

KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY
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SCAPEGOATS: THE *FEMME FATALES* OF WORLD WAR II

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SCAPEGOATS: THE *FEMME FATALES* OF WORLD WAR II

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Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this
has been indicated in the thesis.”



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ABSTRACT

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May, 2014

The hard-boiled *femme fatales* of *film noir* are usually represented as evil females and as a result, they are often seen as a danger to society. However, this notoriety usually results in their deaths and/or murders. In the end, they are transformed into victims. This thesis focuses on this contradiction in two regards: What are the main reasons that they become victims as *femme fatales* and what is the meaning of this dilemma? This research answers such questions by exploring and utilizing René Girard's theories of violence and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection through the textual analysis of the following films: *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1945) and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (Lewis Milestone, 1946). The perils of these *femme fatales* are discussed in terms of the background of increasing women's participation in the workforce in America during World War II. This study concludes that the hard-boiled *femme fatales* are actually uncanny victims that bear traces of deep-seated social concerns and present a discussion about women's new roles during the war years.

Keywords: René Girard, Julia Kristeva, *film noir*, *femme fatale*, sacrificial act, surrogate victim, abjection, working women, World War II.

ÖZET

GÜNAH KEÇİLERİ: İKİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞININ ÖLÜMCÜL KADINLARI

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Film Noir dünyasının sert kadınları *femme fatale*'ler genellikle kötücül olarak temsil edilmektedir ve bunun neticesinde toplum için tehlike arz eden kadınlar olarak görülürler. Buna rağmen, şöhretleri genellikle kendi ölümleriyle/cinayetleriyle sona erer. Sonunda birer kurbanı dönüşürler. Bu tez iki bakış üzerinden bu çelişkiye odaklanıyor: *Femme fatale*'leri kurbanı dönüştüren temel nedenler nelerdir ve bu kadınların dilemmasının anlamı nedir? Bu araştırma, René Girard'ın şiddet teorisini ve Julia Kristeva'nın "abjection" kavramını keşfederek ve onlardan faydalanarak, bu sorulara kültürel ve bireysel katmanlar üzerinden şu üç filmin analizi ile açıklama getiriyor: *Çifte Tazminat* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Scarlet Caddesi* (Fritz Lang, 1945) ve *Martha Ivers'in Tuhaf Aşkı* (Lewis Milestone, 1946). Bu *femme fatale*'lerin tehlikeli bulunma nedenleri ise İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında iş gücüne katılan kadın sayısının artışı bağlamında tartışılıyor. Bu çalışma, bu kötücül *femme fatale*'lerin aslında derin toplumsal kaygıların izlerini taşıyan ve savaş yıllarında kadınların yeni rolleri hakkında bir tartışma sunan esrarengiz mağdurlar olduğu sonucuna varmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: René Girard, Julia Kristeva, *film noir*, *femme fatale*, kurban sunumu, ikame kurban, abjection, çalışan kadınlar, İkinci Dünya Savaşı

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INTRODUCTION

The hard-boiled *femme fatales* of *film noir* became prominent with their characteristic features such as seduction, ruthlessness and cleverness. In such circumstances, denotative causes were taken up to present *femme fatales* as a danger to society. However, their glories usually ended with death and they were often depicted as victims. On this point, this research is based on two questions: What are the main reasons that cause hard-boiled *femme fatales* to become victims and what do the dilemmas of these *femme fatales* tell us? Drawing on these questions, this thesis explores the relationship between hard-boiled *femme fatales* of *film noir* dating from the mid-1940s and the women who had worked in war-related jobs in America at the time. To answer the above questions and clarify the bond between *femme fatales* and working women, I use major theories of two theoreticians: René Girard's notion about violence and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. As the corpus of the thesis, I focus on three movies that reflect the changing concerns of working women as the war was winding down: *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1945), and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (Lewis Milestone, 1946).

During the German occupation of Paris, French writers started publishing novels emulating American hard-boiled detective fiction (Ahearn 2009) and in 1945, Marcel Duhamel founded a publishing house that focused on this genre, which was known as *Série Noire*. During the German occupation, new Hollywood films were not screened in France but in 1946 such movies began to be shown in Parisian

cinemas (Luhr 2012: 20). In this way, French moviegoers such as Nino Frank discovered a new kind of melodrama that resembled *Serié Noire* and they christened it “*film noir*.”

Paul Schrader, however, argues that *film noir* is not a genre per se (1972: 53). He argues that unlike western and gangster films, *film noir* is not characterized by “conventions of setting and conflict” but is identifiable by its subtle atmosphere (Schrader 1972: 53). As William Luhr claims, it is the combination of several genres, especially the genre of horror (2012: 29). At this point it will be helpful to note that the word “*noir*” appears to have more meanings, the first of which relates to the atmosphere of these movies in the sense that they tend to be dark and bleak. They have a “violent tone, tinged with a unique kind of eroticism” (Borde & Chaumeton 1955: 17). The second meaning refers to the techniques that were used in shooting the films because they were often shot at night or indoors by using pools of light rising from the darkness.

Unlike Paul Schrader, Luhr does describe *film noir* as a genre in the sense that “everyday, contemporary life, without supernatural intervention, can become as terrifying as any monster movie” (2012: 29). *Noir* films usually tell crime stories imbued with an atmosphere of violence and are set in a gloomy brutal world where the average man or woman can shed all notions of mercy and acquire the power to destroy her/his own society. As a result, society is threatened by normal characters who represent a hidden danger.

William Luhr states that “the destabilization of traditional gender securities” is a significant feature of *film noir* (2012: 28) due to the fact that men are under threat of emasculation and are gripped by a fear of losing their power (Luhr 2012: 30). This state of affairs arises from the presence of female characters who are

powerful and clever, the *femme fatales* so typical of classic *noir* films. The *femme fatale* is “a woman who is very attractive in a mysterious way, usually leading men into danger or causing their destruction” (Cambridge Dictionaries online 2014) and hence the most apparent feature of such women in classic *noir* is their ability to seduce men. They are often depicted as being evil and having limitless power that they are able to wield as the result of their cleverness, and the majority of the time they use that power to bring men under their sway to do as they wish with them.

Hard-boiled *femme fatales* differ greatly from female characters that had predominated in previous genres of film (Luhr 2012: 31). First of all, they have self-confidence and do not appear to need to seek the approval of men for their actions, and in that sense they are independent from men. In addition, such female characters are often involved in crime and lead men into a deadlock. They are represented as being manipulative and the perpetrators of *noir* crimes.

Nevertheless, these hard-boiled *femme fatales* are not heroines and in most *noir* films they are punished; by the end of the films, they are either murdered or excluded from society. As Mary Ann Doane points out, “their textual eradication involves a desperate reassertion of control on the part of the threatened male subject” (1991: 2) and precisely for that reason they cannot be heroic. Indeed, they are represented as inherently baleful women who must be punished for the simple reason that they are *dangerous*. The hard-boiled *femme fatales* seem to be a secret threat capable of destroying mankind because of the fact that they are able to act as leaders. These women do not just bring about the demise of male protagonists but they are also depicted as symbols of the devastation of society and the ruination of families. They bring their own husbands to ruin and murder anyone who gets in their way and as a result, the *femme fatale* is a threat to everyone.

On that point, I focus on the reasons for this punishment and newly created status of *femme fatales* by this punishment. In *Violence and The Sacred*, René Girard examines Greek tragedies and rituals from various cultures to investigate how “surrogate victims” play a role in a “sacrificial act” to stop the mysterious power of violence. That notion will be a useful framework for understanding the main reasons of this punishment and the importance of the new status that emerges for *femme fatales* who are punished.

Girard states that the function of the sacrificial act is to eliminate violence and counter the threat of conflict in society (1972: 14). Modern societies, however, are unable to realize this function because the sacrificial act is not in fact indispensable (1971:14). Primitive and modern societies react in different ways to avoid the danger of the destructive power of violence. In *Violence and The Sacred*, Girard gathers these into three groups:

- 1) Preventive measures in which sacrificial rites divert the spirit of revenge into other channels,
- 2) The harnessing or hobbling of vengeance by means of compensatory measures, trials by combat, etc., whose curative effects remain precarious, and,
- 3) The establishment of a judicial system—the most efficient of all curative procedures (1972: 20,21).

Girard argues that sacrifice has mysterious contents (1972: 1) and its effects cannot be explained with tangible proof. It does, however, have a certain function in terms of violence, and modern societies usually do not think about the relationship between violence and the sacrificial act (1972: 2). As a result of this, modern society is blind to this function and think of that act as a mystery.

On the other hand, primitive societies are aware of the function of sacrifice and are aware of the danger of vengeance (1972: 15). The reprisals of vengeance can easily corrupt society and the sacrificial act is more important for them in the

quelling of violence. In modern society, Girard argues, the intensity of this feeling has been lost and a system of justice has taken the place of the sacrificial act (1972: 15). The judicial system is a dominant and specialized authority, but if vengeance is a process that continues forever, the judicial system cannot restrain it; it does, however, block the vicious circle of vengeance while at the same time rationalizing it, shaping revenge as it wishes (1972: 22). Seen in this light, the judicial system has the power to say the final word for the cycle of vengeance and this power arises from its supposed objectivity (1972: 22). It does not belong to anyone or any particular group and everyone is expected to abide by its rules and judgments. As a result of this, while it punishes the “right” victim, it can stop reprisals (1972:22). In contrast, sacrificial acts play an active role in primitive societies, which are under threat of vengeance due to a lack of a judicial system. Primitive societies try to break symmetries of reprisals with the sacrificial act to protect themselves from the danger of extinction (1972:23).

At this point, a critical question arises: What happens if modern society has a judicial system that cannot fulfill its duties? War is the most extreme manifestation of violence and in such circumstances, modern societies take on aspects of their primitive counterparts to achieve purification as the result of justice’s lack of power; if that were not done, violence could lead to the extinction of entire societies (Girard 1972). In this way, people take the law into their hands.

According to Girard, the sacrificial act recreates a community’s unity and strengthens social bonds by suppressing rivalries, jealousy and conflicts (1972: 8). But to attain this harmony, there is a hidden rule: “For order to be reborn, disorder must first triumph” (1972: 79). For this reason, the chaotic atmosphere of disorder can be systemized by sacrificial act.

Girard defines the consecutive steps of a sacrificial act in the following manner: At first, there must be an atmosphere triggered by “culpable” characters in which violence can spread. The web of conflict begins to grow over time and as it does so, more people start to be affected as though it were a contagious disease. After a period of a time, these culpable characters lose control of this web and more and more people are affected. The power of violence increases, becoming an unstoppable force of destruction. At this juncture, adversaries begin to resemble one another and a “sacrificial crisis” starts. People are transformed into each other’s monstrous twins and if nothing is done to bring this to a halt, they will become extinct. In this situation, people must find a victim who can assume responsibility for the violence and be sacrificed in order to eliminate the danger of extinction. This victim is called a surrogate victim and Girard refers to this process as a sacrificial act (1972: 1-89).

The narratives of *noir* films which are analyzed in this thesis be compared to Greek tragedies in terms of the way violence is settled, but there is one important difference: the people who are affected by the violence try to purify it. In short, they are faced with a sacrificial crisis and they choose a surrogate victim, whereupon they perform the sacrificial act. In contrast with Greek tragedies, however, every guilty character is punished in the end, and the punishment is meted out by the judicial system.

Furthermore, according to this concept one important point is revealed in the three films analyzed: *femme fatales* becomes surrogate victims. This occurs because after their deaths/murders, the destructive effect of violence, which increases at the beginning of the story suddenly, stops. Their deaths prevent another possible crime. Also, these deaths appear like a kind of purification. At this point, it can be said that

Girard's concept suggests a consistent pattern for understanding the reasons of *femme fatales'* victimized situation.

In addition, identifying the surrogate victims in the *noir* films selected is useful for understanding the social dynamics of the US as the war was winding down. The surrogate victim, as the person seen as being responsible for spreading violence in society, often appears to be arbitrarily chosen. As a result, this individual becomes something of a scapegoat and thus it can be argued that the surrogate victims in *noir* films are the scapegoats of mid-1940s America.

Additionally, this study focuses on the features of surrogate victims to explore the meaning of *femme fatales'* dilemma. However, since the surrogate victim is defined as a status, its position is not rigid. Girard states that the "appropriate" surrogate victim has to be the part of community, but also notes that the victim should not be an inseparable part of community; in other words, she/he should be at the fringes of the community (1972: 39). In this way, when the time comes to face a sacrificial crisis, everybody can point out that person as being responsible for the crisis. A candidate's situation becomes clear with the increasing effects of the sacrificial crisis, which implies that this postulant individual is an ordinary member of society until the time comes for purification. Thus, anyone can be surrogate victim and the process of selection is arbitrary.

Arbitrariness is crucial in understanding *femme fatales'* dilemma. This situation generates a new question: Why are *femme fatales* chosen as victims every time? My answer is related to World War II: women started to do men's jobs.

In the previous decade, the world had been shaken by the Great Depression and as a result many men lost their jobs. During this period of time, the idea of hiring women was often met with hostility. In 1941, however, the United States entered

World War II and great numbers of men went to war. As part of national policy, women started taking up jobs that had previously been done by men (Tuttle 2007: 61). This state of affairs was nothing new, as women had contributed to war efforts for centuries, but World War II was different in that for the first time women began to work in war-related industries (Lockhart & Pergande 2001: 4) as crane operators, riveters, welders, toolmakers, shell loaders and police officers (Chafe 1991: 121-34), which was a significant development for women.

It was commonly thought that women would hold those jobs only temporarily until the men returned from the war, and that women's true place was in the home, taking care of their families. Propaganda campaigns were based on the idea that women were merely "helping" men during the war years (Bellamy 2011-2012: 10). In 1942, Paul McNutt, the chairman of the War Manpower Commission (WMC), said that, "no women responsible for the care of young children should be encouraged or compelled to seek employment which deprives their children of essential care until all other sources of supply are exhausted" (Anderson 1981: 5). Debra Bellamy has pointed out how that discourse is indicative of the perceived relationship between family values and the economy (2011-2012: 9).

However, some women's opinions changed during the war; while some wanted to return to their homes and families after the war, others felt empowered by their new positions. As Andrew Kersten points out, many women sought to continue their careers in "those new, high-paying positions in the factories, in the field, and in government service" (2006: 130). As a result of these changing ideas, some people in American society became concerned about the fact that so many women were working and while single women took on these jobs at the beginning of the war, more and more married women entered the work force as time went on (Goldin

1990: 152-154). As a result, they had less time to look after their households and there was a fear that families might suffer and American family culture would change.

In addition, when men returned from the war hoping to take back their jobs, they found that women had occupied their position in society, which prompted fears that women were usurping men's roles. Men were forced to share their power with women, which implied that they could lose their authority in work life. As Luhr argues, this situation resulted in "gender anxiety" (2012: 32) which in *noir* movies is represented by "images of dominating women," i.e. *femme fatales*, and "emasculated men" (Luhr 2012: 32), hinting at the situation of working women in American society during the war years.

In light of this, Girard's notion about the surrogate victim would be helpful to explain *femme fatales'* dilemma in terms of cultural and historical dynamics. *Femme fatales* are a reflection of American's concerns about women's new role/position in the society. But another important question emerges here: What is the importance of this dilemma for American women?

Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection would illuminate *femme fatales'* dilemma on a more individual level. Abjection can be explained in relation to numerous situations, but in the end it defines a "something" that exists in an ambiguous situation, as neither an object nor a subject (1982: 2):

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable (Kristeva 1982:1).

Kristeva states that abjection designates things which have a tendency to be seen as a potential danger for the rules of society and order (1982: 4). They have to be

eliminated from the order in order to create and protect the corporal boundaries of the individual as well as the constitutive boundaries of society. Some elements have to be coded as abject and excluded from the order. For this reason, abjection reveals something problematic: the dilemma of society. As a result, that which is positioned on the boundaries of things is usually abject, and this can apply to society, order or rules (Kristeva 1982: 4).

In *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind*, Kelly Oliver argues that Kristeva develops a theory of identity and difference that bargains between order and chaos (1993: 12). Oliver asks one particular question that is significant for this research: “Why are certain characteristics or persons excluded from society?” (1993: 12) and she replies referring to Kristeva’s notion of “limit” (1993: 12), “the limits of identity.” According to Oliver, limits are important because they outline an identity and without identity, there is no human life or society (1993: 12). On that point, “things” placed on the verge of limits might be designed abject.

Oliver’s explanation reveals a structural affinity between the function of surrogate victim and abjection. Whereas Kristeva’s notion is related to a much more individual level, Girard’s notion concerns with societal level. In this way, *femme fatales’* dilemma can be clarified in terms of expectations concerning the roles of American women. When American women began taking over men’s jobs, they encountered a new border. As argued by Emily Yellin, these women experienced a kind of freedom they had never encountered before (2004: 70). However, after the war national policy suddenly changed.

In his article “Leave Her to Heaven: The Double Bind of the Post-War Woman,” Michael Renov uses the double bind¹ as an idea concerning the consequences of the situation created by the changing discourses on women during World War II and after it (1991: 229-231). After the war, propaganda that had been used to increase women’s participation in the work force had changed from Rosie the Riveter (a cultural icon of working women in wartime America) to previous images of housewives (Bellamy 2011-2012: 1-19). But women’s new identities could not change so rapidly. In this way, these women were neither working women nor housewives in the eyes of society, and this situation was reflected in their perceptions of themselves as well. As a result, such women were placed in a double bind.

In light of this, it can be said that the surrogate victim is someone who suffers from the double bind, and in this study it is the *femme fatales* who are the surrogate victims occupying the position of being borderline, abject. Taking into account the fears about working women in mid-1940s America, the *femme fatale*’s victimized situation can be seen as the representation of women who took up employment. To sum up, *femme fatales* in mid-1940s *noir* movies are representative of the concerns about working women and hence are a reflection of working women’s dilemma.

This study is organized in three main sections which are in turn structured as three similar parts: The steps of the sacrificial act, the surrogate victim and conceptualizations of the role of the *femme fatale* as a surrogate victim. In the first section *Double Indemnity* will be analyzed in light of Girard’s notion about violence. Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection is used to explain the *femme fatale* in *Scarlet*

¹ Gregory Bateson published his ideas about the double bind theory in 1956: “A double bind is an emotionally distressing dilemma in communication in which an individual (or group) receives two or more conflicting messages, in which one message negates the other” (Wikipedia).

Street in the second section. In *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*, which is the third section, Girard's notion of mimetic desire is applied along with Kristeva's notion of abjection to reveal the characters' dilemmas. This organization makes it possible to clarify some of the aspects of working women's situation through an analysis of victimized *femme fatales* in mid-1940s *noir* films.

SECTION 1

DOUBLE INDEMNITY

This section is arranged in three parts. In the first, the story of *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944) is analyzed through the use of René Girard's concept of violence, which makes it possible to tease out the constitutive steps of the sacrificial act. Building upon this, the second part discusses how Phyllis is the surrogate victim who purifies "impure" violence through a detailed discussion of the elements of the movie's narrative and narration. Towards the end of this chapter, the meaning of Phyllis as a surrogate victim will be argued from the point of view of the status of working women in 1940s America.

The movie opens with credits. There is the silhouette of a man on crutches walking towards the viewer throughout the credits. This footage is not a real event in the story. It is an imaginary scene only established during the credits. As the wounded man's silhouette expands to fill the entire screen, the narrative begins. The sun has not yet risen and darkness prevails. The streets are dark and gloomy and a car is driven madly along the road. It stops and a man emerges from the car, shown from behind. He enters the office of an insurance company. Janitors clean the offices before sunrise. It is time for the man covered in blood to unburden his conscience. He starts to record his story on a dictaphone. Now, his voice and flashbacks pull the audience into his story. *Double Indemnity* tells the bleak story of Walter Neff.

Walter Neff is thirty-five years old, an unmarried insurance salesman. When

he goes to see one of his clients about a car insurance policy, he meets his client's charming wife, Phyllis Dietrichson. After she meets Walter, she arranges a secret meeting with him. She asks him about accident insurance. Phyllis wants to kill her husband for the insurance money. Walter figures out her plan. He leaves the house immediately but he cannot stop thinking about her and her plan. Their affair starts. Then, Walter decides to become a part of this crime. He organizes the murder to get twice the amount based on a clause about double indemnity.

After Mr. Dietrichson's dead body is found on the train tracks, even though the police believe that it is an accidental death, the company's claims manager and Walter's friend Barton Keyes start to investigate this accident. He suspects that Phyllis and an accomplice were involved. But getting the insurance money will not be as easy as Walter and Phyllis had thought.

The ongoing investigation is not good for Walter and Phyllis. When suspicions emerge about Phyllis, Walter cannot trust Phyllis anymore. He thinks he was used by her for this crime. So, he kills her to get away with the first murder, but as a result he gets involved even more deeply. This concept suggests a consistent pattern in the dynamics of the *noir* world, in which violence is spinning out of control.

2.1. The Constitutive Steps of the "Sacrificial Act" in *Double Indemnity*

René Girard argues that the aim of the sacrificial act is to recreate a community's unity and strengthen social bonds by suppressing rivalries, jealousy and conflicts (1972: 8). But to attain this harmony, there is a hidden rule: "For order to be reborn, disorder must first triumph" (1972: 79). According to Girard, violence spreads if there is the slightest chance of it disseminating because it is a "communicable" thing (1972: 30). In this way, it develops quickly and can be

transformed into a threat for the existence of society. Before this transformation, however, something must trigger the violence.

Girard notes that the behavior of characters in a tragedy is driven by two concepts: “noble serenity” and “hubris” (1972: 68). These features can be seen in *Double Indemnity*’s main characters, Walter and Phyllis. Towards the end of their first meeting, Walter explicitly flirts with Phyllis; however, she responds coldly to his advances. During their second meeting, Walter listens calmly to Phyllis’s concerns about her husband but when he senses Phyllis’s dangerous plan, he becomes angry. He feels that Phyllis insulted his intelligence by thinking that he would not understand what she was up to. Phyllis berates him in a high-handed manner, thinking the worst of him. Walter then accuses Phyllis of being “rotten.” When they lose their calm, their arrogant natures emerge, revealing their hubris.

These “culpable” characters incite violence which in turn creates conflict (Girard 1972: 68). An analysis of Phyllis’s alleged reasons for wanting to carry out this murder reveals how that violence begins to escalate. Phyllis claims in the beginning at Walter’s home that her husband is cruel to her. This cruelty is described as a kind of humiliation: he yells at her when she buys a pair of shoes or a dress, and he keeps her shut away. She feels that she is worthless in his eyes and he wounds her arrogant nature. Murdering him is a kind of revenge for Phyllis, but she is also interested in the money she will receive from the insurance claim if he dies.

Walter is not so disparate from Phyllis on this point and he is like “the guy behind the roulette wheel.” Phyllis acts like a trigger that, at long last, prompts him to “crook the house.” From the very beginning he had been ready to be led astray. Moreover, he says that Phyllis’s husband does not deserve such a woman. In his mind, Walter deserves Phyllis. So his hubris prompts him to draw up a devious plan.

The web of the tragic conflict starts to slowly spin outward. The first step is the signature. When Walter comes to Phyllis's home for the car insurance policy, her husband actually signs an accident insurance policy without realizing it. Afterward, Walter suggests to Phyllis that they carry out a scheme for a murder that will grant them double indemnity. They plan to kill Mr. Dietrichson when he goes to his university reunion, but it has to look like an accident (if he dies in a train accident, the company must pay a double indemnity).

As the plan develops, violence begins to affect other people with its destructive power. This is the way that violence spreads. When Mr. Dietrichson talks about the insurance policies with Walter, his daughter, Lola, is playing Chinese checkers with Phyllis. Phyllis uses her as a witness to the conversation between Walter and Mr. Dietrichson. In this way, a clue is given about Lola: she will fall under the sway of this violence. There is another example: when Phyllis phones to say that her husband changed his decision about the university visit, Walter is shown talking to Keyes at the office. Walter pretends that he is talking to someone else. At that moment, Walter and Keyes are framed together (**Figure 1**). As with Lola, this closeness provides a hint about Keyes: he will be affected as well.



Figure 1

The symmetries of the characters' actions drive the conflict forward (Girard 1972: 45). In this story, the sang-froid of the characters is what makes it possible for the murderous plan to proceed. In the example cited above, if Walter had not kept his cool when Phyllis phoned him, Keyes may have suspected their plan. Moreover, on the night of the murder Phyllis keeps her calm during the entire journey to the train with her husband even though Walter is hiding in the car. If she had panicked, the whole plan could have fallen to pieces. Also, she calms Walter down when he is preparing to get on the train disguised as her husband after they murdered him. On the train when Walter unexpectedly comes across someone he acts calmly, and manages to elude the man and jump from the train. Because of their cool-headed behavior, the murder is carried out as they planned.

These symmetries are important because it causes a loss of differences between characters (Girard 1972: 47). These characters are represented as part of the violence mechanism "to allow any sort of value judgment, any sort of distinction, subtle or simplistic, to be drawn between 'good' or 'wicked' characters" (1972: 47). As a result of this, it can be said that there is no difference between Walter and Phyllis or any other character in the story. They resemble each other as they are all at the same level of being "rotten."

As the tragic conflict unfolds, everybody makes her/his own position clear (Girard 1972: 61). After the murder, the insurance company starts an investigation into this dubious accident. The company and its claim manager, Keyes, have suspicions about the event. Moreover, Lola is affected directly by the murder and her role in the narrative becomes clear: she points to Phyllis as the murderer. She wants to talk about her suspicions about Phyllis but Walter convinces her to keep silent. As the characters start taking positions about the murder, the effects of violence are

compounded as their intolerance increases. As Girard notes,

Where violence is concerned, intolerance can prove as fatal an attitude as tolerance, for when it breaks out it can happen that those who oppose its progress do more to assure its triumph than those who endorse it (Girard 1972: 30).

Thus, this new situation further complicates the web of conflict because Walter and Phyllis's positions start coming into conflict. First of all, when Keyes suspects that it is not an accident, he visits Walter to share this idea and as a result Walter decides not to see Phyllis for a while. But Phyllis is worried: "We are not the same anymore. We did it so we could be together, but instead of that it is pulling us apart." Then Walter starts a kind of relationship with Lola as a friend, which upsets Phyllis even more. But she cannot prevent this, as she and Walter are not seeing each other. As a result of this new relationship, Walter starts to learn about Phyllis's past; he finds out that Lola suspects that Phyllis also killed her mother. Walter, however, cannot confirm this suspicion because he cannot meet up with Phyllis by virtue of Keyes's investigation. In this way, Walter's attempts to avoid Keyes leads to a vortex of conflict that brings about the demise of both Walter and Phyllis.

Little by little the crime starts to spiral out of Walter and Phyllis's control. The man on the train suddenly steps up as a witness. He does not recognize Walter but he states that the man on the train was not the man pictured in the obituary. Keyes is certain after hearing this that a murder took place. And he has his suspicions about the murderer; he suspects that it was Phyllis and an accomplice. This information changes the path Keyes will follow. He decides to reject Phyllis's claim and he wants an inquiry to be set up.

The loss of control over the plan causes the characters to lose their cool-headedness. Walter desperately wants to talk to Phyllis after this new development. He loses his calm and begins to panic. He asks Phyllis not to sue the company,

however, she refuses. He warns her that “a lot of things are going to come up” about her, including “the way the first Mrs. Dietrichson died.” Suddenly, Phyllis loses her calm and gets angry with Lola because of her “cockeyed stories.” Then Phyllis gets angry with Walter because now he starts to care about Lola instead of Phyllis.

When they lose their calm, the characters’ partnerships begin to break down, which causes their “culpable” features to trigger mistakes as they try to bring each other under control (Girard 1972: 69). Each put their collaborators at risk. After the argument, Phyllis tries to convince Walter about her past but is unable to do so. In Walter’s eyes, there are still doubts about her. She cannot persuade Walter to hold himself back and as a result, she makes a major mistake. Toward the end of their conversation, she reminds Walter who the real murderer is; that is, who physically killed Mr. Dietrichson. She also threatens to tell Keyes the truth: “We went into it together, and we are coming out at the end together. It is straight down the line for both of us.” Walter’s reaction at this point is shot in close-up; he realizes he is arriving at a dead-end.

This realization is the turning point for the relationship between Walter and Phyllis. For the first time, Walter thinks independently from Phyllis. After this threatening conversation, Walter understands that he is stuck with Phyllis in this crime and if he cannot do anything, both of them will be faced with the death penalty at the end of this journey. This situation causes Walter to start thinking about ways to escape and save himself.

Lola unintentionally offers Walter a way out. One night she shares her new suspicions with Walter about Phyllis and her boyfriend, Zachetti. She suspects that Phyllis and Zachetti killed her father together. She followed Zachetti and saw that he met Phyllis every night at her home. Also, on the night of the crime Zachetti was

supposed to pick her up from the university but did not come, and Lola did not believe he was sick. Lola's statements confuse Walter. He starts to believe that he has been a pawn in this crime. When he listens to Keyes's dictaphone recording, he has no doubt about this issue. The recording points out that Zachetti may be Phyllis's lover and the man who helped her in this crime. Walter decides to use this to his advantage: now he can get rid of Phyllis and lay the blame on Zachetti.

At this point, the sacrificial crisis starts. There is no differentiation between truth and lies; a chaotic atmosphere dominates. The violence affects everybody profoundly: Lola loses her mother and father; the company may lose a large amount of money; and Walter and Phyllis may lose their lives. Everybody wants to purify the atmosphere but when a purifying action occurs, the effect of violence is increasingly calamitous. In *Jungle People*, anthropologist Jules Henry mentions that in a universe that has no sovereign authority and that surrenders itself to violence, the difference between one's paranoiac thoughts and calm considerations wears away (1964: 50). In *Double Indemnity*, many suspicions begin to emerge at this point: Phyllis may have caused the death of the first Mrs. Dietrichson and she may have used Walter in this crime; moreover, her real lover may be Zachetti.

It can be said that this crisis's effects are conveyed to the spectators through formal means. The editing style echoes the violence in the film. The film uses many lap dissolves. According to David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, a dissolve is "a transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears; for a moment the two images blend in superimposition" (2008: 478).² In this kind of transition, the image's meaning dissolves into another for a moment via superimposed images and spectators cannot

² "The exposure of more than one image on the same film strip or in the same shot" (Bordwell&Thompson 2008: 481).

distinguish the differences between them. This creates continuity between the different scenes. This resembles the communicable aspect of violence, which brings spectators under its sway. Scenes seem have not ends, they seem continuous.

Moreover, telling the story through Walter's multiple flashbacks and retroactive voiceover (Walter tells his past, including the murder story, from his present) enhances the effect of violence on spectators. As Maureen Turim notes, "by suddenly presenting the past, flashbacks can abruptly offer meanings connected to any person, place, or object" (1989: 12). In addition, in *Invisible Storytellers*, Sarah Kozloff argues that first-person narrators affect the spectators' experience by "increasing identification with the characters" (1988: 41). It can be argued that the spectators are bound up with Walter through his flashbacks and voice. The story is not told from an unbiased viewpoint. From the beginning, the truth of the story depends on Walter's reliability.

In other words, films often create the sense of character-narration so strongly that one accepts the voice-over narrator as if he or she were the mouthpiece of the image-maker either for the whole film or for the duration of his or her embedded story (Kozloff 1988: 45).

So, it can be said that spectators have to believe what Walter believes. For this reason, the first confusion arises with Walter's confusion: Is Phyllis deceiving him or not? When the violence envelops other characters in the story, much distrust emerges. The viewer, like Walter, cannot distinguish what is true.

In addition, there is a clever trick that can make the danger palpable for spectators through the sacrificial crisis and this involves revealing the function of flashback. Walter is an active subject in all the flashbacks, which means that he is a witness to what he tells, except for one case: Phyllis is shown preparing her home for their meeting at eleven o'clock at night. She hides a gun under the armchair's cushion. When the audiences see this, they acquire information Walter does not

have. But Walter's retroactive voiceover is heard during this preparation: "...she had plans of her own." This voiceover strengthens the suspicion that Phyllis used Walter for this crime. But after Walter comes to the house, the doubts are refuted by Phyllis because her plan is quite different than what Walter had thought: she is planning to use Zachetti's hot temper against Lola. The combination of a flashback and Walter's voiceover falsifies the spectator's expectations. This reveals the function of the flashbacks. Bordwell and Thompson give a definition about one function of flashback like that,

Yet once we are inside the flashback, events will typically be presented from a wholly objective standpoint. They will usually be presented in an unrestricted fashion, too, and may even include action that the remembering character could have no way of knowing (2008: 92).

It can be said that, the illusions of Walter's flashback are disclosed by this trick. Thus, an important question emerges for spectators: Can it be that Walter is mistaken about everything? In this way, the spectator loses their guide to the story. There is no one who can be trusted; there is no differentiation between truths or lies. In the end, the danger of the sacrificial crisis is conveyed to the spectators.

Girard states that when the moment comes, it becomes impossible to stand up against violence without using violence (1972: 31). He adds: "Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached" (1972: 26). The last situation between Phyllis and Walter can be an example of this. Walter sets a trap for Phyllis although he is unsure about Zachetti, and Phyllis rebuts his claim. Yet, Phyllis does not wait for Walter's reply and shoots him. But he does not die immediately.

At this point, the destructive power of the sacrificial crisis can be seen as the characters face destruction (Girard 1972: 14). Furthermore, this possibility is foreshadowed in Phyllis's plans for Lola, as she wants to kill Lola by manipulating

Zachetti's anger. These two characters are in danger just like her husband, as his first wife had been before. But there is another option to purify this violence: a sacrificial act. If this small group cannot commit this act, they will be destroyed one by one.

2.2. The Surrogate Victim

To purify violence, choosing the "appropriate" surrogate victim is important (Girard 1972: 39). If the victim is too similar to society or is too different, violence cannot be completely brought to an end:

If the gap between the victim and the community is allowed to grow too wide, all similarity will be destroyed. The victim will no longer be capable of attracting the violent impulses to itself; the sacrifice will cease to serve as a "good conductor," in the sense that metal is a good conductor of electricity. On the other hand, if there is *too much* continuity the violence will overflow its channels (Girard 1972:39).

In *Double Indemnity*, everybody can be responsible for the spreading of violence. The gap between the characters and society is narrow. They are ordinary people who are part of society. Their social and economic classes are accepted in this group. Walter is an insurance salesman, Phyllis is a nurse and a married woman, Lola is a university student and daughter, Keyes is a claim manager and Zachetti is an ex-pharmacy student and a worker.

At the same time, the gap is wide. Everybody in the story can be a suspect; everyone can be involved in crime and criminality. Walter and Phyllis kill a man for their benefit. They are not happy with their positions in society. Lola's actions suggest that she is a liar. When she meets up with Zachetti, she lies to her father about this fact. Also her rebellious attitude is very persuasive. Besides, her story about Phyllis and her mother could be a figment of Lola's imagination. She is a ten-year-old girl; she is just a child, when Phyllis nurses her mother. So, her story loses

its cogency. Keyes has a mysterious intuition about the crimes, about his “his little man.” He researches everything, even in his own life. He is a kind of madman seeking out criminals. Zachetti is shown as having difficulties with his anger and is capable of anything when he loses his temper.

At this point, we can ask: Which one is the right person to purify the violence? How can the right victim be chosen? Girard states that the role of the surrogate victim on a collective level resembles an object in Shamanist rituals which are based on extracting this object from diseased bodies, believing that the object is the source of the disease (1972: 83). He mentions the important notion of choosing this victim, in terms of “unshakable unanimity.” When the sacrificial crisis starts, violence spreads to all members of society, but miraculously all blame is transferred to one person who can carry every unstable emotion including revenge, rivalry and tension away from the entirety of society (Girard 1972: 7).

In *Double Indemnity*, Phyllis is chosen as the surrogate victim by this “unshakable unanimity.” Everything targets her. Keyes suspects Phyllis, and Lola blames her for killing her father and mother. And in the end, Walter accuses her of using him from the beginning and cheating on him with Zachetti. When Phyllis tells Walter that they are both “rotten,” he replies: “You are a bit more rotten.” Girard asserts, “the slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginous speed and is transformed into irrefutable proof” (1972: 79). As a result, Phyllis appears to be the scapegoat, the surrogate victim.

The movie suggests that Phyllis is the surrogate victim in some formal manners. Towards the end of the scene of Walter and Phyllis’s first meeting, when Walter leaves her house, there is a lap dissolve from Phyllis at home to Walter driving away. Walter and Phyllis are superimposed. This new frame hints at her evil

influence. It seems as if she is whispering into Walter's ear (**Figure 2**). In addition, comparing Walter's shadows on the wall when he arrives and when he leaves Phyllis's house, the later shadow is much darker, suggesting that Phyllis triggers his dark side.



Figure 2

Therefore, it can be said that both Phyllis and Walter can be seen as the reason for the spread of violence. Girard states that a given community has a tendency to find a lone victim to blame for being the source of corruption: the surrogate victim (1972: 80). This victim also is easy to be alienated from society. She/he has to be alone. She/he must have no relatives who would try to take her/his revenge on society (1972: 12).

The spectators are channeled to choose Phyllis as the surrogate victim. The narrative elements help in this channeling. The mise-en-scene suggests that Phyllis is dissimilar from the world she lives in. She is different from Walter in this aspect. Walter's costumes are harmonized with the mise-en-scene. He is a part of his world. In contrast to this, Phyllis's costumes contrast with the mise-en-scene. The lighting style that is used for her supports this as well. While Walter is plunged into darkness more and more, she is brightly illuminated, which separates her from her world.

Moreover, the manner of framing reflects a negativity on Phyllis. When Walter goes to see Phyllis's husband for the car insurance policy, he talks to the maidservant in front of the door. Then Phyllis appears on the top step of the stairs. Because of Phyllis's location, she looks at Walter from above. Looking down indicates the distance between them. In addition, while Phyllis is in the frame in a wide shot, Walter is shot with a medium close-up during their conversation. In other words, while Phyllis's entire body is in the frame, only Walter's upper body is seen. In a sense, the distance between Walter and Phyllis is similarly created between the spectator and Phyllis (**Figures 3 and 4**). Spectators might identify with Walter instead of Phyllis because of this distance.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Her position in the frame increases her ambiguity. She is framed unconventionally. According to Bordwell and Thompson, "Filmmakers often place a single figure at the center of the frame and minimize distracting elements at the sides" (2008: 143). When she talks to Walter during their first meeting, she is positioned in the corner of the frame (**Figure 5**). Once again, she is represented in a way that is different from the rest of the mise-en-scene by the lighting and although she faces the spectator (which implies that she is the main subject of the frame), she is not in the center of the frame. Besides, Walter is hardly distinguishable from the

mise-en-scene because of his harmonized costume. In this way, Phyllis seems to be the person who unbalances the frame. Her unconventional decentering creates an ambiguity for her. As a result, spectators feel something uncanny about Phyllis.



Figure 5

The shot-reverse-shot between Phyllis and Walter is used to deepen the spectator's doubts. Towards the end of their first meeting, Walter flirts with Phyllis in a shot-reverse-shot (**Figures 6 and 7**). During this shot-reverse-shot Phyllis's face is not in the center of the frame in contrast to the way Walter is shot. Again, she is framed in an unconventional way. In addition, when seen from Walter's back, there is an obvious distance between Walter and Phyllis for the spectator. If we recall the function of Walter's flashback and retroactive voiceover, it can be said that spectator sees events through Walter's eyes. So, this distance may be read in the sense that Phyllis has not entered Walter's world yet. As a result of this off centering, the uncanny feeling about Phyllis increases.



Figure 6



Figure 7

In their second meeting, again there is a shot-reverse-shot between Walter and Phyllis in same place, with the same mise-en-scene. But this time, this distance diminishes (**Figures 8 and 9**).



Figure 8



Figure 9

Phyllis's background is brighter than the previous one now, because Walter figures out her plan. Her one secret emerges. Taking the distance issue into consideration, it can be argued that Walter and Phyllis are becoming closer. Phyllis starts to be included in Walter's world, which implies the spectators' world as well.

After this point, we can see that Phyllis's uncanniness contaminates Walter. His face is hardly seen during the night of the murder. Before Phyllis and her husband arrive, he is waiting hidden in the car. When Phyllis opens the car door, she looks at him. Only half of his face is visible (**Figure 10**).



Figure 10

Then, when Walter and Phyllis are walking to the train after the murder, again Walter's face is obscured. His hat's shadow drops across his eyes. He begins to disappear in the darkness. At the end of the scene, Phyllis wants him to kiss her in the car. He looks at her. His face is obscured by shadows. In addition, when they are kissing, Phyllis faces the spectators. Walter becomes almost invisible (**Figure 11**). He, too, becomes uncanny. After Phyllis enters Walter's world, her ambiguity spreads to Walter.



Figure 11

In addition, the mistrust about Phyllis continues in other scenes with regard to her vagueness. For instance, when she goes to the company for questioning, her face is covered by black lacy tulle. She lies to the company's manager and Keyes during

the entire scene. And the spectators know she is lying. After that scene, she goes to Walter's home. Keyes has just left Walter's apartment, and Walter is plunged into thought because of what Keyes told him. After Walter tells her that they cannot see each other for a while, Phyllis walks behind him. Her face is not seen clearly because of Walter's shoulder. Then Walter asks whether she is afraid. She coldly responds, "Yes." This time, spectators cannot be sure if she is lying or not. But her mouth behind Walter's shoulder when she says "yes" suggests that she is lying. A final example of this is in the supermarket. When she meets Walter, she wears sunglasses. Her eyes are not seen. Walter touches first on the Mrs. Dietrichson issue. She panics for a moment and denies it. Again, there is no reliable information about this. But like before, her unseen eyes reinforce the doubts about her. As a result of her loss of reliability, Phyllis is getting closer to being the surrogate victim, step by step.

Thus, Phyllis is the "appropriate" surrogate victim. After her death, the corrupted order of society starts to rehabilitate itself. "Because the violence is unanimously ordained, it effectively restores peace and order" (Girard 1972: 83). The insurance company does not have to pay the money. Walter talks to Zachetti about Lola's affection for him. Then, he starts to record his confession. The end of his confession to Keyes comes when Walter has lost too much blood. The doorman calls, and Keyes goes to the office. Walter tries to escape from Keyes but is too weak. There is one end for him: to pay for his guilt. The sun rises again.

2.3. Considering the Role of Phyllis as a Surrogate Victim

Double Indemnity was released in April of 1944. Movies cannot be considered as separate from the social and historical events of the time they were shot. In 1944, America was anticipating the end of World War II. Every member of the family was helping to win the war: some men fought at the front and the others

carried out their roles on the home front. This situation affected *film noir* movies as well, especially movies shot during the war.

Girard's idea about the returning warrior can be used to make an analogy between Walter and the returning soldier. Girard asserts that a warrior who comes back from war to his homeland represents a risk, as the moment of coming back may pose a threat to liberty in his country. The violence of war affects the warrior; now he can spread this violence with his homecoming (1972: 41). Reconsidering the opening sequence with credits, the man's silhouette is similar to a wounded soldier.

Furthermore, this similarity makes the story of *Double Indemnity* seem like a soldier's story. At the beginning, there is an injured man: Walter. After he enters the company's office, he starts to record his story/confession. At the same time the audience begins to see this confession through Walter's flashbacks. In the first part of this analysis, it was stated that the use of flashbacks makes this story Walter's story. In other words, the spectator can only learn the details of the story from what Walter recalls. This method of narration establishes a similarity between the story that the wounded Walter tells and an injured soldier's story.

Walter's story suggests a warning about a certain type of woman. According to Walter, at first she was something beautiful for him but at the end of his story, he thinks that this woman caused his end, as she is evil. Besides, everything points to this woman as being responsible for the crime. She has the potential to destroy everybody who is close to her.

The role of Phyllis as a surrogate victim takes on new meaning through this approach. She reflects the concerns of society about working women in the 1940s, in that she is a former nurse. But first this concern should be explained together with the social and the historical developments about women. American women were

called to join the work force when the United States entered World War II in 1941. Amy Snyder notes that the United States government used daily magazines to effectively promote this calling (1997: 2). This propaganda encouraged both women and society to accept these new roles and they created a new place for women in the work force.

As a result, many women worked in the place of men during the war. In war production work, many American women (nearly 360,000) responded to the call of military service to help. Furthermore, more than 6 million women worked in the factories during the war. The statistics indicate that the ratio of working women increased by 57 percent during the war (Tuttle 2007: 61).

As Snyder notes, before the war, middle-class American woman could hardly find jobs to develop a career outside the home (1997: 3). Women's place was seen to be in the home with their families. Because of this, at first both women and men were concerned that working women could lose their femininity. But according to Melissa Dabakis, the war effort's strategy removed this concern by using glamorous images of femininity in their propaganda (1992: 190). Yet the concerns did not die down. Women workers' increased presence caused new concerns in American society. Towards to the end of war, many married women had joined the work force.

At first, some women did not want to retain these new jobs. But over time, some women's opinions changed. Most of them had been successful in their new occupations. They liked their jobs. They gained self-respect. In a report by William Tuttle, Jr., one woman said, "War jobs have uncovered unsuspected abilities in American women," (2007: 62). And Leila Rupp notes, "[the] public images of women during World War II adapted to the temporary employment of women in male fields so as to leave traditional gender norms untouched" (Honey 1984: 5). As

Neil Wynn points out, these women were called “New Amazons” (1996: 475).

At this point it can be claimed that Phyllis represents Americans’ concerns about working women in *Double Indemnity*. Phyllis is presented as a dangerous woman for the entire society by being coded as a “home wrecker.” This situation created a concern about the survival of American families. This situation is displayed in *Double Indemnity* through the depictions of Mr. Dietrichson and Lola. When Walter goes to Phyllis’s house for the first time, he sees pictures of Lola and Mr. Dietrichson. They are not actually there, in contrast to Phyllis; however, their representations are there. In this way, Phyllis’s destruction of the family is foreshadowed. According to Girard, when communities start pinning the blame on one person, they suggest that this person has been “accused of violating society’s most fundamental rules” (1972: 114). Phyllis fits this definition. She helps Walter kill her husband; also, this may not be her first murder. According to Lola, she caused the death of Mrs. Dietrichson. These accusations imply that she is rebelling against the cornerstone of society: the family. In addition, she has no children of her own and her servants do housework; she is hardly a housewife. She is not depicted as a part of her own family. The market scenes are significant in this regard. She has to go grocery shopping like every housewife. But Phyllis makes murder plans at the grocery store with her lover, which implies she also is not part of society. So if she can destroy her own family, she will be a threat for every family, and thus to society.

In addition, despite the fact that Walter actually killed her husband, she is presented as the person who causes her husband’s death. When Walter kills her husband in the car, the homicide is not shown. This crime is shown off-screen. Because of this, the murder exists only in the imagination of the spectator. However, Phyllis’s smiling cold face is shown instead of the murder. Therefore, Phyllis is

shown as the cold face of death (**Figure 12**).



Figure 12

Another concern about working women is that they might occupy “the status of males as the bread winners;” factory heads especially had this fear (Bellamy 2011-2012: 9). In *Double Indemnity* this fear is incarnated in Phyllis. When Walter comes to her home to sign the insurance papers, at the moment of signing she is placed in the middle of the frame between Walter and her husband. She is portrayed as looking down on them. She is in focus, unlike Walter and her husband. Despite these men taking up the majority of this frame, she is dominant (**Figure 13**). It can be implied that she drives a wedge between these businessmen, Walter and her husband, dividing the security of men’s world.



Figure 13

Furthermore, she not only divides the world of men, she takes it on. After the murder, she is invited to the insurance company to talk about her husband's insurance money. When she enters the manager's room, she greets everyone (**Figure 14**). She stands in front of the dark door of the room which is separating her from the men, who stand together against a light-colored wall. Also the men's backs are visible, contrasting with Phyllis. Alone, she seems to be confronting all three of men.



Figure 14

In addition, reconsidering the opening sequence with the credits, although the silhouette belongs to Walter, this image can be thought of as Phyllis's husband. Before his death, he used crutches. So, this silhouette can be the symbol of some kind of men: wounded men, which can imply that they are castrated. Also these two important men are in Phyllis's life. Considering this in terms of the war situation, it can be claimed that there is a reference about men and war. They were in a danger because of women like Phyllis.

However, the question should be asked: had women become as powerful as society feared at the time of *Double Indemnity*? Unfortunately, no. Women had discovered new limits for themselves. And many wanted to expand their limits.

Many wanted to keep their jobs. A hard struggle was needed to achieve this but “women unionists were not yet a political force to be reckoned with” (Kersten 2006: 138). Despite the unfair pay scale that distinguished between men and women, some women continued with their war jobs after the war but they had to accept a lower salary than men (Tuttle 2007: 62). As a result, working women were stuck with this bitter struggle to succeed while dealing with the concerns of the society. This may also be thought of as a double bind.

Double Indemnity reveals this dilemma by casting Phyllis as the surrogate victim. However, she did not necessarily have to be the surrogate victim, especially if we compare her with Walter. He is not so different from Phyllis. He is responsible for the violence and is just as guilty as Phyllis. Numerous times Walter is represented as a dark man. At the beginning, the imaginary scene (including the silhouette of a man) suggests that this silhouette is responsible for spreading the darkness and violence. In fact, this scene is not a prologue. There is a lap dissolve between this scene and the beginning of story, which implies that this silhouette has an influence on the story. At the end of the credits, the man’s dark silhouette fills the entire screen. In other words, the darkness expands to occupy the entire diegetic universe. And that silhouette belongs to Walter.

Furthermore, when spectators see Walter’s home for the first time, it is also shown in darkness. He paces back and forth in the darkness, lost in thought. He thinks about Phyllis and her plan. Considering this darkness in terms of his situation, it can be said that he tends to be involved in crime as he has a dark inner world.

Yet, the main problem about Walter seems to be his role as a deceived man. The chronology of the narrative presents Walter as a fall guy. He meets Phyllis and falls in love with her. What’s more, he kills her husband for her. As a result of this,

despite the fact that Walter kills two people, he seems to be a victim of fate. But the narrative choices eliminate this option. The movie starts with Walter's confession. Spectators hear of a murder case and who the killer is before any information about story emerges. They start by listening to the story from its end. In this way an expectation is created about the rest of the story which has an impact on the audience. The murder case takes precedence over the relationship between Walter and Phyllis. As a result of this, their love affair loses its importance.

Moreover, telling the story by using flashbacks is an important choice as it suggests that Walter is responsible. When Phyllis goes to Walter's home for the first time, towards to the end of the scene they hug each other on the couch. This hugging is interrupted by Walter. The camera moves away from them with a tracking shot. After a lap dissolve, Walter appears at the office. He confesses that defrauding the insurance company was something he had thought about before Phyllis. He says,

You are like the guy behind the roulette wheel, watching the customers to make sure they do not crook the house. And then one night, you get thinking how you could crook the house yourself. And do it smart. Because you have got that wheel right under your hands (*Double Indemnity* 1944).

After this monologue, this interruption, we come back to Phyllis and Walter again. But this time, they are sitting on the couch separately. Walter's confession does two things: it interrupts the hugging of Phyllis and Walter, which implies that it interrupts their love scene. Also it separates them. Besides, this interruption includes Walter's real reason for his involvement. It is not solely related to his feelings about Phyllis. Again, the love affair loses its importance. He is not a fall guy.

The most significant narrative element strengthening this claim is the sound bridges made between Walter's present and past. His voiceover is used to connect these two different periods, which implies that his past still continues affecting his present. Walter who confesses is the same man as he was in the past. These events do

not turn him into a less violent man. The fact that he tries to run away from Keyes so he will not be punished at the end of the movie is supportive of this claim.

At this point, we should ask why Phyllis is chosen as the surrogate victim, despite the fact that she is just as responsible for the violence and is just as guilty as some of the others. Girard states that when collective violence is publicly disclosed, the essential point is the arbitrary choice of the victim (1972: 132). Arbitrariness is the important point in answering the question above because it can be said that Phyllis is arbitrarily chosen to be the surrogate victim, she is a scapegoat in this story.

This arbitrariness is important in considering the working women's dilemma because in this way, Phyllis does not just represent the concerns of American society; but also she reflects the dilemma of working women. *Double Indemnity* reveals this fact through Phyllis's role as a surrogate victim. Phyllis disturbs the system. She does not show respect for the limits of her society. As a result, she is punished. Girard states,

There is no question of 'expiation.' Rather, society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect (1972: 4).

It can be claimed that Walter's world wants to protect itself by sacrificing Phyllis.

In consequence, *Double Indemnity* could be bear as a postwar soldier's story based on Walter's flashbacks. This world belongs to Walter. Phyllis is a reflection of Walter's wartime fears and the problems of his society. So, Phyllis is ejected from the society that accepts Walter, she reveals the situation of women in 1944 by the fact of her being a surrogate victim. This is related to Americans' concerns about working women as World War II was coming to an end.

SECTION 2

SCARLET STREET

In this section, the story of *Scarlet Street* will be analyzed in light of the constitutive steps of Rene Girard's sacrificial act and how the surrogate victim could be formulated in terms of Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. By drawing on the notion of the surrogate victim, this section explores the relationship between the *femme fatale* of the story and working women in wartime America in terms of the social and historical developments occurring at the time.

Scarlet Street (Fritz Lang, 1945) is about an elderly cashier who is conned by a young couple. Christopher Cross is an unhappy lonely man, married to a nagging widow, Adele. His real passion is painting. One night he meets Kitty, Katherine March, a charming woman who is dating a rather violent man, Johnny. Chris is impressed by Kitty the first moment he sees her; however, Kitty uses his admiration for her own benefit in line with her boyfriend's desires.

When Chris is going home after a party to celebrate twenty-five years on the job, he gets lost in bohemian Greenwich Village. He sees a man attacking a woman. He runs to help her. In fact, Johnny is beating Kitty, which happens often in their relationship. But Chris does not know this yet and it takes long for him to realize this. He saves Kitty by attacking Johnny from behind. When Chris returns with a policeman to the scene of the beating, he cannot find Johnny.

After the policeman leaves, Kitty and Chris drink and chat at the bar below her home. Chris guesses that Kitty is an actress and she guesses that Chris is an artist. Neither of them wants to tell the truth to each other. Chris introduces himself as a painter, but that little lie will get him into trouble. When Johnny learns of it he decides to con him by using Kitty. This fraud leads all of them to a dead-end.

3.1. The Constitutive Steps of the “Sacrificial Act” in *Scarlet Street*

In *Scarlet Street*, Chris Cross’s job is a suitable occupation for him to use his honesty to commit a criminal act. As a cashier, it is easy for him to start stealing money, even though he was praised for his reliability at his 25th anniversary dinner. In fact, it is his honesty that makes people not suspect him and as a result, the ongoing violence continues to affect people.

In *film noir*, characters generally have triggering characteristics which create conflict in an atmosphere that threatens to deteriorate at any time. *Scarlet Street* has three main characters who have such characteristics: Kitty, Johnny and Chris. Kitty is an arrogant woman who, according to her roommate, Millie, lost her previous job because of her snippy attitude. Kitty never lets anyone speak ill of Johnny or her personality, and she thinks that Millie is jealous of their love.

Johnny is arrogant as well. He thinks he can outsmart everyone. In his mind, he has “imagination” and he only needs capital to start earning money. He uses Kitty, his “Lazy Legs,” to achieve that. He abuses her love to make money but he does not show her any respect. When Kitty refuses him or laughs at him, he beats or threatens her, getting his way with his quick-tempered nature.

Chris has weaknesses and tends to be quite passive. He is married reluctantly out of sheer loneliness. Although his real desire in life is to be a painter, he works as a cashier. His boss, J.J., has the life Chris wants. He is the same age as Chris and is

quite wealthy. J.J. is married but at the anniversary dinner his employees see him getting into a car with a beautiful woman. The fact that Chris wants to be like J.J. is revealed at the beginning of movie. When they are at the anniversary dinner, J.J. presents him with an expensive watch and offers him some luxury cigars. Those two objects and the beautiful woman are the symbols of J.J.'s life. Consequently, Chris's desire to emulate J.J. as well as Johnny and Kitty's arrogant natures lead them into conflict.

As the story unfolds, the web of conflict begins to take shape. Chris starts stealing money to satisfy Kitty's demands: he rents an artist's studio for her and his paintings and gives her money for shopping. At first, however, he is unable to bring himself to steal money from the safe in his office and he unsuccessfully tries to take out a loan, so he decides in the end to take money from Adele's insurance policy. This is the sign of his contamination, and sounds are used to represent his state of impurity. After Chris and Adele have an argument about Chris's tight financial circumstances, she goes to listen to the "Happy Hour Family Time" program at a neighbor's place. Chris can hear the sounds of the radio upstairs. When he decides to steal money from Adele, the sounds of the radio begin to distort, creating a dissonant effect. In this way, Chris's contamination is expressed. After his first contagion, Chris surrenders to corruption. Then, he gets the courage to steal money from the safe in his office.

The symmetries of the characters' actions cause developments to come about in a parallel manner: Johnny forces Kitty to get money from Chris, she lies to Chris to get the money, and then he steals the money. These symmetries reveal that the characters are not different from each other. If Kitty and Johnny are accepted as representing the bad side of this triangle, Chris might appear to be from the good

side. But Chris is not so different from them. He starts to do everything to try to achieve happiness, even living a lie. So, it can be said that he is a selfish man, like Johnny, the only difference is that he is not rude to Kitty.

This resemblance is coded with rapid camera movements. Every time Johnny does something fraudulent, the camera rapidly zooms in on him. For example, at the beginning when Johnny wants Kitty to respond to Chris's letter, the camera focuses in on Johnny and Kitty on the couch. This creates a self-conscious effect on the spectator. Another example occurs in the studio that Chris rents for Kitty. Johnny and Kitty wake up and starts to talk. Before Johnny asks Kitty for 1,000 dollars, again the camera quickly zooms in. This occurs repeatedly, as a reflection of Johnny's fraud. Later this technique is used to indicate how Chris resembles Johnny. When Chris steals money from his office and when he thinks about responding to Adele's question about Katherine March, the camera zooms in on him in the same manner. In this way, the film emphasizes the similarity between Chris and Johnny as they are both corrupted.

An analysis of Chris indicates that he has a hidden and repressed violent world that he carries inside. From time to time, he thinks of killing Adele. He joyfully reads a news story to her about a murder. After Adele asks about Kitty, he walks up to Adele with a knife to get her coat. But his actions are very suspicious if we compare his feelings about Adele with how he feels about Kitty. Also, his paintings are very masculine and violent. When Kitty compares him to a cave man, he brutally kills Kitty, stabbing her repeatedly with an ice pick. We discover the truth that Chris is not, in fact, a good-mannered cashier; he is violent, just like Johnny.

As time goes by, more and more people are drawn into the circle of Johnny's lies. Johnny gives some of Chris's paintings to a street painter to sell them for cash.

Afterwards, a famous art critic comes across them. When Johnny comes back to retrieve the paintings, he learns that the art critic had insisted on finding out who did the paintings. Johnny panics and flees. But with help of the street painter the critic finds Johnny at Kitty's home and tries to find out more about the painter. Also the famous gallery owner who comes with the critic wants to buy the paintings. So Johnny tells them that Kitty is the painter. In this way, these men are brought into the circle of Johnny's fraud.

After that, the web of violence begins to spiral out of control. Johnny expands the scope of his deceptions. Kitty pretends to be the creator of these paintings. She charms the critic by parroting Chris's ideas about being a painter, and he falls under her spell. Because Johnny insists, she starts seeing the critic. As a result, she is able to get a personal exhibition at the gallery. Eventually, Johnny's ruses come to light: Adele sees the paintings in the gallery window and accuses Chris of imitating Katherine March's work. In this way, Chris finds out that Kitty sold his paintings. Even though Chris is not angry at Kitty, this is an undesirable development for her and Johnny. Besides, a detective, the former husband of Adele who was presumed to be dead, appears again. This is good for Chris, because legally, he becomes an unmarried man and is free to marry Kitty. This development is the last thing, however, that the devious couple wants.

This last incident leads Chris to find out about the scope of their deception. After the detective (Adele's former husband) reappears, he asks Chris to give him money in exchange for "remaining dead," which is not to Chris's liking. He wants the detective to return to his marriage so he can be free of Adele. For this to happen, he sets up a trap for the detective. When the detective sneaks into the house to steal Adele's insurance money, Adele discovers him. After gaining his freedom, Chris

immediately goes to Kitty's home. But when he arrives, he discovers the true nature of Kitty and Johnny's relationship.

Although their fraud comes to light, Chris still wants to marry Kitty. When Kitty hears about this, she starts to laugh. At first Chris does not understand. He thinks she is sobbing. So he continues to proclaim his love for her. Then she reveals her true self and vents her hatred for Chris. For the first time, Chris gets angry and stabs her repeatedly with an icepick. Suddenly, he has been transformed from a mild-mannered cashier into a brutal killer, and Kitty is dead.

With the murder, the sacrificial crisis appears. The previously established difference or the binary created by the way the bad couple and Chris now diminishes/evaporates. Chris is now more evil than Johnny, the man who used to beat Kitty. After the murder, when Johnny returns, Chris hides under the stairs. Until that point, Johnny is one who used to hide or sneak away from Chris. Under the stairs, Chris is plunged into darkness. He is as malicious as Johnny, and that lack of a difference has to be eliminated before it affects all the members of society.

3.2. Surrogate Victim

To purify the spreading violence, a surrogate victim must be chosen, and in *Scarlet Street* Kitty is the victim. But she does not take that position directly. Her death seems to only be the result of a murder, but that is the turning point for this story. If she had not been killed, the fraudulence would not have stopped. To understand her situation as a surrogate victim, first of all we must analyze the reasons that bring about Johnny's demise.

In the narrative, it seems that there are two prominent people who could be the cause of all the violence: Chris and Johnny. The gap between these two characters and society is not very wide; in fact, they are a part of it. Their social and

economic standing is known and accepted. But at the same time, a gap exists. Johnny engages in fraud, while Chris is also involved in illegal activities. They cause impurity to spread. Also, Chris is Kitty's murderer.

An "unshakable unanimity" brings about Johnny's end. After the murder, he is caught with Kitty's jewelry and his fingerprints are on the icepick. This puts Johnny in a difficult situation, and he struggles to explain his way out of it. In court, everybody testifies against him. Everybody in the triangle of Chris, Kitty and Johnny is seen as being a witness. All of the witnesses are seen one by one, and they are framed in turn as their intimacy in that triangle grows. The shots of their faces increase in closeness in relation to that intimacy. When Johnny's face is seen in a very close shot, the witnesses' statements incriminate him as the murderer. As a result of this unanimous power, Johnny is executed.

As a result, Johnny may seem to be a surrogate victim; however, the hidden surrogate in the film is, in fact, Kitty. She does not have an active role in this regard but only her death can bring about the death of Johnny. In this way, Johnny's death can purify society of the violence of his fraudulent games. In a roundabout way, Kitty's death stops the escalating violence.

There are some aspects of the film that strengthen this claim. First of all, Kitty and Johnny's relationship is seen as the reason for the spreading violence. At first, their relationship is coded as a symbol of deterioration like the damaged record which plays repeatedly in the studio. When they are seen as a couple for the first time, a song about love is on the record player. Suddenly, the record skips and starts to repeat again and again on the same part: "I am in love, love, love..." This distortion defines their relationship. When Chris sees them kissing, the repetition of

the song is heard again. Thus, this broken song is heard twice: at the beginning and end of the corruption.

They cannot be thought of as individual people; Johnny and Kitty are represented as an inseparable whole. Kitty is a kind of puppet for Johnny. She does everything he says and because of this she cannot be thought of as individual without Johnny. And Johnny cannot exist without the money Kitty gets for him. Kitty procures a kind of “help” for Johnny. He meets Chris via Kitty, and cons Chris through her. In this way, he gets money and gains status in society.

This relationship is expressed with some formal elements as well, such as the similarity of colors chosen for their outfits. Their costumes are in harmony when they are closer to each other. As a result, it makes it difficult to distinguish them from one another and their differences dissolve into each other (**Figure 15, Figure 16**).



Figure 15



Figure 16

In addition, they are represented as being different from the other people in society when they are together. When Chris sees them fighting in the street, they stand out because of the lighting and their clothes, and they shine in the darkness that encircles them (**Figure 17**). The scene when Chris sees them kissing is represented in a similar manner (**Figure 18**). In the beginning, when Millie is seen for the first time, Johnny and Kitty are kissing in front of the door. Again, their costumes are

harmonized with the mise-en-scene. Suddenly Millie comes in with her black dress which contrasts with this harmony (**Figure 19**).



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

Their relationship and this inseparability seem to indicate their roles as surrogate victims in the story. Johnny is punished as the one responsible for the corruption in society. Kitty's death causes the end of their relationship, which destroys the order of society, so she is the indirect surrogate victim.

To understand the importance of their relationship's elimination, we can analyze their position in the system at a more individual level. According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, purification rites ostracize the "filthy object" to preserve the secular order; this state of being ostracized brings this object a sacredness (1966: 7). In this way, filth becomes defilement. The filthy object, which

can be codified as abject, separates it from “cleanliness and order.” This is the basis of society. Julia Kristeva claims that defilement is a something that escapes the clutches of logical order, which is the basis of social rationality and integrity (1982: 62).

The surrogate victim and the filthy object are similar in terms of their function. Both of them restore the body of rules for society’s unity. In addition to that, their features are similar in that both of them have to be a part of society; however, they are not too integral a part of it in that they have a different relationship compared with ordinary engagements. Considering Kitty and Johnny’s relationship in terms of Douglas’s explanation of purification rites, their relationship can be seen as filthy for society and for that reason, the fact that their relationship is ostracized helps draw society from fraud and corruption.

Nevertheless, Johnny and Kitty are not the same. The representation of Kitty’s character can be analyzed at a more individual level by using Kristeva’s notion of abjection, and such an approach reveals that the function of the surrogate victim is not related to a state of being bad or good or filthy or purified. It is more about how the system and order works.

Kitty is more inconsistent than Johnny. She is passive when she is with Johnny and she is a foolish lover; she resigns herself to Johnny. Even though Johnny humiliates her, does not love her and beats her, she cannot give up on him. In fact, she even wants to marry him. But first she has to satisfy all his demands, even when that means she has to pretend to love Chris. Furthermore, it is usually Johnny who makes the decisions. For example, when the gallery owner asks if she can visit the studio, Johnny accepts the offer before she answers. Also, he decides the prices of

the printings by talking alone with the gallery owner without her approval. She is like an object that simply belongs to Johnny.

On the other hand, she is an active woman when she is with Chris and she wraps him around her finger. Whenever Chris catches her lying, she apologizes to him in tears, saying that she had no choice but to lie. When Chris is doubtful about Johnny, she dominates him completely. She does that in a very cruel way: she brings him literally to his knees to paint her nails (**Figure 20**). Kitty is more active than ever before when she is with Chris.



Figure 20

At this point, it can be claimed that Kitty's ambivalence situation drives her into abjection. Kitty is neither active nor passive. As Kristeva states, "defilement is what is jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*'"(1982: 65). According to her, the symbolic system means a "classification system" or a "structure" (1982: 65). She explains this system as "the dependence and articulation of the speaking subject in the order of language" (1982: 67), Kristeva asks, whether the social determined by the subjective, or is it the other way around (1982: 67). This question's answer is related to a kind of border-like relationship between the symbolic system and the speaking subject. The border relationship causes some things to be designated with

abjection. Kristeva notes that in such a situation,

[...] the border of subjectivity where the object no longer has, or does not yet have a correlative function bonding the subject. On that location, to the contrary, the vacillating, fascinating, threatening, and dangerous object is silhouetted as non-being—as the abjection into which speaking being is permanently engulfed (1982: 67).

Thus, defilement can be one of the possible foundations of abjection bordering on the frail identity of the speaking subject (1982: 67).

At this juncture, the speaking subject's borders are uncertain and because of that, the subject can appear as abject. In light of this, Kitty's ambiguous position can be seen as being dependent on her activity/passivity, which implies borders. Her role, with its inconsistent borders, leads her into an ambiguous situation. According to Kristeva, not respecting a position causes abjection. It is "the in between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982: 4). Besides, Kristeva states, "the abject threatens life; it must be radically excluded" (1982: 2). As a result, she is the first person who needs to be removed from society and from the symbolic system of the film.

The mise-en-scene, along with her costumes and voice, combine to create that state of ambiguity. Most of the time, especially when she is on a bed or sitting on a couch, the borders between her body and the mise-en-scene are minimalized and she seems to be part of the mise-en-scene itself (**Figures 21, 22, 23**). At the same time, she is speaking. She is closer to being a subject. In this way, the source of her voice seems the subject of those borders that cannot be described. She seems to be a potential danger and the main reason for the spreading violence.



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

Moreover, Kitty's potential for danger is expressed through the risk of breaking the incest taboo. In his book "*The Interpretation of Dreams*," Sigmund Freud states that children who are three to six years of age feel sexual possessiveness towards their parents of the opposite sex. Because of this, they want to eliminate the other parent (1900: 110). A boy wants to possess his mother sexually but he is anxious about the father. In this triangle of the mother-child-father, the father is transformed into a punisher. The child assumes that if he possesses his mother, his father will castrate him as punishment. This fear causes the boy to repress this desire for incest because he knows secretly that he is a breaking a taboo (1910: 110).

The incest taboo is the one of forms which establishes the symbolic order. According to Freud, the boy must accept his father's authority. Only in this way can

the boy leave his incest drive behind and never turn back. The symbolic system is constituted on this rule (1924: 318). Moreover, Kristeva says that breaking the incest taboo can be defilement (1982:85). In the myth of *Oedipus*, to preserve the symbolic system as clean and proper, the source of this defilement is excluded from society. If we consider this issue at a cultural level, as Girard notes, “incest plays in consequence an extreme role in the destruction of differences” (1972:74). The shedding of differences can lead to the destruction of society.

Considering Kitty’s age, Chris can be seen as Kitty’s father substitute, and this entails major implications. Chris warns Kitty the first time they meet up that he is old enough to be her father, and Kitty repeats that when Johnny gets jealous. In view of these implications, it can be claimed that Chris tries to break the incest taboo. He tries to marry Kitty, and at one point Chris puts into words his repressed desire for incest before he meets Kitty; after his anniversary dinner, Chris says to his friend that he wonders what it is like to be loved by a young woman and he adds that nobody ever looked at him, not even when he was young. Thereupon, not surprisingly, the camera zooms in on the face of Chris’s friend in a medium close up shot when he says, “When we are young we have dreams that never pan out but we go on dreaming.” At this point, this emphasis on youthfulness can be seen as a boy’s repressed desire for incest. Also, Chris’s friend suggests the commonness of this desire but also he expresses that this desire has to remain as a dream that never comes true. For that reason, Chris’s attempt to do so destabilizes the symbolic order.

However, Chris’s desire cannot be realized. The moment when he comes closer to achieving this, Kitty refuses him. She yells at him and is crueler than she has ever been, sending Chris into a state of shock. She vents all her hatred for Chris and insults Chris’s masculinity: “You kill Johnny? I would like to see you try. Why,

he would break every bone in your body. He is a man.” This humiliation stirs Chris’s fear: the fear of castration. As a result, he brutally murders the real source of abjection.

At this point, we can ask why Kitty seems to be the real source of abjection instead of Chris. In fact, Chris’s desire triggers a breaking of the incest taboo, and this, yet again, is related to Kitty’s inconsistent role. When they meet for the first time, she makes Chris think that there is a possibility for such an incestuous relationship and does not refuse him and his desire. Although she pretends to love him because of Johnny, she did not initially seem hateful towards Chris. But at the end, she rebuffs him with all her hatred. These conflicting messages are another reflection of her ambiguity. But killing Kitty stops the cycle of fraud and prevents the possibility of breaking the incest taboo. In this way, the symbolic order is restored and life goes on, except for the people in the triangle.

3.3. Considering The Role of Kitty as a Surrogate Victim

In 1945, World War II ended for the United States and life had begun to return to normal. But the traditional pattern of behaviors had changed, which brought new challenges. Women and men had different expectations in the postwar era. Considering the dynamics of *Scarlet Street*’s characters, an analogy can be made between these characters and the state of affairs in America in 1945.

This film presents a world which denies the rules of perspective or denies linear perspective. *Film noir*’s style was influenced by German expressionism, just as *Scarlet Street* (Dickos 2002: 9). German expressionism was an anti-realist and anti-naturalist movement related to the expression of feelings or the imagination. It was a respond to the gloomy realm of daily life. This movement was widespread during and after World War I in Germany and became quite popular as a means of

expressing emotion. The movies made in those years included the hidden effects of war such as loss of innocence and depression. Chris's paintings are repeatedly defined as having an absence of perspective. His paintings are two-dimensional, like expressionist paintings. From this point of view, an analogy can be drawn between these paintings and the world of the film, which has no perspective, just like Chris. It is not what it looks like. The opening frame of the city with the monkey man's music offers up an entertaining world; however, this world is gloomy, and this state of affairs can be associated with the atmosphere of postwar America.

This world includes two different types of men: Chris from the old generation, and Johnny from the young generation. Chris is a reliable, understanding and gentle man but he has no authority. Johnny is handsome and clever but is arrogant, abusive and brutal. The differences between the two are clearly expressed in the movie. Chris is represented as a "failure," as he says to Kitty. When a friend comes to his home, he has to do the dishes for Adele. He has no room in the house for his own interests, so he has to paint in the bathroom. He has no value in the eyes of Adele when he is compared to her former husband.

In contrast, Johnny is depicted as a tough guy and he is hard on Kitty. When she refuses his demands, he accuses her of having no "imagination." Also he humiliates her by calling her "Lazy Legs." Moreover, Kitty's life is a complicated mess. Johnny thinks that he is the brain of the relationship. Moreover, Kitty's love means nothing to him. When she does not want to eat dinner with the art critic, he tells her to "stop acting like a green kid." He abuses her love for his own benefit. And when she is unable to satisfy his demands or makes fun of him, he beats her.

The formal elements of the film reflect these differences. Chris is a short man unlike Johnny, highlighting his lack of authority. Many scenes emphasize this point

by showing him as being shorter than he actually is (**Figure 24**, **Figure 25**), reaffirming his lack of power.



Figure 24



Figure 25

When the audience sees Chris for the first time at his own anniversary dinner, he is depicted as being obscured in a cloud of smoke (**Figure 26**), and this scene yet again echoes his lack authority.



Figure 26

Moreover, Chris is dominated by authority figures. At home, Adele had hung up a picture of her former husband, and Chris is dominated over by the supposedly dead man. He has no chance against them, he even wears a woman's apron when he does the dishes (**Figure 27**). Adele's former husband's portrait is a strong reflection of Chris's lack of authority, as he is obviously more important than Chris in the house, and in many scenes the portrait looms over Chris.



Figure 27

In contrast, Johnny is depicted as a symbol of masculinity through superimposed frames. The first one is during the transition between the frames of Chris's painting and Johnny. After Chris goes to Kitty and leaves his paintings for the first time, Johnny is seen hiding from Chris in a corner of the apartment. Then, in a dissolve, one of Chris's paintings overlaps with Johnny (**Figure 28**); in this overlap, Chris's painted snake and Johnny are superimposed. The snake can be seen as a phallic symbol, as an object representing male generative power, hinting at Johnny's masculinity. The second such occurrence is with a knife and Johnny. When Adele tells Chris that his paintings are in the gallery window, Chris is cutting liver for dinner. Towards to the end of the scene he drops the knife onto the floor. This frame dissolves to a shot of Johnny's body and the two frames are superimposed for a moment (**Figure 29**). Like the snake, the knife can be seen as a phallic object.



Figure 28



Figure 29

However, both of these two rather different men are dependent on Kitty. If Kitty was not in Johnny's life, he would not have the means to get by. In a similar way, Chris is dependent on Kitty after he meets her. First of all, he would have continued to bottle up his desire to be known as an artist if he had not met her. Also, Chris's paintings would not have been displayed at the famous gallery. In a sense, she makes his dreams come true. Even after he sees Kitty and Johnny kissing he cannot give up on Kitty and he does not want to accept that Kitty loves a man like Johnny.

After World War II, there were two primary types of men. Most men continued to see themselves as the main breadwinner of society and after the war, they expected to support their families like they had done before because they thought that their old jobs were still available for them (APUS 2006). Many men also returned home in a state of depression; notably, the American Psychiatric Association did not recognize this as "post-traumatic stress disorder" until 1980 (Tuttle 2007: 78). In addition, many veterans of the war did not know what they would face in civilian life (Tuttle 2007: 79). In light of that, it may seem that Chris was a man who tried to keep in step with his family after the war but was unable to do so. And Johnny can be compared to a soldier after the war as he was unable to adapt to social life by himself and he uses Kitty to gain social status.

Kitty can be seen as representing postwar working women, and in some ways she is a kind of working woman. Her representation reflects concerns that working women threaten the system. In *Scarlet Street*, Kitty brings about the demise of two different men: Johnny is executed and Chris loses his mind. She contaminates these men with her ambiguity and ultimately they cannot escape this contamination because of their dependence on her.

On the other hand, the shifts in her roles reveal something different about working women. After the war, some women wanted to go back to their usual family life that had been disrupted by the war, but for others the situation had changed and numerous women liked their military jobs. In 1946, *Life* magazine published a photo essay about this issue: "The American Woman's Dilemma" (APUS 2006). This essay referred to women's conflicting desires regarding their homes and their jobs, which caused women to slip into depression brought on by questions about their identity. Kitty's varying activities hint at the existence of such a double bind.

Her role is shadowy and ambiguous, and she is stuck between two different men. She is not free and she is unable to make her own decisions; in short, she cannot act, as she wants. She wants to be at home with Johnny; however, to reach her dreams she works like a scarlet woman but in the end she is murdered. Her role, however, is not presented as being weak. Inscrutably, she determines Chris and Johnny's destiny. Her inconsistent role reflects the dilemma of working women in the sense that she is not completely active or completely passive.

At the end of the movie, Kitty's dilemma is clearly revealed. After Johnny's execution, Chris is haunted by thoughts of Kitty and Johnny's voices and he tries to hang himself. But he is rescued and he is sentenced to live with those sounds in his mind. In the end, he is shown as a homeless person; because of Kitty, he lost

everything in life. At that moment, he is confronted with Kitty's portrait, and that is the last time Kitty is seen. Even though Kitty has driven Chris mad, she is powerfully represented in the portrait. As an uncanny character, she prevails even in her absence in the world.

To sum up, *Scarlet Street* contains elements that reflect the consecutive steps of Girard's concept of violence. In light of this concept, Kitty is the surrogate victim who will be chosen for the purification of violence. Her situation is indicative of the postwar working women's dilemma in the ways that she affects the two main male characters and in the ways she is unable to meet her own desires. These dilemmas are made tangible in the way her changing position and status is presented.

SECTION 3

THE STRANGE LOVE OF MARTHA IVERS

This section presents an analysis of *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* in three parts. The first part of the analysis examines the sacrificial crisis in the movie through a discussion of Rene Girard's notion of mimetic desire and the concept of the monstrous double. The second part explores the reasons for choosing a surrogate victim and discusses the surrogate victim in terms of Julia Kristeva's notion about abjection's ambiguity. And the last part presents an analysis of the relationship between the story and the postwar United States in terms of the social dynamics of America in 1946.

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers (Lewis Milestone, 1946) is about the unusual story of the ruthless Martha Ivers. The year is 1928. It is a rainy night. Young Martha tries to run away from Mrs. Ivers and her town, Iverstown, for the fourth time. After her father's death, Martha was forced to live with her aunt. She has no one in her family except her wealthy aunt, Mrs. Ivers, but Martha despises her. Martha's best friend, Sam Masterson, helps her run away, but Mrs. Ivers's detectives catch Martha each time. Martha, however, does not give up, and ultimately, teenage Martha Ivers attempt to run away yet again results in her aunt's death.

After being caught, when Martha enters her room to change her wet clothes, her teacher's son, Walter, is playing with her cat. At the same time, the teacher, Mr. O'Neil, and Mrs. Ivers are playing chess in the study. Suddenly, the electricity goes

out. After a short while, Sam approaches Martha's window and once again she decides to try to run away again with Sam and get on the circus train. But her cat jumps off Martha's lap and starts to go down the stairs. Sam tries to catch the cat, but Mrs. Ivers sees the cat before Sam can get to it, and out of her hatred for cats she starts beating it. When Martha sees this, she is infuriated and picks up her aunt's cane and hits her on the head. As a result, Mrs. Ivers rolls down the stairs.

The power comes back on. We see that the door is open and Sam has disappeared. Mr. O'Neil returns from the study, and Mrs. Ivers is lying on the floor, dead. Martha makes up a story about a man who killed her aunt and escaped through the open door. She claims that Walter saw everything; he agrees to go along with the story. Mr. O'Neil, the policemen and everybody in town believes Martha's story. In this way, Martha becomes the master of the town because as the only heir, she inherits her aunt's wealth.

Many years later, Sam visits Iverstown. Everything has changed. Mr. O'Neil has passed away, and Martha has become a charming and powerful woman. Through her investments, Iverstown has developed into a rapidly growing industrial town. She married Walter, who is a candidate for the position of district attorney. But they are unhappy. Walter has become an alcoholic, unable to passionately express his love for Martha. Their marriage becomes little more than a business, and their secret about Martha's aunt has taken its toll on Walter.

On Sam's first night in town, he meets a beautiful woman, Antonia (Toni) Marachek. She had missed her bus and agreed to have a drink with Sam, and then she checks into Sam's hotel. In the morning, Toni is arrested for a probation violation. At that time, Sam decides to visit his old friend Walter to ask for help. With this visit, the web of conflict starts to take shape.

Martha starts by meeting up with Sam, who she sees as a kind of savior rescuing her from her dissatisfaction with life. In the course of events, Sam is impressed by Martha as well. Walter, however, does not want to lose Martha. As a result of this triangle, the secret in the past comes to light, bringing about the demise of Martha and Walter.

4.1. The Constitutive Steps of the “Sacrificial Act” in *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers resembles the other two films analyzed in this thesis in terms of constitutive steps; the characters are “culpable.” Young Martha rebels against her aunt and is reckless enough to run away from her only home. Her hatred drives her to extremes and her sole desire is to be free of her aunt.

Young Walter is a “good boy” who is tied to his father’s apron strings, but he is also loyal to Martha. His obedient nature positions him between Martha and his father. As a result of this state of affairs, he does not have the power to stop the violence from spiraling out of control, and he tends to resign himself to its power.

These elements pave the way for the emergence of the conflict. The beating of Martha’s cat triggers her hatred, driving her to attack her aunt. Nobody stops her; Mr. O’Neil is in the study and Walter is not strong enough to resist Martha. The death of Mrs. Ivers is transformed into an inevitable conflict, which grows like a spider web. Walter’s loyalty exhausts him. Everything he has belongs to Martha; he is completely under Martha’s influence. By virtue of this, he continues to keep Martha’s secret. Martha develops into an arrogant woman after she seizes her aunt’s authority and power. Her feelings of self-importance lead to her to be terrified of losing everything she has. As a result, she becomes involved in another crime.

After years have passed, Martha and Walter find a man who resembles the

“murderer” in Martha’s concocted story. With Martha’s false testimony and Walter’s abilities as attorney, they ultimately get him convicted and cause the death of the innocent man. Violence, starting to spread, provokes another crime. In the words of Girard, “Once violence has penetrated a community it engages in an orgy of self-propagation” (1972: 67). So, it can be said that the sacrificial crisis begins at the start of the movie with the death of Mrs. Ivers. After that, Martha is enraptured by the power of violence and she cannot be purified because her lie about the murder does not stop the violence; on the contrary, it leads to other events and more violence.

The uniqueness of *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* lies in the way the sacrificial crisis develops. The constitutive steps are visible with the development of the shadow of conflict in *Double Indemnity* and in *Scarlet Street*: the danger of extinction is explicit. Then, the violence is purified by a sacrificial act. As a result of this process, the sacrificial crisis is solved quickly in *Double Indemnity* and in *Scarlet Street*. But the story of Martha Ivers begins with conflict: the homicide of Mrs. Ivers. Then, there is an ellipsis: 17-18 years pass. The story starts again with Sam’s return. This return discloses the sacrificial crisis, which started with the death of Mrs. Ivers who wielded influence over the whole town.

Martha’s story provides an opportunity to analyze the process of how the sacrificial crisis can be a danger and lead to the annihilation of a society. Girard notes that a sacrificial crisis acquires the power to destroy a society in terms of mimetic desire and the monstrous double. Throughout the course of the film, Martha’s unsolved crisis continues to increase step by step because of Sam. At the end, the threat of this crisis appears as a black hole, and Girard’s concept of mimetic desire is useful for discussing this crescendo.

Girard notes the importance of the rival (1972: 145) and argues that the rival is positioned in the triangle of the sacrificial crisis with the subject and the object. In this triangle, the subject and its rival desire the same object (1972: 145). The importance of the rival emerges at this point: “the subject desires the object because the rival desires it” (1972: 145). According to Girard, desire is mimetic: it imitates another desire as a role model (1972: 146). Before the satisfaction of their core needs, people experience intense desire, even if they do not know the truth of what exactly they desire. The main reason for this experience lies at the basis of desire (1972:146) and this desire is experienced as a kind of insufficiency. The subject thinks that her/his role model fills this lack and as a result, the subject wants to be just like his/her role model (1972: 146).

In the triangle of this story, Walter fills the subject position and Sam is his rival, and the object of desire is Martha. Walter wants to be like Sam because he is never afraid of anything. In the past, when Martha and Walter talk about Martha’s concocted story after Mrs. Ivers’s death, Walter discloses his desire, prompting Martha to tell him to “shut up.” In response, Walter reminds her that Sam saw everything as well. Martha protects Sam by saying, “Sam will never tell” but Walter says: “Yes, he will. He is scared. He ran away but I stayed.” This response reveals Walter’s desire to be like Sam in Martha’s eyes. He wants to be free of fear.

Moreover, the relationship between Sam and Martha is represented as having been significant since their childhoods; Sam has always been the one for Martha. For that reason, if Walter attains his object of desire, Martha, before Sam does, he thinks he can be like Sam. When Sam flees the town without Martha, Walter fills the gap he left behind and eventually marries her. But because of his personality, he lags behind

Martha's power in this triangle because in the absence of Sam, Walter's characteristics lack importance for Martha.

This desire is critical in terms of the sacrificial crisis because two desires which meet in the same object lead to a misunderstanding, which in turn leads to conflict. Girard explains this misunderstanding through the dynamics of the relationship between the subject and its rival/model:

The model, even when he has openly encouraged imitation, is surprised to find himself engaged in competition. He concludes that the disciple has betrayed his confidence by following in his footsteps. As for the disciple, he feels both rejected and humiliated, judged unworthy by his model of participating in the superior existence the model himself enjoys (1972: 146).

In other words, both of them, the model and the rival, are unaware that there is a rivalry, which implies that "their desires are identical" (Girard 1972: 147). As a result of this blindness, the conflict develops. This situation occurs in the film as well, but there is one difference: the conflict has already been created in Martha's story. So, it can be said that the misunderstanding leads to an increase in the danger of the sacrificial crisis.

In Martha's story, Walter's situation as a grown man is indicative of this humiliation. The first representation of him is in a photograph, not in person. In this way, his inconspicuous position is indicated with the picture, in which he is represented as a powerful figure as a candidate. However, Sam does not take that in stride when he visits the town and he humiliates Walter by constantly referring to him as a "scared little kid," thus revealing his jealousy. In fact, he begrudges Walter's position. This envy is represented in a scene that shows Sam's reflection in the mirror and the election campaign poster, "For district attorney," above the mirror (**Figure 30**). But the mirror together with the poster implies Sam's impossible desire. Sam is separate from the text, and only his reflection is part of the writing.



Figure 30

This rivalry develops the sacrificial crisis. When Sam goes to Walter to talk about Toni, he unwittingly recreates the triangle of the past. This recreation can be seen clearly when Martha visits Walter and Sam is in Walter's office. After many years, Martha sees Sam for the first time, which pleases her greatly. In Walter's words, she is "off balance" for the first time. Walter's jealousy boils again and this recreated triangle can be seen clearly in this scene (**Figure 31**). He expresses this to Martha as Sam leaves: "Sam will never tell. I will never forget you said that." Yet again he reminds Martha that he is being compared to Sam, as in the past.



Figure 31

When they meet, Sam suggests that Walter does not deserve a woman like Martha. When Walter proposes a toast to Martha for being his wife, Sam finds this strange. When Walter asks him why, Sam replies that he could not imagine such a situation. Walter has to face his desire with this implication. He is not like Sam; he will not be like Sam, even if he is married to Martha.

In this way, the misunderstanding starts for the subject. Walter thinks that Sam wants to get something in exchange for keeping his silence about the murder. He explains this idea to Martha, claiming that he sees blackmail in Walter's eyes. But Martha does not believe him and continues to trust Sam. At this point, Walter's attitude can be read as he tries to hide his desire and denigrates his rival, Sam. This misunderstanding creates a double bind for the subject because "the unchanneled mimetic impulse" (Girard 1972: 148) blindly attacks the obstacle created by the rival. As a result of this, the duty of the impulse becomes bogged down but does not give up, attacking again more ambitiously than before. It tries to acquire the target/object indicated by the rival but fails. These failures lead the subject to assume that "the violence itself is the most distinctive attribute of this supreme goal!" (Girard 1972: 148). Thus, desire and violence are strongly bound to each other.

Walter experiences such a situation repeatedly. After the first time Sam and Martha meet, he sets about gathering information about Sam with the hope of getting Sam to leave town. In doing so, Walter uses Toni against Sam and tries to turn Sam's request for help to his advantage. He makes it clear that if Toni does not do what he wants, she will have to go to jail for five years. As a result of this threat, Toni agrees to play by Walter's rules.

The first reversal appears for Walter when Toni is released. This appears normal to Sam because he had asked Walter, his "old friend," for help. Sam takes

Toni to a restaurant to celebrate her freedom. But at the restaurant an agitated man appears who claims that he is Toni's husband. Sam is shocked. The man actually is actually Walter's private detective, and he tries to provoke a fight with Sam. After they leave the restaurant, Walter's men start to beat Sam and drive him out of town. But Sam comes back with the badge belonging to Walter's detective, and the ploy is brought to light. This is the first round for Walter.

The second round starts when Sam visits Walter at home. Walter is surprised when he sees Sam, who came to visit Martha, in Walter's study. Sam is infuriated by what happened and he wants to tell her what he had been put through. While Sam and Walter wait for her, Walter tries to reach for his gun in the top drawer. Sam realizes this and he closes the drawer on Walter's hand. Then he punches Walter, knocking him to the floor. In this way, Walter loses the second round as well.

With every attack by Walter, Sam becomes more powerful in Martha's eyes and Walter slips even deeper into his double bind, which indirectly compounds the crisis by creating symmetries of reprisals: Sam responds to Walter's plan each time. If we reconsider Girard, the sacrificial crisis gains its power from the symmetries of reprisals which Girard terms as "tragic cyclothymia" (1972: 155), and the sacrificial act does not occur with an appropriate surrogate victim, it has the power to destroy the entire community (1972: 148). Girard notes that mimetic desire is an inseparable part of the contamination of violence (1972: 148). In turn, this desire is the main indicator of the sacrificial crisis.

This tragic cyclothymia can be seen in the ways Sam reciprocates Walter's attacks, which are actually attempts to drive Sam away from Martha. The first time he comes back to town to get revenge and the second time he punches Walter. The violence of these responses increases every time and thus the crisis becomes more

obvious with the deepening power of the symmetries of reprisal. Moreover, when the response time of the reprisals become shorter, the enemies start to lose their differences, transforming into each other's monstrous doubles/twins (Girard 1972: 161). When the time of reprisals between Walter and Sam gradually decreases, Sam begins to turn into a man like Walter. In short, their violent responses create counter-effects.

The story reveals this issue of twin characters in Sam's personality. He is a gambler and it is suggested that he makes his living by gambling. When Sam visits Walter at his home after being beaten by the detectives, Walter lets his suspicions about Sam slip out. In turn, Sam uses this to his own advantage even if he does not understand what Walter means when he refers to blackmail. That same day Sam tries to find out more about the blackmail that was mentioned, and realizes that it concerns the death of Mrs. Ivers. Then he goes to speak with Martha at her factory, hoping to become her partner by using this "gimmick," and Martha responds positively. But the important issue is that Sam is willing to do anything for his own sake, regardless of how wicked it may be. He uses his gambling abilities for his own good, just like Walter uses his abilities in the Mrs. Ivers case for his own good.

At the end of the movie, the sacrificial crisis appears in all respects. First, Walter confesses his hidden mimetic desire to Sam. He realizes that Martha and Sam are in love. Martha comes home after a date with Sam. That night, Walter had been drinking heavily. He gives the servants the night off and then calls Sam to invite him over. After Sam joins Martha and Walter, Walter starts to tell him the truth about Martha. He says to Sam "You are all of them," and continues to tell him about Martha's ex-lovers who tried to lighten her loneliness. But worst of all, Sam is "the only man who shares with Walter the only claim Walter has on her."

Walter unwittingly reveals how Walter and Sam can be transformed into monstrous twins before the extinction of society. He claims that Martha tried to lure Sam in to kill Walter, just like she made Walter kill an innocent man. In this way, Sam will fill the gap in Martha's life, as Walter had done in Sam's absence. The power of the sacrificial crisis is about to engulf Sam. Moreover, Walter points out the source of the crisis by telling Martha's side of the story, saying that she is so obsessed with power it even drove her to bring about the death of an innocent man. In this way, Walter analyzes the situation in terms of how Martha's fear of the unsolved murder causes more violence. If the crisis cannot be stopped, it will cause more deaths.

There are two ways to purify this crisis. The first would be the death of Walter. In this way, Sam would completely replace Walter but the crisis would not be solved. Sam offers a second option when he breaks the symmetries of reprisals. After Walter sees what he is worth in Martha's eyes, he leaves the room; however, he is too drunk to go down stairs and so he falls, briefly losing consciousness. Martha uses this moment to her advantage and tries to convince Sam to kill Walter. But she fails.

Sam realizes that he is gotten involved in serious trouble and says that he feels sorry for her and that she is a "sick" woman who does not know the difference between right and wrong. It is not a coincidence that he says that at that moment. He realizes the situation he is in; there is no difference between truth and lies, and this is the sacrificial crisis.

Sam breaks the symmetry of reprisals by not killing Walter. This situation opens Walter's eyes to the crisis. After Sam's reaction, Martha does not realize the real issue that is at hand and she threatens Sam. She argues that if she kills him, it

could be seen as self-defense. But to do this, Walter would have to be her witness. When Martha asks Walter if he will corroborate her story, Walter keeps silent and as a result Martha is not brave enough to pull the trigger. Sam leaves the house, and now the sacrificial act has to be carried out to purify all of this violence.

4.2. The Surrogate Victim

Mrs. Ivers' death initiates the web of violence and Martha's love of power increases the effects of violence. In particular, the people who are closest to Martha feel the devastating effects of her wrath in their bones. Walter's mimetic desire deepens this violence; his desire turns it to a vicious circle and thus the necessity of a sacrificial act becomes inevitable and an appropriate victim must be selected for the process of purification.

Anybody in this story can be the surrogate victim. The gap between them and society is not too wide. Martha runs Iverstown like a queen. If she wants something, she takes it sooner or later. Walter is her husband and he is a candidate for district attorney. Sam and Toni seem to be ordinary people in this town. But also the gap is not too narrow. Martha is not an ordinary executive. She obtained her position by killing her own aunt and pinning the blame on an innocent man, bringing about his death. Walter is an alcoholic and Martha's accomplice. Sam is a gambler, and Toni has just gotten out of prison.

Nevertheless, Martha seems to be the appropriate surrogate victim in the story, and she is represented in a way that differs slightly from everyone else. This can be seen in some formal elements, the first of which is her costumes. She is dressed in attractive, eye-catching clothes. When she takes to the stage, she garners all the attention, practically gleaming in her garments (**Figure 32**). The second is the harmony created between Martha and the mise-en-scene. Her outfits and lighting are

used to achieve this, and she is depicted as harmonizing with the mise-en-scene. She appears in a white dress when the background is white (**Figure 33**) or she wears dark colors in the dark factory office (**Figure 34**). In addition, she is often well-lit and is the center of attention. Even when her clothes harmonize with the decor, she stands out.



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34

Such details are in accordance with Girard's concept about the surrogate victim in the sense that they are related to a cultural level. Martha can be seen as the kind of person who bears society's unstable emotions. In this way, her death can purify the violence. But before going into greater detail about the cultural aspects, it will be useful at this point to analyze the reasons for Martha's victimized situation at a more individual level: abjection.

According to Julia Kristeva, abjection can be seen as a borderline issue; it cannot be defined by any rigid position. It is “above all ambiguity” (1982: 9) because even if abjection severs the bond between the subject and a thing that threatens the subject, this release is not radical. On the contrary, the subject continues to feel like she/he is possibly under threat (1982: 9). Kristeva writes, “[...] abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning [...]” (1982: 9-10). Because of this reason abjection is related to borders, it cannot be codified by any rigid positions.

People imitate desires. This mimesis can be seen as the basis of existence. Because of this, people can only be somebody when they are with others. These mimetic desires create the rules of order, which hold together society. In this way, people can gain status or value in this symbolic order and the body of rules (Kristeva 1982). However, this is not easy: because, people have to imitate other desires while also wanting to be unique. But nobody can truly be unique. As a result of this, being somebody is a painful process. People flow from one desire to another like water when they try to take a rigid position (Kristeva 1982: 10).

Abjection conserves these uncanny feelings existing “in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body” (Kristeva 1982: 10). This ambiguous situation creates two different fields: a space which includes signs and objects arising from the symbolic/cultural order and the space shaped out of this (Kristeva 1982: 10). As Kristeva argues, the latter is a possible alter ego for people (1982: 10).

In *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*, Mrs. Ivers is a kind of alter ego for Martha. Mrs. Ivers is similar to grown-up Martha in that she is a business woman and adheres to strict rules of business. She does not agree to give a scholarship to

Walter, even if Mr. O'Neil gives lessons to her niece. She is an executive of her own factory and can control the people of Iverstown because of her power. However, Martha does not want to be like her aunt, who she despised. Even if she is the only heir to her aunt, she never wants to be an Ivers. Even though Mrs. Ivers changed Martha's surname from Smith to Ivers, she wanted to remain as a Smith, which was her father's surname.

Martha needs her aunt but at the same time hates her. These complicated feelings can be discussed in light of Kristeva's claim about "maternal function" (1982: 12). According to Kristeva,

The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before *ex-isting* outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, "with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (1982: 13)

If the child can gain her/his autonomy, she/he has to be free from her/his maternal body, struggling against it. She/he has to be abject (Kristeva 1982:13).

The relationship between Martha and her aunt resembles a unity of mother and child. Symbolically, Martha tries to avoid being in her aunt's shadow and be, instead, tries to be an individual woman. The murder scene can be read as Martha's attempt to control her own alter ego. Because of this, Martha attempts to acquire authority in the symbolic order. The fact that she tried to run away from her aunt can be expounded with this claim. She struggles to restrain her alter ego by trying to break ties with her aunt. In the end, she achieves this by killing Mrs. Ivers.

Martha's uncanny feelings can be explained in terms of Kristeva's notion of maternal function. Martha needs her aunt's power and money to be Martha Ivers. Because of this, she continues to live in her aunt's former house and runs her aunt's factory. Even though she never wanted to be like her aunt, when she grows up, she

acts like her, applying the rules of the business world, even in her marriage. She controls Walter and his behavior. She gets whatever she wants in Iverstown. Her cold mannerisms and the physical similarities between the actresses who play grown-up Martha and Mrs. Ivers are a reflection of this. Nonetheless, this claim reflects a false expectation. When the electricity goes off, Martha asks Walter to light some candles. Then she says that she will do it but in the end, the candles are lit but she is not the one who does it; her aunt lights the candles in her room. In this way, this false expectation emphasizes that Martha and her aunt are one and the same. Because of this, even though Martha killed her aunt, she cannot escape being caught by her shadow.

Martha does everything to preserve her position, like someone who suffers from abjection. As Kristeva notes, “the abject is perverse” (1982: 15). This is because the abject neither accepts the rules of a system nor denies them. It uses them for its own benefit: “Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject” (Kristeva 1982: 16). Martha’s way of using laws is indicative of such a situation in that she corrupts the rule of law as she sees fit.

Kristeva states that the subject bears the traces of her/his archaic relationship with the maternal forever (1982: 62). The subject cannot feel at peace because of the power of this relationship’s existence. In addition, this relationship tends to make the father’s role vague. If one cannot reject the maternal, she/he is stuck between two different realms: she/he is not situated completely in the symbolic order, nor is she/he completely in the maternal level.

In light of this, Martha’s absent father and her feelings about her aunt can explain her dichotomy. When she tells her feelings about her aunt’s murder to Sam,

she says she slept heavily and peacefully on the night of the murder. But later Mr. O'Neil frightened her about the feeling of guilt. She adds, "I was crazy with fear." This resembles a kind of split between Martha's alter ego, her aunt, and Martha's personality in the symbolic order.

Martha's struggle concerning her aunt shapes her character. Despite the fact that she has power over the entire town, she has to live with the feeling of abjection, which destroys her. Even in death it never leaves her in peace. When Martha is shot by Walter, she hears an inner voice saying, "Ivers, Ivers, Ivers." In response, she says: "No, Martha Smith." Her struggle is clearly revealed at that moment.

Martha's positioning vis-à-vis the love object reflects her ambiguity. In the end, Walter understands that he will never be with Martha because his ideal Martha is different from what he had supposed. As long as Sam is in their lives, Martha will be whatever Sam wishes. But Sam gives up Martha. He cannot recognize her as the Martha of the past. In this way, Martha's ambiguous personality is strengthened.

The campfire in the forest reflects Martha's split situation, too. After she learns that Sam was not in the room when her aunt died, she attacks Walter with a burning stick. But suddenly, they start kissing. The camera focuses on the campfire, instead of their kissing. Their youth love blazes up again. The fire can be a symbol of their youth/their maternal period. As the fire sputters out, Martha's voice is heard: "Sam help me, help me." Her call for help is heard over the image of a dead fire. Her situation can be interpreted as meaning that there is nothing that can be saved from her existence. She wants to acquire her "fire" but everything changes. Only Martha does not accept this. Martha could not adapt completely to the symbolic order. As a supportive way to this claim, after Martha's voice, Sam's reply is heard on the same image: "Tell me, talk," which implies that Martha has to be talked to adapt in the

symbolic order. She has to reject completely her alter ego, her aunt. But Sam's voice is heard over the image of dead fire, which can be read that it is too late for Martha.

Girard's notion of "unshakable unanimity" is applicable here as well. At first, Toni says that Martha is an internecine woman. Toni warns Sam: "Leave this town. Even without me, but leave." After that, Sam sees the danger with his own eyes. He gives up on Martha to her detriment. And finally, Walter gives up on her too.

To sum up, she is the most appropriate person to be the surrogate victim for purification, and abjection captures her with her aunt's death, making her a suitable person to bear the unstable emotion of violence. She is chosen to be the person who determines and recreates the borders of the cultural order. As a result, she becomes the surrogate victim.

4.3. The Role of Martha as a Surrogate Victim

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers was released in 1946 which is a significant year in that it was the first year after the end of World War II and Martha's story reflects the dynamics of the post-war era in America.

According to James L. Abrahamson, one of the explicit results of war is that it drives forward the economy (1983: 172), as illustrated by the case of the United States after World War II. The war advanced industries and one result of this was that the government became immensely more powerful (Harper 2007, 8). This situation can be seen in the movie as well. After Martha takes over management of the factory from her aunt, she drums up business and increases the number of workers at the factory from 3,000 to 30,000. She expands the factory and Iverstown becomes "America's fastest growing industrial city."

Moreover, the characters in the story can be seen as being in parallel with those left on the home front in America during the war and postwar era. Sam's

abilities as a soldier are referred to repeatedly. The policemen who visit Sam at the hotel room because of Toni mention his wartime exploits, and Walter's detective also mentions that Sam did well in the war, making it clear that Sam had served in the war and returned home.

In some ways, Walter resembles a soldier as well. But his situation is different from Sam's. War provides good opportunities for the economy and the government; however, some soldiers are negatively affected. Lori Rotskoff states that some people have called the postwar era an "age of anxiety" (2002: 72) because the shadow of the Cold War hung over everyone and there was paranoia about the atom bomb and Russian endeavors. Rotskoff argues that it is ironic that because of the war, depression was brought back to the homeland (2002:72).

During this stressful era, alcoholism increased (Rotskoff 2002). In the movie, Walter suffers from this as well and he constantly drinks. When Martha asks Sam to kill Walter, she tries to use this problem against him. She says: "Everybody knows what a heavy drinker he was."

The situation of working women was rapidly changing as well. According to Debra Bellamy, after the war working women quickly lost their popularity in the eyes of media and the government (2011-2012: 8). The fact that men were returning from the war played an important role in this development because their positions had been taken over in some cases by women. As a result, the media often portrayed women as homemakers and housewives who happily returned to their homes (Bellamy 2011-2012: 18-19).

At this juncture, Martha is a symbol of the women who had worked in war-related jobs and their situation in the postwar era. She is a powerful business woman who reconstructs and controls Iverstown "by herself." Her loneliness and sedulity are

depicted as being typical of working women. Additionally, Martha has no children and is in an unhappy marriage. Through these elements, she represents growing concerns about working women at the time.

The main reason for the changing image of working women was the major transformation taking place in the United States. Inevitably, war affected the flow of people and because of that, postwar propaganda began to backtrack from efforts that had been made during the war. In 1946, pediatrician Benjamin Spock published a book about babies and children in the postwar generation, advising mothers to stay home for their children's mental and emotional health (APUS 2006), and an article in *Esquire* argued that working wives were a "menace" (APUS 2006).

Toni's character reflects these concerns. She differs from Martha in that she is easy-going and has no power. She agrees to do whatever Sam suggests and is at home much more than Martha. At the end of the movie, she is the happy woman. Also there are hints that she will marry Sam and in the end they leave Iverstown, never to return.

At this point, the reasons that Martha is victimized can be read in light of the fact that she is a kind of "menace" for Iverstown. She may have helped develop the town, but she is represented as being the cause of the spread of violence. She has the dangerous power to use laws as she wishes and bring about the death of an innocent man. Martha is like a god of Iverstown. As a result, her ambiguity leads to the contamination of the town.

Sam's story about Lot represents a correspondence with Iverstown's situation. In the story of Lot, there is a town populated by sinful people. Lot is sent there to warn and save the people of the town but they do not want to be saved. So two angels are sent to destroy the corrupted town. The angels warn Lot and caution

him, “Do not look back.” Martha’s death can be read as Iverstown’s death. And this death can save Iverstown from the spreading violence. In addition, the story about Lot strengthens the idea that Iverstown plumbs the depths of sacrificial crisis.

Sam can be seen as a savior for Iverstown. In the end, his renunciation stops the crisis, and Martha sinks into her own violent circle. After Sam begins to understand the truth about Martha, he makes a major contribution to purifying the violence. This state of affairs can be associated with the tensions that were being felt concerning traditional gender roles after the war.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Martha’s situation is suggestive of the double bind of working women. According to Michael Renov, two discourses combined to place women in a double bind (1991: 229). The first discourse took shape around war work. During the war, women were encouraged to join the workforce through reminders that their husbands and sons were putting their lives at stake in the war (Renov 1991: 229). After the war, this encouragement suddenly changed. Advertisements suggested, “If you women work, bread-earning men will be humiliated and unemployed” (Renov 1991: 230). In this way, women were being sent conflicting, irreconcilable messages.

The second discourse was based on the immediate post-war female experience (Renov 1991: 231) and is related to the paradoxical demands placed on wives and mothers. Wives were encouraged to make sure that they took good care of their husbands returning from the war. The second request was based on childcare and women were encouraged to give priority to their children for their nation’s future (Renov 1991: 231).

These conflicting demands placed American women in a difficult position. Who were they? Were they housewives or workers? Where did they belong? These

questions led to confusion over women's "proper" roles. According to one poll by *Fortune* magazine in 1946, 25 percent of women said that they would prefer to be men (APUS 2006). Indeed, this split can be seen in Martha's identity as well. Who is Martha? Is she Martha Ivers, Martha Smith or Martha O'Neil?

Her lack of a clear sense of belonging is indicative of the double bind of working women. In addition, her struggle to become her own woman by killing her aunt supports this claim. This struggle can be read in the fact that she tries to kill her previous hard-working generation to establish a new family with Sam, but in the end, she fails.

In consequence, Martha is the surrogate victim in this story. The reasons underlying her victimized situation can be understood through the notion of abjection. Also, her character reflects some aspects of working women of America. Likewise, the concerns of society about working women are revealed in Martha's character; however, the reasons for her victimized condition expose a different side of working women: In many ways, Martha is in a double bind, like many working women in 1946.

CONCLUSION

Double Indemnity, *Scarlet Street* and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* present three different women as *femme fatales*: One coldblooded husband killer, Phyllis Dietrichson; one scarlet woman, Catherine March; and one executive murderess, Martha Ivers. All of them are represented as dangerous, seductive and irrepressible, aspects which make them threats for society's safety. However, the most significant feature shared by these *femme fatales* is their victimized position. This situation unveils the deadlocks in which they are caught: they are powerful enough to threaten an entire society but are incapable of preventing their own inevitable deaths. This dilemma underpins their existence, a point that this study attempted to examine because it opens a window onto the situation of working women being represented as *dangerous* in the middle of the 1940s in America following World War II.

First of all, the deaths of the *femme fatales* create a new position and status for them which can be understood via the theory about violence put forward by René Girard. Taking up such an approach, this thesis investigated the reticulating web of conflict in terms of spreading violence which can stop only with an appropriate victim, who is the surrogate victim. Girard states that the surrogate victim can be anybody but the most determinant rule that indicates who the victim will be is unshakable unanimity. When violence reaches its peak, there is no difference between right and wrong and everyone turns into each other's monstrous twin. At

that moment, “the old pattern of each against another gives way to the unified antagonism of all against one” (Girard 1972: 78). In this way, the person responsible for this contamination is suddenly identified. This point is crucial in understanding the apparent arbitrariness of how an individual is transformed into a victim, and that person can be anyone in an atmosphere in which the destructive power of violence is escalating. Thus, the major reasons underlying the danger of *femme fatales* lose their importance and these women are arbitrarily transformed into victims.

In the films selected, this arbitrariness inevitably transforms the *femme fatales* into scapegoats, a state of affairs which cannot be merely ascribed to coincidence. These films reveal the bond between *femme fatales* and American working women. Through their successes, many such women discovered a sense of empowerment. However, after the war, discourses about what a good woman was began to change. Some of these discourses were related to motherhood while others were linked with nurturing wives, and they all were invariably linked with concerns over women in the workplace. These different discourses and the changing position of working women after the war placed women in a double bind and led to confusion about their identity. Despite the fact that many women did not actively participate in the war, they suffered from the effects it caused. That is why *femme fatales*' victimized position runs parallel to working women's experiences.

In developing an understanding of this double bind, Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection is useful. The theoretical framework offered by Kristeva deepens the issue of the surrogate victim and transfers the concept from Girard's cultural dynamic to a more individual scope which helps to unravel the reasons why the ambiguous position of these *femme fatales* was created through their powerful features and inevitable punishment. According to Julia Kristeva, abjection is a kind of code; it is

the other face of religious, moral and ideological systems which impact individuals (1982: 209). This face is an unwanted yet necessary facet. Because of this, after the death of these *femme fatales*, a new order and system can be established. These women are thus represented as being the source of corruption and abjection. They display the two faces of civilization and exist in the hinterlands of civilizations, identities and moral codes. As a result of this, they reveal the borders of the system. In this respect, they are the closest person to be sacrificed in the re-establishment and re-systematizing of the body of rules. They are neither a subject nor an object; they are ab-ject.

In these three films chosen, the *femme fatales*' uncanny positions reveal the experiences of working women in that era. Working women tried to become many things in that system, which led them to be placed in a double bind. The *femme fatales* displayed this suffering through their uncertain characters. In this way, sacrificing the *femme fatales* is illustrative of two matters regarding working women at the time. First; the concerns about their dangerous natures echoed deep-seated anxieties about the roles of women in society and how they became victims of the given order for the sake of the greater "good." Secondly, the *femme fatales* suffer from abjection, and this is related to the double bind in which working women found themselves: a contradictory position that threw their identities into disarray.

If we further comment on spectators' positions, considering the catharsis created by these films, it can be argued that the viewers also become surrogate victims for wartime. In this way, this study could be carried further to examine the relationship between these films and spectators, and also examined from that perspective.

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