, political epiphany” (Annas 10–11). Babb’s characters already have radical thoughts and vision on the plains, but their California experience adds to that awareness through camp life, seasonal farm work, and hostility towards refugees. They get involved in the union struggle that unites dust bowl refugees with the working class community of black and Filipino farmers, as “the sense of family and neighborhood the Dunnes had in Oklahoma has shifted into a multicultural community of sisters and brothers committed to improving the condition of workers” (11).

The 1930s economic downturn and the natural disasters that fell upon the plains farm communities indicated the failure in agriculture policy: homesteads, the expansion of plowing and overgrazing, the ignorance of soil conservation against soil and wind erosion, and irrigation problems and low precipitation on the plains. As R. Douglas Hurt conveys, farmers could not have survived the burden of economic deterioration, dry spells, and black blizzards only with reformed agricultural methods. According to Hurt, they required New Deal legislation: “During the 1930s, though, even good farm management techniques were inadequate to prevent economic hardship when farmers faced the triple problems of drought, dust, and depression. Certainly, government aid in various forms from a multiplicity of agencies gave farmers buying and refinancing power which they would not have had otherwise” (101). The victims of the 1930s economic and ecological failure ended up homeless, looking for jobs in the city or living on the road as

dust storm refugees in California. Thus, their lives and poor circumstances were conditioned by "a common economic culture, in factories and on farms, based on unregulated private capital seeking its own unlimited increase," with the help of high production and consumption levels that nourished a "self-destructive culture" (Worster, *Dust Bowl* 44).

3.4. CONCLUSION

In *Now in November*, Josephine Johnson portrays the Haldmarne family's reverse migration from urban to rural life as a result of unemployment and economic failure. Marget narrates her family's search for stability and dignity in the agricultural economy. However, mortgage debt, drought related crop failures, and low prices threaten the sustenance of farmers in the Midwest. The farmers' alliance only provides temporary benefits, without federal relief and agricultural policies. Johnson's portrayal of desperate tenant farmers, bankrupt farms, and vagrants reveals the rural economic devastation, disillusionment with American values, and distrust of the government as they struggle with environmental disasters of biblical proportions during the Great Depression and drought years.

The agricultural policies of WWI permitted the expansion of mechanization, easy bank loans, and the "great plow-up" on the plains, which catalyzed the soil erosion, black blizzards, and farm foreclosures of the dust bowl years. In *Whose Names Are Unknown*, Sanora Babb depicts the American farmer's transformation to migrant agricultural laborer in California. The Dunnes and other migrant farm families move between the FSA camps and the squatters' camps for seasonal farm work. They pay the price of being depression and dust bowl refugees with malnourishment and sickness, xenophobic reception and the violent vigilantism of an anti-union company mob. As Theobald and Donato note, WWII's new industrial opportunities and the post-WWII Bracero program eventually permitted Okies to work in urban centers, while Mexican migrants returned to the fields, "the west coast's lowest occupational stratum" (41).

In their novels, Johnson and Babb reveal the outcomes of shortsighted agricultural and banking policies that disregarded the environment. *Now in November* narrates farmers' suffering in the Midwest during the drought and depression years, whereas *Whose Names Are Unknown* depicts farmers from the southern plains with an emphasis on their

westward migration to California valleys. Babb's novel elaborates migrant workers' disheartening encounter with the "survival of the fittest" philosophy in labor camps and agribusiness. Johnson and Babb call for federal recognition of the farmers' plight and new economic policies. Johnson and Babb suggest the importance of a working class consciousness, a sense of community in labor camps, and union activities to improve conditions.

Johnson's and Babb's social novels remained forgotten and unknown in the shadow of *The Grapes of Wrath.* While there are thematic similarities with Babb's dust bowl novel, Steinbeck primarily focuses on the Joads' allegorical journey through the impersonal tone and documentation style of a journalist. The Joads' exodus from Oklahoma to California depicts their futile escape from depression and poverty, debt-ridden farms, and the monstrosity of banks. Their life on the road introduces new tormentors: the exploitation of labor in the fields, hostility towards migrant laborers, illness, death, and starvation. Steinbeck's characters cannot find any relief in collective action, working class solidarity, or labor activities. Furthermore, Steinbeck's portrayal of the Joads promoted the "Okie family" stereotype, unlike the genuine voices of farmers and migrant laborers depicted in the social and political novels of Johnson and Babb. They share women's toil as farmers, mothers, migrant laborers, and union sympathizers, and emerge as an alternative to Steinbeck's dominant masculine voice.

William E. Riebsame underlines the value of historical narratives and depictions of the Dust Bowl years. In his opinion, they provide critical knowledge for the assessment of future environmental disasters, referring to the "anchoring" effect of haunting dust storm images (127). In this way, documenting the outcomes of dust storms on the Great Plains monitored people's view of "environmental and land use problems" in the region, with the assistance of technology, sociology, and biological diversity (128). In this regard, reading the social novels of Johnson and Babb as realistic reflections of their own observations contributes to the documentation of the decade, with an anchoring effect on readers, environmental reformers, and policy makers, even in the twenty-first century. The dust bowl farmers' experiences are still relevant today, as we continue to discuss the effects of global warming and climate change.

The last chapter will present closure to the interwar period that began with the Great War—the war to end all wars—and ironically ended with the Second World War. Chapter Four will address Dorothy Canfield's social novels *The Deepening Stream* (1930) and *Seasoned Timber* (1939), with sociocultural and political commentary on WWI and the pre-WWII years. *The Deepening Stream* portrays American responses to the outbreak of WWI and the US humanitarian involvement. Reflecting on the relief activities of Dorothy Canfield in France, the novel alludes to the voluntary relief drive of Americans, the mobilization of the American Red Cross, and the postwar disillusionment with naive American idealism. The peace meetings and settlements prove to be insufficient and even futile after the armistice, with the persistence of hostility and resentment. Through Quaker pacifism and the noncombatant participation of the Forts, Canfield critiques American involvement in the war, which comes across as merely securing economic investments, bureaucratic control mechanisms, and diplomatic maneuvering in Europe. In *Seasoned Timber*, Canfield explores the sociocultural and political outcomes of WWI, including the rise of Nazi Germany, totalitarian regimes in Europe, and the persecution of Jews. She places the racist, conservative, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and exclusionary atmosphere of the pre-WWII years into an unsuspecting American setting—a small town and academy. Through the school principal, Canfield voices her concerns about growing intolerance and discrimination, the ignorance of American ideals and principles, and problems in the educational system. Thus, her novel foreshadows increased global conflict (WWII) and the end of the interwar years.

CHAPTER 4

DOROTHY CANFIELD: REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERWAR YEARS FROM WWI TO WWII

Dorothy Canfield (1879-1958) was a renowned bestselling American writer, dedicated educational reformer, and social activist during the first half of the twentieth century. Her novels and short stories primarily reflect her concerns about race, class, and gender prejudices, and their resulting injustices, through her insightful interpretation of American society and Europe in the interwar period. Canfield, whose married name was Fisher, was committed to relief initiatives and producing wartime narratives, which cemented to her role a humanitarian figure, social critic, and prolific author of (non)fiction.[22] According to Mark J. Madigan, she started her writing career through apprenticeships in newspapers and magazines, followed by the publication of her first novel *Gunhild* (1907), through which she cultivated her voice and interest in the relationship between men and women. This was followed by her novels *The Squirrel Cage* (1912) and *The Bent Twig* (1915) (xi). Canfield was highly influenced by Maria Montessori and published *A Montessori Mother* (1912) and later a children's novel, *Understood Betsy* (1916), on her educational theories (Madigan xi). After the outbreak of the Great War, Canfield was inspired to write *Home Fires in France* (1918) and *The Day of Glory* (1919), which portrayed wartime France. *The Brimming Cup* (1921) achieved great commercial success as a counter narrative to Sinclair Lewis's satire of small town life in *Main Street*. It claimed second place on the bestsellers list, after Lewis's work, and emerged as "the first modern best-seller" that critically addressed racial bias against African Americans (xi).

Dorothy Canfield emerged as one of the most acclaimed American writers due to the versatility of her works and sociopolitical agenda. *The Home-Maker* (1924) was another well-received bestseller that portrays "role-reversal" in married life, as it redefines the traditional homemaker-nurturer and breadwinner roles for mutual happiness (Madigan xi). Her translation of Giovanni Papini's *Life of Christ* was "the most purchased" book in

[22] The writer signed her works of fiction as Dorothy Canfield, whereas she signed her works of nonfiction as Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Throughout my discussions of her novels, I will refer to her as Dorothy Canfield.

1923, while her novel *Her Son's Wife* (1926) was praised by renowned critic William L. Phelps for being worthy of the Pulitzer Prize. The financial success of her novel *Bonfire*, published in serialized form by the *Woman's Home Companion* in 1933, her honorary degrees from several institutions, and her interest in writing children's books also added to her fame (xii). Furthermore, she was devoted to humanitarian work through her efforts to establish a Braille Press and a children's hospital in France during WWI, her services to the Vermont State Board of Education and the Adult Education Association, her organization of the Children's Crusade during WWII, and her lifelong contributions to charity projects, leading Eleanor Roosevelt to compliment her as "the most influential woman of her time" (xii).

Janis P. Stout views Canfield's social and humanitarian novels as political fiction, thus providing a renewed perspective to her work beyond the cycle of middlebrow writers and, in the process, reconceptualizing the political novel ("Writing Politically" 252). Stout relates the long-established gap or interpretive difference between political and middlebrow writers to a traditional view of gender that asserted that political writing was an embodiment of masculine interests in public issues, whereas women were concerned with "local, domestic, or nurturing" subject matter ("Writing Politically" 252). Canfield's fiction shares the characteristics of middlebrow and political literature as a transition from the domestic sphere to the community (Stout, "Writing Politically" 252). Thus, her novels exhibit cross-genre elements and multiple affiliations with the progressive writers and bestselling authors of the interwar era.

Regarding Canfield's political novels, Stout notes that her main characters are committed to ethical behavior and principles, and are unafraid to confront accepted social customs and standards. In this manner, *The Deepening Stream* portrays "her hatred of war" along with the wartime decadence of civilized society (Stout, "Writing Politically" 256). *The Home-Maker* states that the strict observation of conventional gender roles is detrimental, while *The Brimming Cup* reflects "a nearer approach to economic equality" and confrontations with racial bias (Stout, "Writing Politically" 256). *Seasoned Timber* denounces anti-Semitism as an "un-American" mindset, as the protagonist, T. C. Hulme, finds a purpose in his life through his nonconformity. Through this work and others, Canfield's writing "serve[s] society through the quiet and ultimately educational pressure

of modelling an alternative in one's individual life" (256). The individual's political stance in their personal life proves that indeed, "the personal is political" (256).

Canfield's interwar novels comment on the US wartime humanitarianism, postwar settlements around the Peace Conference, the much debated Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations, and the rising threat of another global conflict in the late 1930s. In between the armistice on November 11, 1918, and the Paris Peace Conference on January 18, 1919, the Allied powers undertook the time-pressing job of assigning delegates and completing conference preparations, including reports on complex problems, grievances, and demands ("Germany and the Peace Treaty" 381). The Peace Conference was to provide ultimate relief and definite solutions regarding a "permanent peace" through the establishment of a League of Nations, the settlement of territorial expansion and border conflicts, the founding of new nation states with "liberty and unimpaired integrity" out of collapsed European empires, and the designation of mandates for millions of people in Africa and Asia (381). In the meantime, the peace treaty and the League of Nations represented Wilsonian idealism and his commitment to the principles of world peace, justice, and democracy.

Prior to the US Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles on March 19, 1920, President Wilson ran a cross-country campaign for its ratification with his open criticism of the Senate's "reservations" about the peace treaty, particularly the terms of the League of Nations ("Senate's Rejection" 27). On March 8, President Wilson's letter to Senator Hitchcock, who conducted the administration's campaign for the treaty, emphasized his uncompromising stance about modifications to Article X of the treaty: "Any League of Nations which does not guarantee as a matter of incontestable right the political independence and integrity of each of its members might be hardly more than a futile scrap of paper, as ineffective in operation as the agreement between Belgium and Germany which the Germans violated in 1914" (qtd. in "Senate's Rejection" 27–28). In his letter, Wilson justifies Article X of the treaty as the guarantor of postwar stability and security when it came to the pressing issues of shared political interests, territorial rivalries, the possibility of future aggression, the need for global peace and justice, and unremitting threats of militarism and imperialism. Wilson concludes that people either defend democratic principles for the freedom of nations, or support imperial power and oppression (28). Nevertheless, he was unable to conquer opposition to the treaty and the

League of Nations, which the US Congress saw as suspect. The end result was that the US Congress never ratified the Treaty of Versailles choosing, instead, to sign separate peace treaties with the aggressors in 1921. The postwar politics of the Allied powers, their peacemaking efforts, their manipulation of war debt, the push towards disarmament, and hyperinflation in Germany and other part of Europe, triggered the resentment that would ultimately culminate in another war by the end of the turbulent 1930s.

This chapter addresses Dorothy Canfield's interwar social novels *The Deepening Stream* (1930), which focuses on WWI and its aftermath, and *Seasoned Timber* (1939), with its emphasis on the rise of anti-Semitism and fascism and the inevitable path to a second world war. *The Deepening Stream* is heavily influenced by postwar American society's reinterpretation of global conflict, particularly American military involvement and humanitarian drive at the individual, organizational, and governmental levels. The main characters, Quakers Matey and Adrian Fort, reflect the experiences of Dorothy Canfield and her husband, John Fisher, and their voluntary relief work in France. Canfield depicts the dilemma of the Forts, who maintain their Quaker pacifism, non-violent resistance, and humanitarianism during their presence in wartime France, claiming that the global conflict blurred divisions between voluntary relief workers, pacifists, pro-war and pro-Allied advocates, and bureaucrats. Her characters struggle with the moral ambiguity of resistance to violence, wartime involvement, and war atrocities, while assisting the French home front and soldiers on the battlefield. In the novel, Canfield predicts that the armistice would not bring a final resolution to the crisis, even with peace settlements and the idealism of Wilsonian democracy, for they would not be able to overcome the persistence of postwar resentment.

Seasoned Timber emerges as a testimony to the postwar failure to secure world peace. Canfield challenges interwar American isolationism with the rising tension, anti-Semitic atrocities, aggressive territorial expansion, and totalitarian regimes of Europe. She asserts that American values, virtues, and sense of unity are under threat by delusional materialism, the corruptive desire for power and influence, discriminatory attacks on American citizens, and the elitist class struggle against immigrants and working class that surfaced in the postwar era. With dedication to education and reform, Canfield speaks through T. C. Hulme, the principal of the Clifford Academy, whose loyalty to American, namely humanitarian, principles functions as a revelation of American ignorance about

the national sociocultural crisis and the possibility of impending war. Canfield uses her social novel as a vehicle to reflect on interwar politics and her concerns about peace, education, racial discrimination, class distinctions and resentments, gender prejudice, and injustice. Her characters' various encounters with these issues reveal a consciousness raising agenda in her writing. She integrates her commitment to democratic principles and humanitarian progressivism into her works, which address forms of discrimination, the detrimental effects of war, and even socialist ideas that underline the "fairness of distribution and pacifism," thereby engaging in a unique form of literary activism (Stout, "Dorothy Canfield" 46).

4.1. *THE DEEPENING STREAM*: THE AMERICAN HOME FRONT RESPONSES TO THE GREAT WAR

In American war literature, men's war fiction highlights battlefronts and servicemen's experiences; however, women's writing underscores (non)combatant lives and perspectives from the home front and the warfront, adding a "human dimension" to representations of war and traumatized selves, particularly women's wartime suffering (Carter 14). Women's WWI literature juxtaposes European women's direct experience of war and American women's multidimensional wartime encounters through their service in Europe as relief workers, and home front involvement as wives and mothers of enlisted soldiers (15). In this respect, American women's view of the Great War provides autobiographical portrayals, as seen in the works of Dorothy Canfield, Willa Cather, and Edith Wharton who embellished their narratives with their wartime observations in Europe (15). In *The Deepening Stream*, for instance, Matey and Adrian Fort follow the humanitarian drive of Dorothy Canfield and John Fisher to wartime France for relief work.

The beginning of the Great War in Europe reaches American shores through several newspapers reports with shocking effect and almost disbelief. As Matey exclaims, "'What are you thinking about, to imagine for a minute that modern European nations are going to war!'" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 198). She is immediately concerned about their friends in France and Belgium, without positing any political arguments or patriotic response. Canfield portrays the Quakers' dreaded view of war with an analogy to the Civil War, triggered by the recollections of destruction, political polarization among

Americans, and sectarianism. During the Civil War, Matey's Quaker father-in-law, Adrian, left his home to be a "stretcher-carrier," rather than a soldier. With her initial American innocence about the European war, Matey fails to interpret "the intensity of their Quaker horror of war," as they vividly recall the war that divided the nation and carnage they witnessed through their anti-war stance: "They needn't think that Friends were the only ones who knew that war was barbarism. All moderns did" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 199). Fort elders remember the misery of soldiers returning home, instead of a joyful homecoming celebration. Thus, Canfield criticizes the traditional association of wars with honor and glory; instead, they are a waste of human lives and potential.

From the first appearance of the Great War in US newspapers in 1914 to the end of the war in 1918, American society sought ways of interpreting the conflict in modern Europe, reading reports of murder, massive destruction, and acute suffering. According to Julia F. Irwin, people resorted to prewar experiences and the language of "disaster" to comprehend the true meaning of the global war and their humanitarian mission in Europe ("Disaster of War" 21). Rather than seeing it as a "man-made political crisis," Americans dismissed any sense of "blame and responsibility" and emphasized aiding the victims through humanitarian interventions (Irwin, "Disaster of War" 21). Matey is only worried about the safety of her close friends in the war zone, without any sign of hostility, anti-German sentiments, or ideological arguments: "What did she care about abstract ideas like Germany and Russia? Little Paul Vinet was not in the Russian army, was he? [N]or was Ziza's passionately loved husband in the German. . . . Was Mme. Vinet still in Louvain with Ziza?" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 200–201). Matey's response reflects a natural humane response, rather than a reclamation of politics or an invocation of historical alliances with European nations for, as Adrian's father adds, in the end "'[w]ar's always the same'" (202).

Matey's innocence about war is shattered by atrocity reports from Europe and memories of the Civil War. As Matey looks at the Civil War photographs in the family album, she observes the death and destruction of the soldiers in the trenches: "Corpses in uniforms, scattered sand bags, thrown-down rifles lay scattered about the trenches. . . . they were in grotesque and impossible attitudes so that they looked like nothing but badly stuffed rag dolls. They did not horrify her half as much as the steady patient misery in the eyes and

on the lips of [General] Grant" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 203). The analogy between the Civil War, the deadliest war in American history, and the Great War represents the postwar public response during the interwar years; specifically, a highly critical view of the wartime transition from US neutrality to the US belligerency.

As Jennifer D. Keene conveys, the global aspects of WWI reveal "diverse, often locally-based" American experiences based on different wartime agendas (268). Keene indicates three major groups who addressed wartime concerns: progressive reformers and their concern for Belgian war victims and humanitarian relief efforts after the German invasion; African Americans turning their attention to racial unrest in the United States and the persistence of the global color line in African colonies; and Jewish Americans concerned about their people in the war zone (268). Thus, Keene concludes that President Wilson's neutrality policy did not hinder American involvement in the global war, which expanded the meaning and scope of American neutrality and interference during WWI (268). Without a direct wartime association with patriotism, economic interests, or a political stance, the Forts are driven to humanitarian relief work in France.

Canfield's insightful narrative depicts war as a threat to the safety and well-being of women and children as a shattering, traumatizing experience. In this light, Matey imagines Mme. Vinet "sitting alone in the old home fighting down grief and fear and looking about her to see what pounds of flesh would be salable" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 211). Both Matey and Adrian feel uneasy about their inaction and personal security after receiving letters from their friends in France. As a Quaker pacifist, Adrian is willing to contribute to the Belgian relief effort and ambulance drivers' unit without fighting on the front, whereas Matey feels obliged to help women on the home front, "'There are plenty of women—poor things—to look out for everything that can be done behind the lines. Most of them are busy trying to earn a living for their babies and their old people!'" (212). Thus, Matey follows her Aunt Connie's bequest to help war widows and refugees, through which she might fulfill her aunt's will to find a purpose in life, regardless of social restraints on gender.

As Keene indicates, American well-to-do progressives travelled to Europe with humanitarian aid to civilians between 1914 and 1917 (269). Keene adds that the Committee for Relief in Belgium (CRB) spearheaded the American aid initiative to

Belgium civilians; however, it was only one of the leading organizations among "nearly one hundred charitable groups" that served this end in 1914 (269). In this context, the Forts are among the many participants of the American transatlantic relief crusade, seeking to reach war-torn Europe along with upper class American women, privately sponsored relief organizations, and the American Red Cross.

Canfield passes severe judgment on people who view the war as a time of business and profitmaking, rather than a humanitarian struggle. Matey is infuriated by her brother's, Francis's, letter about investing in the European war for personal gain. He writes that "'Fortunes are going to be made there. This war is going to last lots longer than most people think. The European factories can't begin to supply their demands. It is a wonderful new market'" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 216). Francis encourages Matey to invest in the steel and food industries in Europe through Aunt Connie's bequest since he has used all of his savings to buy stocks (216). Canfield implies that wartime profiteering and the desire for class mobility assist the war machinery, from the industrial production of arms and ammunition to providing the necessities of warring nations. Through her view of noncombatant war benefactors, she expands the geographical war zone and obvious perpetrators of the conflict beyond European nations to US borders.

According to Allan Kohrman, the wartime experience of the Society of Friends (Quakers) reflected their dilemma of maintaining a balance between their patriotic sentiments and faith in peace with the outbreak of the war, "atrocity stories," widespread misinformation, and governmental propaganda (52). Kohrman adds that their "peace testimony stresses respect for life, and by supporting the war effort they might have felt that they were protecting innocent people from slaughter by the Germans who they perceived to be a genuine threat to world morality" (52). With this in mind, the Forts are motivated by the same dilemma of home front Americans, particularly Quakers, as they are exposed to reports of rising aggression and receive letters from their friends in Belgium and France. When Matey decides to move to France, her sister, Priscilla, questions her choice, indicating parental responsibilities and the potential threats of war. To this end, her father-in-law, Adrian, makes a statement about true humanitarianism, "'[i]t will be a sorry day . . . when getting married and becoming a parent puts an end to being a member of humanity!'" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 221). Thus, he articulates the Quaker principle

of taking action through individual commitment and the moral obligation to ease the suffering.

Francis continues to view the European war as a "commercial scheme" against industrial and imperial Germany after the invasion of Belgium, considering the invasion as a legitimate German military tactic from his purely political and economy-based perspective (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 222). Matey denounces any political or economic interests in her pursuit of humanitarian relief, saying that "'why bring in political economy? Does he think we're going because . . . why, I'd like to tell him that if it was a German family that I loved as much as the Vinets, and owed as much to, I'd go to Germany just as'" (222–23). According to her father-in-law, Adrian, Matey sets a "better" example as a true Quaker than his own son, Adrian, guided by his Francophile interest and overall sympathy for the Allied forces (223). Matey emerges as a Good Samaritan with her willingness to help, despite the fact that the Great War has produced different factions on the basis of self-interest such as pro-war and pro-Allied individuals, neutrality advocates, pacifists, and voluntary relief workers.

4.1.1. American Involvement: Relief Work in France

After the outbreak of WWI, many American writers immediately dived into humanitarian relief work and raising funds for organizations in France, Belgium, and England (Price 1). Henry James's letters and pamphlets for Norton Harjes ambulance units and Belgian refugees, Gertrude Atherton's pleas for helping the wounded French soldiers through Le Bien-Etre, and Edith Wharton's charity work in France, including *The Book of the Homeless* (1916) edited by Wharton, served to this end (1). American propaganda assumed a different turn after US involvement in 1917, putting an end to American neutrality, the pro-Allied campaigns of support, and private charity efforts. By then, the American Red Cross and the American Expeditionary Forces would manage the home front and the warfront, which also produced a new agenda for such writers as Dorothy Canfield and Edith Wharton of "rehabilitating the reputation of France" (1). Canfield and Wharton praised wartime France with a vivid portrayal of life and culture for their American audiences (1). *The Deepening Stream* depicts French daily life and the struggle to survive based on Canfield's personal observations and her efforts to strengthen the close ties between the two nations through collaboration and sympathy.

The Fishers reacted to the Great War with their Francophile leanings and Quaker heritage, and desired to have a "more active role" after reading the war news about the suffering in Europe (Price 2). John Fisher volunteered to work for the American Ambulance Hospital at Neuilly in 1916, which would be followed by the arrival of Dorothy Canfield in Bordeaux with their two children, after considering the dangers of the voyage and possible German U-boat attacks (2). During her stay in France, she established a Braille Press for the war blind in Paris, cooked for her husband's ambulance unit, arranged a Red Cross home for refugee children in the Pyrenees, and managed a Red Cross clothing initiative in Versailles (2). Likewise, upon their arrival in Paris, Adrian starts working as an ambulance driver while the Forts live with Mme. Vinet. Matey observes that the French military needs more assistance on the front with the mobilization of older and younger men. Each day they receive such war news as "one Russian defeat after another, the murderous failure of the Champagne offensive, the savage invasion of Serbia, the Gallipoli tragedy" play out in 1915 (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 237). In the meantime, Mme. Vinet contributes to the war relief by writing letters to the soldiers' families, preparing clothing to be sent to refugees, and organizing "packages of cigarettes, matches, chocolate, writing paper, and woolen things" to be delivered to the front (237–38).

As part of this gendered division of labor, Matey is in charge of doing the shopping, paying visits to soldiers in hospitals, and helping their families, including war widows and orphans. She visits a girl and her new-born baby after her husband's death on the front: "He had been in Henri's regiment, and from his death-bed had sent word to ask Henri's American foster-sister to look out for his wife. He had no one else" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 238). She provides morale, finds her a safe place to stay, and gives her a means of making a living through her connections and aunt's bequest. Moreover, Matey and Mme. Vinet collaborate with several organizations and charities, mostly led by American and French upper class women, to assist traumatized, malnourished, and recovering refugees. At the same time, relief work to the severely wounded and psychologically disturbed is conducted under the constant threat of air-raids and German attacks "which might sweep them all into the ranks of refugees" at any moment (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 242).

As one of the headquarters of the French home front initiative, Mme. Vinet's home serves as a guest house and convalescent home to soldiers from the front. Regardless of their

socioeconomic backgrounds, soldiers voice their displeasure over their wartime role as "defenders of civilization" and any remark about "exploding shells, bayonet attacks, trench life—war in general" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 242). While they are quite appreciative of the home front mobilization, especially the distribution of clean clothes before returning to their regiments, they maintain their connection to normalcy and self-respect despite the carnage they witness in the war. Likewise, Matey visits soldiers on their deathbeds in order to receive their last words to convey to their families and to provide company and consolation in their final hours.

On the other hand, Adrian gives an account of the blind violence and murder of war through his personal observations. He expresses a sense of entrapment between his duty of helping soldiers as an ambulance driver and the burden of witnessing death: "'When we got to the hospitals one of the Germans was dead. He looked like a nice little kid gone to sleep. But I suppose he had killed other nice little kids too, before one of them killed him'" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 259). The fierce reality of bloodshed, the trenches, and hospitals challenge any self-righteous claims to profiteering and neutral wartime politics. John Mueller states that the First World War transformed the general view of war, despite that fact that it was not exceptionally different from earlier wars in history, considering its "duration, destructiveness, grimness, political pointlessness, economic consequences or breath" (3). In the aftermath of WWI, Mueller points out the emergence of a new perspective, the opposition to war, primarily rooted in the organized anti-war campaigns that took place before 1914 and the preceding century, a uniquely long peaceful period in European history (3–4). Additionally, Mueller notes rising concerns about scientific developments in warfare and the possibility of massive destruction in future global conflicts (4).

The arrival of American soldiers and the American Red Cross signals the beginning of the "American phase" in the Great War (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 290). French people and the media are fascinated by American engineers who immediately set up "barracks and hospitals" together with railroads and telephone lines for disrupted communication and transportation services (290). Although the arrival of American war relief organizations and soldiers seem belated, the French express their sense of indebtedness for American wartime services and contributions. They are delighted by the buildings adorned with equipment and the American workforce: "Aladdin built his dream palace

no more rapidly than, in the French legend, American war relief organizations leased huge buildings and filled them from top to bottom . . . with typewriters, steam radiators, roll-top desks, telephones, and self-possessed ladies in khaki uniforms, ready to bind up the wounds of war on a large scale" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 291). The emergence of American relief also adds to Matey's relief work because the victims of the war look to her for immediate access to American philanthropy. Through her daily encounters with American relief organizers, she becomes uneasy about their professional conduct, massive buildings and offices, and impersonal air, in some cases to the point of feeling alienated like a stranger or refugee (291). Matey appreciates their help and services; however, she is also critical of complexities, constant shifts in the organizational scheme between the home front and the warfront, and formal procedures which, at times, lack a direct solution-oriented approach.

As Julia F. Irwin states, American relief organizations reflected the US global mission through their help to Allied noncombatants and voluntary services for civilians across Europe, also reaching out to parts of Russia and the Near East, from the very beginning to the end of the conflict:

> Many of their projects focused on ameliorating pressing health and welfare problems, including hunger, homelessness, and illness. American volunteers established and staffed thousands of feeding stations, hospitals, and clinics; they distributed clothing, created employment opportunities, and assisted refugees and orphans in finding new homes. . . . [A]id workers established nursing schools for European women and fresh air camps for European children. . . . Going well beyond the quest to reduce wartime suffering, American humanitarians transformed civilian relief into a broader project of social engineering. ("Taming Total War" 770)

In this context, Matey's initial response reflects her feelings of gratitude about American humanitarian involvement through organizations led by the American Red Cross (ARC) and American soldiers. She forges her own battle on the home front through her assistance to war relief services. She is proud of ARC workers, their fulfillment of relief promises, and mighty representation of the nation. She brings Red Cross supplies to the relief headquarters, with great patriotic feeling: "Yes, that entire moving-van of a thing was full of shoes and malted milk and flannel petticoats and quinine and baby shirts and aspirin and wool socks, underwear . . . disinfectants—everything I had set down on my list was there, by the dozens, by the hundreds!" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 294). Likewise, the arrangement of a convalescent home for undernourished refugee children with rickets (a

vitamin D deficiency) startles Matey. The children are sent to spend winter on the southern seashore for a swift recovery. As Matey adds, "'One of the nurses in that office told me that they had wonderful cures of rickets there . . . undernourished children of six, like the little boys in that family from Lille, who have never stood on their feet, running around playing tag, inside five or six months'" (297).

4.1.2. A Critical View of the American Phase

With the US military involvement in WWI, the definition of a pacifist evolved with wartime patriotism and conformity, which transformed the advocate of "international cooperation for peace" into one in opposition to a war that might even end all war(s) (Chatfield 1920). The definition of a pacifist varied with tendencies to broaden or limit its scope, depending on the historical moment, political arguments, and philosophical views in question. Viewed as "draft dodgers, socialists, and communists," pacifists also embraced the original, though narrow, definition of the movement, as peace workers who "refused to sanction any given war" (1920). The adamant pacifists of the pre-WWI period were characterized by their religious convictions against murder and military service, and emerged as "conscientious objectors" to the Civil War and world wars. However, religious pacifists, including Quakers and Mennonites among others, did not confront the power of the government or social policy beyond the issue of military service (Chatfield 1920). Prewar peace advocates valued the power of law, treaties, and international courts in order to solve conflicts; nevertheless, many of them were nationalists with an elevated view of American virtues and interests: "If the nation ever should go to war, they believed, its democratic politics and humanitarian traditions would guarantee its cause to be just and necessary" (1921). Considering the changing definition of pacifism over time, the Forts maintain their Quaker pacifism and perform humanitarian services in France, while observing American military and humanitarian interventions with rising uncertainty about the meaning of war and its potential outcomes.

News about the closing of the Hendaye Convalescent Home for Children seems incomprehensible to Matey. During her visit to the American headquarters, she looks for the relief organizer in charge, adding that these children are likely to have pneumonia upon their return to Paris (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 302–303). As she waits for the new director, Dr. Taylor, she regrets overacting because "an organization of doctors and

nurses" never brings back "sick children from a warm sunny climate to a cold damp one . . . with practically no fuel in Paris tenement-houses" (303). However, she is informed about the repeal of the fund to assist other areas, despite her protests about poor living conditions in Paris and unfulfilled American promises. Adapting to the business-like manner of the relief organizers, she offers to pay for the children's care. Dr. Taylor rejects her proposal due to his organizational principles and their responsibility to the families: "'We can't possibly turn children entrusted to us over to private individuals. I don't doubt it would be all right in *this* case . . . but you see what an impossible precedent it would establish'" (305).

Through the relief organization's ironic policy-making, Canfield criticizes the emphasis on documentation and professional conduct, rather than taking initiatives with life-saving measures. Matey's acquaintance with an American benefactor, Mrs. Whitlock, helps the cause of refugee children through her connections. Her struggle with the relief organization also implies that the home front remains relatively neglected because relief organizations pay more attention to the warfront. At the centennial anniversary of the outbreak of WWI, Julia F. Irwin contemplates Great War humanitarianism, considered as a testament to "transnational humanity and compassion", and reveals a critical perspective concerning the relief efforts ("Taming Total War" 763). Irwin acknowledges that relief workers and organizations provided "food, shelter, clothing, and medical care" to soldiers and noncombatants in the European war zone; however, humanitarianism also accomplished multiple agendas as wartime propaganda, "a means of social control, and a tool of statecraft" ("Taming Total War" 763). As Irwin indicates, humanitarian aid "arguably helped to validate war by softening its horrors," while relieving soldiers' pain and worries about the home front, without adopting a direct opposition to war ("Taming Total War" 763).

Matey and Adrian have a glimpse of life from the home and war fronts, which transforms their view of human nature and American politics. With the armistice, Adrian further clings on to the Quaker principle of nonviolence, whereas Matey voices her skepticism about American humanitarianism, despite the fact that the French idealize the Wilsonian promises of relief, democracy, and justice: "There were times when she was caught up with every one else into a collective madness of hope and ardor over the American attitude as voiced by President Wilson. There were nights when she woke up suddenly to a sick

memory of the American bureaucrats who had almost brought those children back to winter Paris" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 327). The wives, sisters, and mothers of enlisted soldiers search for a meaningful way to honor the dead with the upcoming Peace Conference and President Wilson's postwar vision (328). As Canfield implies, any sign of revenge would prove to be a disgrace to wartime suffering. They needed to believe that the war would produce progress and a new vision out of all the death and destruction.

During dinner with American bureaucrats from the Peace Commission, they assume Matey is a pro-Allied American relief worker in France. Their view of the wartime experience totally differs from the Forts' humanitarian work, which is without political partisanship, economic interest, or hostility towards Germans. Consequently, Matey and Adrian's voluntary efforts and sacrifices are devalued because they do not serve the pro-Allied agenda and are not directly related to American relief organizations. Matey is disappointed by the members of the commission who discuss politics, investments, and postwar settlements in fancy hotels and at lavish dinner parties in Paris. Francis points out her unpretentious demeanor among the dinner guests, "'My sister,' he said proudly, 'has been absolutely living the wartime life of France for nearly four years. You can see by looking at her that she has not had more than her share!'" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 334), while calling attention to her "as a war exhibit, her thinness, her old remodeled dress, her plainly dressed hair, her lack of jewelry" (334). To Matey's dismay, Francis's letters express the reception of the American Peace Conference members with kindness and pleas to help German women and children: "'How much did the Boches think of French and Belgian women and children? It is their turn now'" (350).

Reinforcing Matey's disillusionment with the armistice, peace settlements, and the war, John Mueller notes that the unremitting diligence of anti-war individuals, though previously underestimated, contributed to changing perspectives towards the war among Europeans and Americans who had experienced the four-year conflict (12). In this regard, Mueller claims that "[t]he First World War served, therefore, essentially as a catalyst. It was not the first horrible war in history, but it was the first in which people were widely capable of recognizing and being thoroughly repulsed by those horrors and in which they were substantially aware that viable alternatives existed" (12). For Matey and Adrian, their wartime relief work deepens their sense of entrapment between voluntary humanitarian services and a sense of uneasiness about having taken part in the

continuation of the warfare as noncombatant participants. In the end, their wartime experiences challenge their home front idealism and the sense of duty that motivated them at the beginning of the war.

As Janis P. Stout states, *The Deepening Stream* addresses anti-war arguments through the wartime sacrifices and experiences of Matey and Adrian, who return to the United States with postwar disillusionment ("Dorothy Canfield" 42). Stout emphasizes that WWI seemed to be "glorious from afar," but turned out "ugly and senseless," with no resolution to violence and suffering ("Dorothy Canfield" 42). According to Stout, Matey and Adrian perform their share of humanitarian work through their representation of Quakerism, the "standard by which to judge war" ("Dorothy Canfield" 43). Quakers held meetings to discuss world peace, for which they immediately organized the Friends General Conference in 1914 and shared their projections with President Wilson about the foundation of "a Parliament of Nations" with "a World Court and a World Police" (Witte 85). The global conflict, American foreign relations, and internationalism were some of the key issues they addressed in their anti-war meetings, articles, and activities. Eventually, this formed their opinions concerning the establishment of an international organization (the League of Nations), peace settlements, and disarmament (85).

In a conversation with Mme. Vinet, Matey voices her concerns about the glorification of Wilsonian principles and the role of American delegates in the postwar world. According to Mme. Vinet, however, Wilsonian idealism merely transmits lofty ideas for future generations, rather than offering an immediate solution or progress, "'What he is doing—this faulty human being—is sowing a seed that no European in power would dream of sowing. Or is it America through him that is sowing it? Perhaps he himself hardly knows what he is doing. . . . He has only stated the theme. To develop it will take your grandchildren and mine—'" (Canfield, *Deepening Stream* 352). This is actually an attempt to reconcile President Wilson's wartime and peacetime policies, with the hope that the seeds sown for the future world would grow into something tangible. As Mueller explains, President Wilson had been acclaimed throughout the war, treated by most Americans with the utmost respect, because he set an agenda that prioritized "perpetual peace" in the face of conflict, despite his declining public image with the "acrimony of the peace talks" and the Congressional veto of the League of Nations (22).

4.2. *SEASONED TIMBER*: AN AMERICAN PRELUDE TO WWII

The Great Depression and FDR's New Deal years coincided with the Nazi rise to power in Germany, which resulted in "an explosion of unprecedented antisemitic fervor" (Dinnerstein 105). Protestant and Catholic agitators, and the hostile statements of social and religious leaders, provoked anti-Jewish aggression, violence in urban centers, and conspiracy theories that allegedly threatened Christian America (105). In the United States, Jews did not encounter segregation laws, deportations, or forced internment, as they did elsewhere, which permitted them to build lives and lucrative businesses in their own communities until antisemitism began to seep in from Europe (Dinnerstein 106). European antisemitism was gaining popular support and a violent edge with the collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires, leading to pogroms and attacks on Jews in many eastern and central European countries during the 1920s, particularly at universities (106–107).

Concerning the roots of anti-revolutionary, anti-alien, and anti-Semitic movements in the United States, Donald S. Strong points out a passage in the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798), the emergence of nativist societies in the 1850s, such as the Know-Nothings (the American Party) in opposition to the Irish Catholic immigrants, and the arrival of Jews from eastern and southern Europe in the late nineteenth century (14–15). The reactionary views to the newcomers resulted in the immigration restriction laws of 1921 and 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act), and arguments supporting the superiority of the Nordic race as promoted by Lothrop Stoddard, Madison Grant, and other eugenicists (Strong 15). After WWI, antisemitism gained political currency beyond a form of social discrimination. Approximately two million Jewish immigrants had arrived since the late 1880s, and some were targeted by the Red Scare, the wide circulation of anti-Semitic media, such as Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent*, and the Ku Klux Klan (15). The postwar economic downturn aggravated the clash between radicals and conservative groups through hypernationalist ideas and Jew-baiting on both sides of the Atlantic, and Jews once again became scapegoats for global economic, social, and political problems.

In *Seasoned Timber*, Dorothy Canfield places the intense political atmosphere of 1930s Europe in the background of her American setting, Clifford, Vermont, in the period right

before WWII.[23] Canfield begins the novel with the Principal of Clifford Academy, Timothy Coulton (T.C.) Hulme, who reads "an account of recent anti-Semitic brutalities under Hitler" from the *Manchester Guardian,* before he puts it aside with "a humanitarian familiar feeling of guilt over the passively accepted safety of his own life" (*Seasoned Timber* 5). Canfield's first glance at Mr. Hulme not only depicts his responsiveness to the humanitarian crisis and the serious offenses committed against Jews, but it also underlines the ironic American sense of security and isolationism from the raging unrest in Europe. Afterward, Canfield describes the geographical and symbolic situatedness of the Academy, which is literally set on a hill, "a slightly spot, set above the town on a shelf of rocky ground jutting out from the mountain" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 6). The Academy, at the heart of communal affairs, overlooks the town and represents American ideals, including exceptionalism, which will be tested by the encroaching threat: a paradigm shift from democratic foundations to an unwelcoming American society. In short, Canfield portrays the small town as the microcosm of the nation in her premonition of future conflict.

Canfield questions to what extent American idealism and values provide a safe shelter from the culminating political disarray in Europe, and how far Americans are prepared to go to defend their founding principles and democracy against authoritarianism and persecution. During the hundred and seventeenth year of the Academy, the opening ceremony brings out bittersweet memories of bygone school days for the WASP townspeople, who regard the institution with pride and respect. However, immigrant and working class citizens listen to "the bell and the bugle" from the Academy Hill with

[23] Tanfer Emin Tunç points out a white supremacist tradition in Vermont, "the Kake Walk," which was an outgrowth of minstrel shows performed by white men in blackface makeup during the Winter Carnival at the University of Vermont from 1893 to 1969 (47). Tunç states that the racist public spectacle signified an overwhelming nostalgia for the antebellum South, plantation slavery, and the servitude and submissiveness of African Americans that it represented, during a time of massive social change. Hidden under an unsuspecting carnival atmosphere, it evolved from a college fraternity event to a grand weekend, with economic benefit for the university and local businesses (47). Thus, Dorothy Canfield's choice of the fictional Clifford, Vermont, is not a coincidence in this sense, as the state, with all its whiteness, had a troubled racial history. Canfield portrays an interwar community of people who struggle with issues of discrimination, social integration, and the class mobility of immigrants. In their uncompromising defense of "true" American identity and values, anti-Semites and nativists clash with liberals during the election campaign for a new Academy trustee and the consideration of a peremptory bequest.

disbelief, questioning the illusionary American promises of equal opportunity and class mobility based on merit: "Polish and French-Canadian workmen in the woolen mills and chair factory down at Clifford Depot renewed their resentment against the American pretence [sic] that all young people have the same opportunities for success . . . although everybody knows that in the modern world nobody can succeed who has not also money and influence" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 33). Through the disillusionment of immigrants, one can infer that the intrusive power of materialism, elitism, and nativist sentiments jeopardize American ideals and promises long before the outbreak of WWII, during the turbulent 1930s in the United States.

The nostalgic narrative style of *Seasoned Timber* sustains a traditional sense of American security and indifference through occasional references to European affairs, at first without specific associations or historical parallelisms. On one such occasion, during his business trip to New York, Mr. Hulme is distracted by alarming headlines concerning "the Fascist bombing of civilians in Spain" and "more Nazi savagery in Germany" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 141). In direct contrast, he juxtaposes violence and the rising conflict in Europe with scenes of civilized modern cityscapes and amenities in New York, distancing himself from the tension and aggression between European nations and stifling small town life in Clifford. Associating civilization with urban life, security, and progress, he visits a Jewish woman before meeting with Mr. Wheaton. Mr. Hulme's observations of the exhausted and invisible working class, the ungracious response of an elderly woman towards his empathy and decency, and the suffocating air in the subway cast a dim light on the city with its fast-paced lifestyle, perils, and insensitivity to human suffering. His encounter with Mr. Wheaton, one of the wealthy trustees of the school, proves that antisemitism, ideological frictions, and discriminatory policies have already reached American cities.

The novel's political undertone reveals Canfield's warnings about impending social conflicts, specifically race relations, discrimination against immigrants, and concerns about social mobility in American society. A white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elitist, Mr. Wheaton harshly criticizes the acceptance of Jewish students to the school and the arrival of (Jewish) immigrants in general:

> "You don't realize the danger, T.C., safe in those blessed green hills, you don't *realize* that only way to handle that problem is ab-so-lute exclusion. The world's no

> place for a dewy idealist like you. Let in Jews, and they'd make one mouthful of you. Admit just one—and the ghetto pushes in after him. We old-Americans must stand solidly against the flood of them that's pouring in from Europe!" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 147)

Antisemitism in the United States materialized during the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era. Hasia Diner indicates the 1877 Joseph Seligman incident, regarding a Jewish millionaire denied entry to the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York, as the first anti-Jewish response (4–5). The nativism of the 1920s enacted anti-immigration sentiments into law, such as the 1924 National Origins (Johnson-Reed) Act, which targeted European Jews, among many other groups (Diner 5). From the 1877 incident to the mid-1920s, "many private colleges and universities, clubs, resorts and hotels, hospitals, law firms, and other employers" either established quotas against Jews or directly denied their admission (5). Furthermore, anti-Jewish narratives and stereotypical images circulated widely during the lynching of Leo Frank in 1916 and Woodrow Wilson's initial veto (later overridden) of Louis Brandeis's nomination to the Supreme Court, which disseminated the idea of a "Jewish problem" in the United States (5).

Through Mr. Hulme, Canfield severely criticizes the modern individual, who lacks commitment to democratic principles and the power to resist violence, manipulation, and fear—common control mechanisms over the masses. With his share of self-blame, Mr. Hulme observes the alarming rise of fascism around the world: "'do you see anybody seriously trying to invent new and decent ways to keep order in crowds? You do not. They accept indecent ones. They turn tail—like me up here. Or they holler for Fascism, like me down there'" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 222). With this in mind, he relates the crisis in Europe to the resurgence of an oppressive pattern that acquires power over people through public indifference to injustices. Thus, he comments on the current situation in Europe as a type of mob mentality, "'[k]nocking down enough people and kicking them when they're down, to scare the rest into letting you get away with murder—the minute Mussolini began to stick out his jaw, I knew what he was up to. When Hitler knocked down the Jews and began to kick them, I recognized the gesture'" (222). As Mr. Hulme's argument suggests, the rise of totalitarian regimes silences the multitudes through ideological, psychological, and economic control and the justification of tyranny for their own gain.

The portrayal of the Clifford community, a microcosm of the United States, is a commentary on American interwar society and the world in general, with Canfield's apprehension about the European conflict on the horizon. Adolf Hitler engaged in systematic propaganda in order to secure his totalitarian rule and expansionist policies in Europe, concentrating on the German people's "frustration, displacement and anxiety" in the post-WWI era and during the global economic depression (Miller i). Hitler offered Christian Germans a way to channel their war-related resentment and insecurities, in this case towards the victimization of Jews through collective hostility and action (i). He also targeted communists, appealing to the fears of the middle and upper classes, particularly "bankers, industrialists, the Protestant and Catholic churchmen, the statesmen, and the newspaper owners" through the alleged conspiratorial connection between Jews and communism, and the devaluation of democracy (Miller ii). Thus, he transformed self-destructive anger into public support in the postwar era through Nazism's anti-communist stance, which appealed to Europeans and Americans as well (ii). The Great Depression was equally alarming to American industrialists, churchmen, politicians, and agitators who viewed the economic crisis, organized labor, unemployment, and the New Deal as pathways to communist and socialist revolutions, favoring Hitler's anticommunist and anti-Semitic autocracy as a measure to preserve big business, class distinctions, and white Anglo-Saxon Christianity (iii).

Mr. Hulme is challenged by the racist, sexist, and classist preconditions of Mr. Wheaton's bequest upon his death. He leaves more than one million dollars to the school, provided that it is named after him as a preparatory school for all-American (WASP) boys. This also involves the exclusion of Jewish students and raising the tuition to keep out the non-elite:

> "George Clarence Wheaton found dead—apoplexy—will leaves Academy one million dollars for endowment—two hundred thousand for buildings—on condition name be changed—Wheaton Preparatory School—also exclusion of all Jewish students—Jewish defined as person with any relative of Hebrew blood—codicil prescribes also that tuition be . . . [.]" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 315)

In response Mr. Wheaton's will, Mr. Dewey, another trustee, and Mr. Hulme take a silent oath, believing that the time has come "for all good men to stand up for their country" (316). Their resistance to un-American dictates champions the principle of human dignity above capitalism, intolerance, and enmity. Their defense of American principles amounts

to the defense of the nation in a war against tyranny, which alludes to the colonial struggle against British rule for independence and the abolition of slavery through the Civil War. Unfortunately, many prominent prep schools, colleges, and universities were committed to such anti-Semitic admission policies during the interwar years, and Canfield draws attention to this practice in her novel. Rutgers University, for instance, acted in accordance with prevalent anti-Jewish admission policies, resulting in the Jewish community's reaction to discriminatory quotas in higher education institutions receiving public funds (Greenberg and Zenchelsky 295). Elite colleges also opposed applicants considered "socially undesirable" and attempted to preserve their "exclusive" WASP student profile through restrictive policies (Greenberg and Zenchelsky 296).

4.2.1. Antisemitism: A Trial of American Promises

The post-WWI era involved a deep sense of insecurity and the drive to seek "normalcy" after the internationalist war years, the October Revolution of 1917, and the Bolsheviks' rise to power in Russia, which triggered anti-immigration policies that were designed to keep white Anglo-Saxon Protestant American identity intact (Dinnerstein 78). During the 1920s, the children of Jewish immigrants would "enter the elite Protestant world" in search of education, employment, and housing; however, they encountered anti-Semitic discrimination, regardless of their acculturation (78–79). Postwar antisemitism was prevalent, supported by the popularity of pseudoscientific, eugenic arguments about the white Christian race, the alleged threat of communist and socialist revolutions under the leadership of Jews, and the fear of the "Protestant elite" losing domination in prominent American institutions (79). As a result, Jews came to represent the ideological, class-based, racist, and religious concerns of different groups. Furthermore, the Red Scare and labor unrest gave rise to the communist hysteria that scapegoated foreigners, particularly Jews (79). In reaction to their rising numbers among European immigrants and increasing public visibility, many WASPs began associating Jews with materialism and radicalism.

In their democracy versus autocracy campaign, Mr. Hulme and Mr. Dewey visit Clifford residents in order to change their minds about Mr. Wheaton's bequest. Mr. Hulme claims that accepting it would mean running the risk of losing the American ideals and democracy for they fought and died in the Great War:

> "[H]ere's Fascism, right in *our* lives, trying to buy us into endorsing one of its dirtiest ideas. Our plain old town that's just gone about its business for a hundred and seventy years—it's been picked up and set down on the front line where the fighting is. The race-prejudice of that bequest is an open, shameless attempt to knock down and kick to death the principles we were brought up in and still believe in. . . . Over in France when our soldiers first began to arrive, everybody on both sides was wondering. . . . Well, they did stand up—they went forward under fire. . . . The question is, Can *we* stand up under it? Or can't we?" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 393)

With freedom, dignity, and cultural diversity threatened by the autocratic leaders of Europe, Canfield's novel signifies a cautionary narrative to the American public in the interwar period. The postwar era reflected a political swing between radicalism (youth culture and labor movements) and conservative policies that targeted liberalism and immigration. According to John Higham, the anti-Semitic nationalism that emerged as the embodiment of wartime "100 percent Americanism" and anti-German sentiments also targeted German Jews who held wealth and prominent positions during the Wilson administration (278). This continued into the interwar years in the form of a violent backlash against radicalism and immigrants, particularly Jews and Catholics.

Historically, race and color politics had been integral to the experience of American Jews who witnessed the Jim Crow years, mob violence, and racist legislations that defined the position, rights, and privileges of people categorized as white or "non-white" with firmly-held cultural assumptions and constructions of American identity (Diner 13). American Jews encountered biological racism that made their whiteness questionable in the late nineteenth century and discrimination in the fields of higher education, housing, and employment through individual or institutional initiatives, which differed from the encounters of African Americans, Asian Americans of Chinese or Japanese descent, and Native Americans (14). These groups blamed direct governmental orders, court decisions and laws, including the Constitution, for their grievances (Diner 14). Jews arrived in search of equal economic opportunities, having seen pogroms, riots, and instability in Europe that victimized them and kept them at the lowest social stratum. This was why they appreciated the promises of the US citizenship: however, acquiring social acceptance was another matter (15).

Between 1920 and 1924, Henry Ford's weekly *The Dearborn Independent* published a series of anti-Semitic articles, called "The International Jew," which were later compiled into a four-volume set of books. The articles appealed to a wide range of audience, who

appreciated his anti-Semitic campaign, sent money, and asked for more material. Supporters included academics, Christian ministers, and leaders of associations, among others (Dinnerstein 82). The popularity of the articles revealed wide acceptance of anti-Jewish views, stereotypical representations, and readiness to adopt discriminatory policies. To name a few, "banks, insurance companies, publishing houses . . . advertising agencies, school districts, major industrial companies . . . hospitals, universities, and law firms" discriminated implicitly or openly in their employment policy (Dinnerstein 89). Thus, unsurprisingly, Mr. Hulme's campaign, which flies in the face of anti-Semitism, attracts considerable media attention. A reporter from a New York newspaper asks questions about his family line, claiming that he might be a Jewish man for defending the cause, and even has a "Jewish nose" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 400). This type of Jew-baiting circulated biased assumptions and stereotypical narratives that were then used to discredit individuals fighting to destroy those very same assumptions and narratives. It was a strategy akin to the red-baiting of communists, or labelling white people who sympathized with African Americans "nigger-lovers" (as seen in the Gastonia novels analyzed in Chapter Two).

In *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Matthew Frye Jacobson indicates how the interconnection between social discrimination and racial difference reveals a vicious cycle in the unstable redefinition of whiteness for groups such as the Irish, Italians, and Jews in the United States (174). The whiteness of Jewish immigrants in the United States remained unsettled under "the shades of meaning attaching to various racial classifications, given the nuances involved as whiteness slips off toward Semitic or Hebrew and back again toward Caucasian" (176). Thus, Jacobson points out the unstable socioeconomic and cultural dynamics behind the definition of Jewish (American) identity: "the question is not *are* they white, nor even how white are they, but how have they been both white and Other?" (176). The color line was used to define the status of Jewish immigrants, which resulted in the negroization of Jews in order to fit them into existing racial stratifications and then assimilate them into the mainstream. Therefore, it was not easy to categorize them as black or white citizens, considering white supremacist concerns during the interwar years. As Goldstein states, "If they could no longer defuse the danger they saw in the Jews by likening them to African Americans, they aimed

instead to study, clarify, and expose their role as an unstable element in white society" (126).

From the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, Jews, much like African Americans, were subjected to a "physiognomical surveillance" on the basis of physical attributes, namely the shape of the nose, eyes, skin color, and hair, viewed in relation to "an essential, immutable, inner moral-intellectual character," which legitimized their identity with distinctively self-referential characteristics (Jacobson 174). The sociocultural significance of these attributes depended on the historico-political discourse of the specific era, as they defined group identity within, and in relation to, the mainstream, leading to a compromise or the persistence of (racial) difference. The fact that the New York reporter referred to Mr. Hulme's "Jewish nose" suggests that these discourses were still very much a part of the interwar world, and that as a defender of Jewish rights, Mr. Hulme could also be subjected to anti-Semitism as a "Jew by association." This called his own whiteness into question (as many WASP Americans still considered Jews, as non-Protestant Christians, to be non-white), rendering him a race and class traitor, and placing his own safety and security into jeopardy.

While discussing the bequest with Mr. Hulme, Mr. Lane, the President of the Windward County National Bank, considers upper class white Americans who might settle down and make investments in such an exclusive town: "'Substantial men from all over the East would flock here to buy summer homes; they're *looking* for such a place. We could get anything out of them! They'd be people with money, real money. . . . It would seem a haven to them'" (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 417). Clifford is meant to be a sheltered place for wealthy Americans, free from racial and class threats posed by minorities and immigrants, particularly Jews. According to the anti-Semitic narratives of the time, "Jews were set apart by their greedy practices, their filthy bodies, their licentious behavior, and their isolationist tendencies. They were a race of people set apart" (Corrigan and Neal 149). Thus, living with them was unthinkable to individuals such as Mr. Lane. Consequently, he portrays the arrival of Jews in Clifford as a form of cultural and moral decay, and fears the gradual displacement of Americans by foreigners:

> "If the Jews got in, the way they have in the Catskills." It was the picture Downer had painted for Timothy, the picture many people had elaborated for his benefit—broad-bottomed women waddling around in shorts and high-heeled pumps, flashy

> men with cold bloodsuckers' eyes, bedclothes hanging out the windows of fine Colonial houses, noisy, ill-bred young bucks shouldering Clifford people off their own sidewalks. (Canfield, *Seasoned Timber* 418).

Mr. Hulme reacts by underscoring the use of racism as a manipulative tool that threatens modernity: "'You're talking exactly like the professional Southerner who used to say, when anybody suggested that maybe something ought to be done about the high tuberculosis rate among Negroes, 'Oh, I see you want your daughter to marry a nigger'" (418). The analogy between racism and antisemitism reveals the scapegoating of minorities in the name of white supremacy, and the inevitable punishment of nonconformists who point out injustice. At the end of the novel, Canfield elevates American principles through the rejection of the bequest, secured by a majority vote. The people of Clifford defend American ideals, primarily equal opportunity and education, through a democratic voting process.

4.3. CONCLUSION

The Deepening Stream and *Seasoned Timber* highlight the interwar American politics through Dorothy Canfield's wartime experiences in France, her critical analysis of US involvement, and commentary on the rising threats to peace and democracy in Europe. *The Deepening Stream* addresses her disapproval of the American isolationist response to the Great War through her allusions to German aggression stories and the ordeal of the European home front as documented in newspapers and personal correspondence with friends and associates. Canfield casts a different light on American humanitarianism via her positive portrayals of the individual effort of local organizations, led by American and French women and the ARC, later reinforced by American military intervention through the American Expeditionary Forces. Her view of the war shifts from initial American innocence and empathy with the French home front to an ambivalent commentary on American humanitarian intervention (patriotic gratitude towards the American mission, yet criticism of the business-like relief organizations) and postwar disillusionment.

Seasoned Timber confirms Canfield's critique of the American Peace Commission and conveys additional concerns about postwar Europe. The peace settlements fail to prevent, if not trigger, the rise of fascism and antisemitism in Europe through resentment towards disarmament and war debt. She denounces the insistence on American isolationism from

European affairs, seeing the outcome of the autocratic regimes in Germany, Italy, and Spain, and the persecution of Jews. During the economic and ideological crisis of the Great Depression, the Clifford Academy functions as a place to reclaim American principles and human dignity in opposition to the victimization of immigrants, particularly Jews, and working class citizens.

Dorothy Canfield's life in France reflected her multidimensional wartime experience: a relief worker, a writer of short stories and articles, a war correspondent, and a wife and mother. According to Ida H. Washington, she used her writing as a way to earn monetary support for relief projects, creating war sketches, such as "The Little Soldier of France" and "In the Brussels Jail" that appealed to the home front audiences (89). Her wartime experience emphasized the need for relief efforts in France, which rendered her writing a relief initiative that raised humanitarian consciousness about the war. Washington notes that while her writing was modeled after her wartime experiences in France, through her recollection and analysis of these years in the postwar period, "It was not until 1930 that Dorothy's memories of the war and its aftermath . . . were finally ready to emerge, in her most autobiographical novel, *The Deepening Stream*. By then she was able to see the intense pain of the war years and the troubled postwar period" (97).

Dorothy Canfield enriched her domestic fiction with her war related political agenda after the end of her voluntary relief work in France, and was deeply concerned about the outbreak of another world war (Stout, "Writing Politically" 263). In her "true (anti)war novel," *The Deepening Stream,* Canfield portrays the postwar political reactions of disillusionment and the foreboding sense of neutrality (263). Thus, Canfield exemplifies the interconnection between the personal and domestic lives of her characters and culturally defined concerns, ranging from racial prejudice, class dynamics, gender roles, and global conflicts. Likewise, *Seasoned Timber* highlights the need for socioeconomic justice through her opposition to racism, antisemitism, sexism, and elitism. She emerges as a dedicated advocate of the democratization of education, which she defends as a right rather than a privilege. Her social novels emphasize the duties and responsibilities of a democratic nation to its citizens who, in the end, are the ultimate guarantors of American values and virtues.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation addressed six neglected American women writers and their social novels. Through them, they commented on the American interwar decades and their radical and conservative perspectives, economic crisis in industry and agriculture, environmental disasters ranging from severe drought to dust storms, labor unrest and "Okie" migration, and concerns about global conflicts culminating in two world wars. These writers criticized the social and political milieu of their time in light of their progressive social reform agendas. The four chapters analyzed the rise of the New American Woman, the plight of working class families in high-profit industries and modern cities, debt-ridden farm communities struggling with drought, depression, and the dust bowl, and global threats to democratic and humanitarian principles. To this end, each of these chapters examined two overlooked interwar novels written by women while discussing each of these themes.

The interwar decades characterized conflicted perspectives regarding the Great War, which shaped postwar American society, cultural traditions, and the political scene through a push towards compliance and conformity, and a resistance to freedom, change, and progress. The repercussions of WWI also laid the foundation of another global crisis, arising from unresolved conflicts and rivalry between radical and conservative fronts. As Diane Yancey indicates, wartime regulations resulted in the Roaring Twenties' heavy indulgence in the freedom of mobility and consumerism, free from the government interference seen during wartime mobilization (12). The strict measures that managed wartime consumption and production levels, with an emphasis on home front sacrifices and collaborative work to help soldiers and the starving people in Europe, were no longer in place. The Fuel Administration's control of coal and gasoline supplies, the Food Administration's campaigns for "meatless Mondays" and "wheatless Wednesdays," and the National War Labor Board's workplace dictates were replaced by laissez-faire capitalism and deregulation (Yancey 12).

Americans' eagerness to return to normalcy paved the way for the election of Warren G. Harding in 1920 with a firm belief in Republican agenda of "small government and private enterprise" (Yancey 12). The modernization of American society was also shaped by postwar developments in many aspects of life: automobiles, the migration to urban

centers for industrial jobs, women's suffrage, educational and employment opportunities, and smaller families through Margaret Sanger's birth control movement. The flapper's outlook, manners, and morals were criticized, yet popularly represented in the media, including advertising, films, and literature. The criticism of some members of the American middle class and the "Lost Generation" of writers underscored the dangers of blind conformity to changing life standards and the emptiness of materialism, but this, by no means, stopped individuals from indulging in the temptations of the decade (37).

The iconic flapper emerged as a symbol of the Roaring Twenties in the works of artists and writers such as Edna St. Vincent Millay, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway (Dumenil, *Modern Temper* 7–8). Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* depicted a middle class conformist and consumerist businessman, who became another icon of the decade. However, the domination of flapper and Babbitt characters overemphasized the white, urban, middle and upper class experience of the 1920s, with considerable neglect of labor unrest in industry, class conflict, and racial tension (i.e., race riots in Chicago, African American migration to the North, and the New Negro movement with the Harlem Renaissance and the rise of black nationalism) (8).

White supremacist resentment towards immigrants and labor activists generated nativism and anticommunism in the aftermath of the First Red Scare (1919-1920) and animosity towards organized labor through immigration restrictions, attacks on the civil liberties of radicals and reformers, and support of the Ku Klux Klan (Dumenil, *Modern Temper* 8–9). The KKK defended Victorianism as "the most visible and powerful guardian" of the 1920s (Coben 136), and promoted prejudice against African Americans, Jews, Catholics, and Asians as part of its vision for postwar America. Klan members' support for immigration quotas, segregation on a national level, and the disenfranchisement of blacks in the South demonstrated their influence in local and national politics (137). In principle, they safeguarded white Protestant cultural values and identity as shaped by traditional gender roles, and publicized this in works such as "The Klansman's Criterion of Character," published in March 1924 in *Searchlight*, its national newspaper (137–38).

Chapter One of this dissertation dealt with Gertrude Atherton's social novels *The Sisters-in-Law: A Novel of Our Time* (1921) and *Black Oxen* (1923) and their focus on the emergence of New American Woman and her new morality in the pre-WWI, wartime and

postwar era. Atherton defies American Victorianism and the flapper icon as depicted in the works of Fitzgerald through her portrayal of educated, self-reliant, career women who refuse to take shelter in traditional roles and in the superficial liberation of bobbed-haired, dancing, drinking youth. In *The Sisters-in-Law*, Alexina's faith in the security of the upper class homemaker is shattered by her gradual awareness of working class women in the public sphere and her husband's socioeconomic and legal manipulation of her life. Her sister-in-law, Gora, sets an example as an independent businesswoman running a boarding house, a trained nurse, and a promising writer. She serves as a mentor to Alexina, raising her awareness about equality, her legal rights with respect to property and investments, her intellectual interests that can be developed through proper training and education, and the availability of modern opportunities. Alexina's disillusionment with the Victorian legacy and her lack of interest in the flapper revolution compel her to seek alternatives. She is drawn to socialist arguments that highlight class distinctions and the oppression of the working class. Atherton regards the New Woman's true liberation as economic self-sufficiency, political consciousness, and self-growth through experience, education, and faith in her own potential.

In *Black Oxen,* Atherton advances her reconceptualization of the New Woman and youth with the return of Mary Ogden to New York as rejuvenated Madame Zattiany. She challenges traditional gender and class norms with her stunning youth and beauty, refined manners, and aristocratic wealth. She is viewed with suspicion due to postwar xenophobia, but once she reveals her renewed identity and vision transformed by wartime suffering, relief work, and scientifically regained youth, she gains admirers, along with bitter criticism from gracefully aging Victorian women and jealous young flappers. Madame Zattiany resists aging because she despises the delusional waste of youth in the flapper's lack of commitment. Instead, Madame Zattiany dedicates her reinvigorated self, experience, and wealth to the postwar reconstruction of Europe, particularly the well-being of Austrian orphans. Interestingly, Atherton wrote *Black Oxen* after receiving rejuvenation treatments to restore her youthful vigor and intellectual productivity. In this regard, she creates a postwar American citizen liberated from traditional gender roles and class, aging, and restlessness of the inexperienced youth with her renewed sense of duty and activism.

In the aftermath of WWI, the US economic boom, market growth, increased industrial production, credit and installment-based consumerism, and the modernization of life drove the rural population to urban centers. Postwar American society came to represent "a white-collar paradise" of chain stores, early suburban housing projects, advertising, and escapist entertainment (Pells 11–12). Beyond the surface of the 1920s was a rising number of unemployed Americans, the result of machinery and technological developments, not to mention the crisis in agriculture, mining, and the textile sector (12). As Dumenil expresses, the Roaring Twenties was hardly a "period of unrelieved hedonism" and the disappearance of reform (*Modern Temper* 10). Isolationism, nationalism, and Wilson's uncompromising politics ended the League of Nations, just as much as the anticlimactic peace settlements and postwar dismay. The Great War was not to be blamed for social and political changes in the industrial economy, immigration, and urbanization, all of which actually predated the war (Dumenil, *Modern Temper* 10). Changes in the ethnic and racial structure of urban and industrial communities continued to occur after the war, with many seeing the New Women and the freedom of secularism as threats to tradition, religion, and morals (Dumenil, *Modern Temper* 10).

Postwar industrial growth, urban sprawl, and modernization prompted almost twenty million rural Americans to leave their farms and move to cities (Montgomery 10). The shifting population provided unskilled workers for industrial production and led to fluctuating market demands. Before the war, northern textile workers had gone on strike in Lawrence, Passaic, and Paterson, New Jersey, where they were able to gain higher wages and shorter working hours. The Ladies Garment Workers, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and unions of weavers and knitters in Philadelphia had also engaged in strikes and lockouts in 1921 (Montgomery 11). In order to escape labor unrest and union activities, cotton mills moved down South, leaving New York, Philadelphia and other northern cities as a way to increase production levels, decrease costs, and access seasonal labor without the interference of workers' organizations. However, eventually, northern textile mills in southern nonunion areas resulted in the 1929-1930 strikes (Montgomery 12).

The second chapter analyzed the Gastonia Strike of 1929, also known as the Loray Mill Strike, in North Carolina through Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) and Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930). *To Make My Bread* portrays the migration of farmers from

the Appalachians to mill towns and the socioeconomic shift that transformed landowners and farmers to mill hands. The McClures sell their land to a lumber company after a long winter period and move to a booming mill town for jobs and modern city life: houses with electricity, streets with shops and cars, and education for their children. However, mill life merely offers malnutrition, sickness, and death, long working hours with low wages under a labor efficiency system (i.e., timers, the mechanization of production, and the strict supervision of workers), a gendered wage gap, and class struggle. The disillusionment with agrarian freedom and industrial work triggers the southern mill workers' gradual awakening to the organized labor movement and collective action, regardless of age, race, and gender. Millwork turns into a legacy, passed from mother to child, from Emma to Bonnie and John, under industrial capitalism's slavery of the southern poor. Bonnie McClure's roles as mill worker, former child laborer, mill mother, and local labor organizer, resemble the life of Ella May Wiggins, the balladeer and martyr of the Loray Mill Strike.

In *Strike!*, Mary Heaton Vorse narrates the textile mill strike through Roger Hewlett and Ed Hoskins, evoking the different stages of her career and awareness of labor journalism and writing. Commenting on strike efforts and the "speed-up" system in mills, Vorse indicates common interests and alliances among the benefactors of mills—textile barons, middle class residents, or "the comfortable people," government officials, and mill-funded media and ministers. Labor organizers and striking workers resist the threat of mob lynching, the paternalism of mill owners, the use of Christian virtues in the oppression of the poor, and the notoriety of labor unions in the midst of anticommunist hysteria. Additionally, women labor organizers endure the sexism of labor leaders and mill society. However, older women and young flappers stand side by side on picket lines as participants of the strike, negotiators and mediators facing the militia in the midst of mob vigilantism and communal criticism. Mamie Lewes and many other women represent Ella May Wiggins as neglected union and relief organizers who contributed to reform efforts through their labor activism and maternalism. Emphasizing unhealthy living and the inhumane working conditions in mill cities, Lumpkin and Vorse provide multidimensional views of the strike. They demand change and progress for the working class by narrating the plight of women in textile industries, the organized labor struggle,

and leftist movements. In their proletarian novels, working class women utilize their power and potential for mill families, class solidarity, and unionization.

Far from comforting Americans after the 1929 stock market crash and the ensuing economic deterioration, President Hoover adopted a reactionary response to rising social unrest. The Bonus Army marchers, almost 20,000 WWI veterans and their families, took to the streets of Washington, DC to demand a bonus payment, promised years before, for their wartime services. However, military troops led by General Douglas MacArthur engaged in tear gas attacks and destroyed their encampments in the summer of 1932, leaving the White House under the protection of guards, poised against veterans who were denounced as communist insurgents and criminals. The failure of American capitalism encouraged a drive towards change in liberal and radical circles, as the futility of agrarian, bourgeois, and individual solutions became apparent (Cooney 9).

In the preface of *Dancing in the Dark*, Morris Dickstein articulates that the signs of the economic crisis that became the Great Depression materialized in the postwar agricultural sector before the stock market crash of 1929 (xix). He states that soaring unemployment went from three million in December 1929 to ten million at the beginning of 1932, with a severe reduction in wages and bank failures. As he conveys, President Roosevelt attempted to restore public trust in the financial system through a bank holiday; yet, farm foreclosures continued, hindering economic stability: "Some sixty thousand farmers lost their land to foreclosure between 1929 and 1933. No less than 40 percent of Mississippi's farms were on the auction block when Roosevelt was inaugurated" (xx). The 1930s was the decade of bankruptcy in business and finance, breadlines, Hoovervilles and homelessness, unemployment in urban centers, and migrants and refugees (Eldridge 3). Severe drought and dust storms destroyed the topsoil along with Great Plain farmers' crops, livestock, and communities, leading almost 2.5 million people to move from Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas to California. Known as Okies, they struggled to survive with bank loans on their mortgaged farms until foreclosure and migration to nearby states placed them in the national headlines as depression and dust bowl refugees (3).

Chapter Three examined the Great Depression and the drought and dust bowl years through Josephine Johnson's 1935 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Now in November* (1934) and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown: A Novel* (1939/2004). *Now in November*

depicts the Haldmarne family's reverse migration from the city to the mortgaged family farm due to economic crisis and urban unemployment. Marget describes the situation of farm families at the mercy of natural forces, the unstable market economy, and the unregulated banking system. They live in total isolation during natural disasters akin to biblical plagues such as severe heat and drought, the loss of crops, and fires. Johnson's novel underlines farmers' sense of failure and disillusionment with urban industrial growth and rural agricultural freedom. Moreover, Johnson comments on the gendered oppression of farmers during the economic and ecological crisis; namely, the male breadwinner's burden as farm owner and women's neglected efforts and concerns about the unpredictable future. The Haldmarne sisters feel insecure and underestimated, despite their hard work to survive in a declining rural economy, crop failures, and farm debt that could even be passed onto their children.

In *Whose Names Are Unknown*, Babb portrays the plains farmers of the depression and dust bowl years in Cimarron County in the Oklahoma Panhandle through the story of Dunnes and other struggling farmers. Babb portrays dryland farmers' concerns regarding taxes, planting high profit crops, bank loans, mortgages, and big farmers encroaching on small farms. However, they neglect the drought cycles that historically occurred on the plains and adopt mechanized farming methods without considering the severity of dust storms, wind erosion, and the loss of topsoil. Voicing women's experiences as farmers, wives, and mothers, Julia Dunne acknowledges their fear of the future, as she observes dust covered fields and their entrapment on farms during "black blizzards." Julia describes people getting sick and choking on dust, and migrant farm families heading to western states, mostly California, because of years of reckless agricultural policies such as overplanting and overgrazing on dry land. She keeps a dust bowl diary, which integrates stories of farmers who would come to be recognized as depression and dust bowl refugees, or merely Okies.

As Dickstein notes, economic failure resulted in the American public's identification with the plight of the poor as "they stood in for everyone else's economic anxieties" about the collapse of American capitalism and high-esteemed "unbridled individualism, self-reliance, the entrepreneurial spirit, the promise of prosperity and social mobility, the open horizons once represented by the frontier" (xxi). In the 1930s, the unattainable American Dream was often depicted in the arts, which portrayed middle class concerns, offering the

promise of dignity and fulfillment. Communal collaboration and sustenance came along with governmental control and intervention, unionization among workers, populist messages in literature, and New Deal programs taking initiatives for "the least fortunate" (Dickstein xxi). New Deal agencies such as the Public Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration transformed the nation's infrastructure with the construction of dams, roads, bridges, and public buildings along with their support for intellectuals and the welfare system (xxi–xxii). The New Deal changed the role of individuals and government in its attempt to restore order and the well-being of the nation. Johnson's and Babb's proletarian protest novels address the individual struggle of farm families and their communal plight. They look for agricultural policies, government regulation of the depression economy, and a new dream since agrarianism, capitalism, and the Puritan work ethic fail them.

In the midst of all the suffering, the Farm Security Administration's Photography Unit documented the rural depression in order to sustain public support for federal policies (Dickstein 94). Raised in Oklahoma and Colorado, Sanora Babb worked for FSA migrant laborer camps during the depression, which provided authenticity and deeper insight for her dust bowl refugee novel. The second part of *Whose Names Are Unknown* examines farmers' migration to California where they encounter labor camps, agribusiness, the unionization efforts of agricultural workers, and other seasonal laborers. The Dunnes resent the high production/low cost labor policy, their inability to access healthcare and education, and the harsh treatment of California residents. They also grow to despise corporate farm owners, mobs attacks on labor organizers, and the segregation demands of locals (i.e., separate schools and communities for Okie families). As a result, they form an alternative multicultural community with other farm laborers as a way to combat racist treatment, nativist policies, and the dehumanization of migrant laborers. They collaborate in organized labor efforts, strikes, and raising consciousness about the American working class.

Therefore, Johnson's and Babb's social novels should be read alongside other important Great Depression cultural products, such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Dorothea Lange's photographs. Johnson and Babb excel in their depiction of women and their suffering during the 1930s, which contrasts with the usual narrative form of male protagonists in radical literature and their allegorical and metaphorical journeys, as

illustrated by *The Grapes of Wrath*. These social novels also have an added dimension of realism, a result of their respective writers' direct connections with farm communities and personal experiences. Johnson and Babb demand action and agricultural reform by exposing the perils of soil erosion and working class domestic suffering, namely sickness and starvation on the farms. Babb further explores western migration to the valleys of California, where Americans face discrimination. These novels appealed to the New Deal for solution-oriented federal policies and reforms in the financial system, agricultural industries, and the conditions of the poor in light of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and the Works Progress Administration of 1935. Johnson and Babb criticize the indifference to rural America and the forgotten American farmer in the Midwest and on the Great Plains.

By the late 1930s, the world was on the verge of another war with Nazi Germany's aggressive expansion policy, rising territorial conflicts, and ideological clashes in Europe, despite Woodrow Wilson's efforts to ensure a lasting peace through his Fourteen Points, which served as the basis of the Treaty of Versailles. Wartime hostilities, rivalries among European powers, resentment of the peace settlement, the impracticality of the League of Nations, and the fear of another war dominated the postwar cultural and political landscapes. Wilson's global vision about postwar peace, diplomacy, and the world economy was challenged by American isolationism, the Senate's reservations about the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, the rise of fascism, and eventually the depression. The uncompromising demands of the Allies, antagonism towards Germany, and problematic nation building efforts in Europe led to another global conflict in 1939.

The last chapter of this dissertation chronologically complemented the interwar decades, beginning with the Great War and ending with WWII. Dorothy Canfield's interwar social novels critically portray American responses to the Great War in *The Deepening Stream* (1930) and growing prewar tension culminating to WWII in *Seasoned Timber* (1939). *The Deepening Stream* integrates the wartime relief activities of Dorothy Canfield and her husband, John Fisher, in France through the portrayal of Matey and Adrian Fort. The Forts' Quaker pacifism and humanitarianism are tested by the suffering and destruction in Europe, as they read war reports and correspond with their friends in Belgium and France. Matey voices her genuine concern about the war zone while observing American neutrality, anti-German propaganda, and profit making in war industries. However, she

feels obliged to help the women and children of the war, so they decide to move to Paris. Adrian volunteers for an ambulance unit while Matey assumes an active role in French home front relief. The Forts maintain their pacifist and nonviolent principles in the face of patriotism, human suffering, and their growing uncertainties about the war. Matey's dinner with the Peace Commission embodies her disillusionment, as she listens to bureaucrats discussing wartime hostility, economic and diplomatic retribution against Germany, and their lucrative investments. The Great War brings together pro-war bureaucrats, pro-Allied advocates, and noncombatant relief workers under the banners of humanitarianism and Wilsonian idealism, serving what appears to be the same agenda but in very different ways.

By the late 1930s, the rise of communism and fascism seemed equally threatening due to growing skepticism about "centralized dogmatic movements" (Cooney 19). Canfield's *Seasoned Timber* draws upon this reality to critique American indifference to European affairs, the rise of totalitarianism and persecution, and the political isolation of American small towns and modern cities. The clash between T. C. Hulme, the principal of Clifford Academy, and Mr. Wheaton, a wealthy trustee, reveals the hideous expansion of nativism, antisemitism, and an undemocratic view of American exceptionalism through "100 percent Americanism" during the isolationist and patriotic interwar years. Mr. Wheaton's bequest grants more than one million dollars, provided that the academy is turned into an "all-American school" that excludes Jewish students, girls, and lower class students. Mr. Hulme resists the bigoted terms of the bequest and defends the American ideals of freedom, opportunity, and meritocracy in education, thereby exposing the totalitarianism behind the anti-radical and anti-foreign donation. The democratic decision-making process of Clifford's citizens results in the victory of American ideals and human dignity over elitism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and sexism.

As this dissertation has argued, the Roaring Twenties served as a "transitional stage between the old America and the new" (Palmer 182). Americans viewed promises of change and progress with delight, and some skepticism, through the self-assuring familiarity of the past. They appreciated the depiction of the traditional American family and rural life on the covers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, while migrating to cities in search of industrial jobs, urban life, and entertainment at jazz clubs. They set the stage for today's consumer capitalism, and the firm belief in "states' rights" and "America

First" (182). The turbulent 1930s added to these concerns, with its crippling poverty, class inequality, unemployment, and economic suffering suggesting the failure of capitalism—an anxiety that, along with xenophobia, antisemitism, and class and racial conflict, also shapes life in the twenty-first century. The sociopolitical criticism and protest documented in the journalism, literature, and photography of the era spoke—and continues to speak—for the mistakes of industrial, agricultural, and environmental policymakers grappling with global warming and climate change. As in the interwar years, we are always on the brink of another world war, with regional clashes in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East threatening to turn into global conflict.

Gertrude Atherton's novels *The Sisters-in-Law* and *Black Oxen* portray the New American Woman in direct contrast to traditional Victorian women and the sexually liberated flappers of the 1920s. The economically independent, educated career woman embraces life, experience, self-reliance, her power and potential, and her right to make decisions beyond traditional norms and expectations. With women's expanding opportunities, roles, and public visibility, Atherton's heroines redefine the true meaning of liberation and equality. They appear as working class women, mothers, strike organizers, and union workers in the Gastonia Strike of 1929. Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* and Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* depict women's protests of gender and class politics during their active participation in labor unrest, despite the left's underestimation of the gender struggle at home, the workplace, and within union circles. These two chapters contribute to women's continued search for progress and change in the face of gender, race and class limitations.

Josephine Johnson's *Now in November* and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown* critique the outcomes of mechanized farming on dry land, regardless of soil and wind erosion, irrigation problems, and drought cycles. Booming agricultural and industrial production resulted in the unforeseen economic, ecological, and social unrest in postwar rural and urban America with the growth of agribusiness and the oppression of non-unionized agricultural workers. Lastly, Dorothy Canfield's *The Deepening Stream* and *Seasoned Timber* serve as a warning to American society, signaling the failure of peace settlements, humanitarian organizations, and democratic principles due to national interests, nativist and expansionist policies, and indifference to political tyranny and wide-spread persecution. The significance of these social and political novels resonates

with contemporary concerns and agendas about women's rights, working class poverty, farm communities' struggle with corporate farms and agribusiness, environmental disasters affecting ecosystems and society, and global conflicts in the twenty-first century.

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Tarih: 23/01/2024

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Date: 23/01/2024

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1. Does not perform experimentation on people or animals.
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HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA

Tarih: 23/01/2024

Tez Başlığı Toplumsal Aktivizm Romanları: Birinci ve İkinci Dünya Savaşları Arasında Amerikan Kadın Yazarları

Tez Başlığı (Almanca/Fransızca)*::……
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DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.
(Unvan, Ad Soyad, İmza)
Prof. Dr. Tanfer Emin Tunç

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

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	Status	**PhD** ☒	**Combined MA/MSc-PhD** ☐	

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