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# Mothering modes: analyzing mother roles in novels by twentieth-century United States women writers

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MOTHERING MODES: ANALYZING MOTHER ROLES IN NOVELS BY  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY UNITED STATES WOMEN WRITERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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by  
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## Abstract

For this dissertation, the following novels have been chosen as examples of the many issues that are involved in mothering in United States society: Chapter 1: Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Chapter 2: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Dorothy West's *The Wedding*, Chapter 3: Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Christina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, and Chapter 4: Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. For this study, the term "mothering" is specifically related to the rearing of children by the female parent. Rearing is defined as the bringing up of a child to maturity and at least to the legal age of eighteen. In "Mothers at Work: Representations of Maternal Practice in Literature" (2000), Elizabeth Bourque Johnson examines the following definition of mothering: "Mothering is a job, a kind of work. The word mother may also indicate a relationship or a title or a way of caring, but primarily a mother is a worker, a person who takes responsibility for the care and development of a child" (22). In this dissertation, I argue that oppressive circumstances in the examples in these novels create similar coping strategies for the mother characters, especially when mothering daughters. In addition and contrary to what some might believe, those coping strategies are not confined exclusively to particular cultural groups. The chapters of this study show how different mothers who rear children under different negative circumstances may benefit from similar coping strategies, and they examine these coping strategies from the least to the greatest examples of their success.

**Introduction:  
Mothering Modes:  
A Survey of the Different Perspectives on Mothering**

Mothering is one of the most powerful acts that one can perform. When one chooses the position of mother, one chooses to give a large percentage of one's life to the process of producing, guiding, and managing others' lives. Mothering in United States society, as well as in most other countries, means mothering in a male-dominated society, which has historically and does systematically marginalize (limit or discriminate against) women and other minorities. Therefore, when scholars seek to analyze the multi-faceted act of mothering, they must explore the many forces that positively and/or negatively influence whether mothers will be constructive or destructive in the lives they choose to manage: their own lives and the lives of their children. For the literary theorist, fiction can provide interesting examples for gauging the significance of these and many other debatable issues.

For this study, the following novels have been chosen as examples of the many issues that are involved in mothering in United States society: Chapter 1: Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Chapter 2: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Dorothy West's *The Wedding*, Chapter 3: Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Christina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, and Chapter 4: Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. For this study, the term "mothering" is specifically related to the rearing of children by the female parent. Rearing is defined as the bringing up of a child to maturity and at least to the legal age of eighteen. In "Mothers at Work: Representations of Maternal Practice in Literature" (2000), Elizabeth Bourque Johnson examines the following definition of mothering: "Mothering is a job, a kind of work. The word mother may also indicate a relationship or a title or a way of caring, but primarily a mother is a worker, a person who takes

responsibility for the care and development of a child” (22). In this dissertation, I argue that oppressive circumstances in these novels create similar coping strategies for the mother characters, especially when mothering daughters. In addition and contrary to what some might believe, those coping strategies are not confined exclusively to particular cultural groups. The chapters of this study show how different mothers who rear children under different negative circumstances may benefit from similar coping strategies, and they examine these coping strategies from the least to the greatest examples of their success.

By oppressive circumstances, I refer to those burdensome forces that overwhelm the body, mind, and spirit and that complicate the act of mothering, usually rendering one helpless, inactive, and/or incapable. Examples of such forces are societal discriminations according to sex, race, ethnicity, and class (including slave and immigrant statuses). When using the term oppressive circumstances, I also refer to negative experiences during the mother character’s own childhood and to self-imposed circumstances such as her negative choice of a lover or husband.

By coping strategies, I make reference to those methods that aid the mother in attempting to deal with or to overcome those oppressive circumstances. Those coping strategies include the mother being a strong enough woman to defy the oppressive forces that would deter her mothering or the mother becoming associated with another strong woman who influences her defiance of those forces. This woman may be a relative, friend, and/or othermother.

Othermothers are “women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities” (Collins, “Meaning of Motherhood” 47). Another coping strategy is the mother acting as an agent of positive self-transformation. In *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (1997), Obioma Nnaemeka writes that “victims are also agents who can change their lives and affect other lives in radical ways” (3). Here, Nnaemeka considers

the simultaneous victimhood and power of the mother (5). This is an example of the mother using the power she does have. By relying on her own inner strength or her sheer desire to be effective, the mother character is capable of overcoming some of the odds that usually work against other women in her particular situation. For example, *Beloved's* Sethe Suggs goes from escaped slave woman and jailed convict to self-supporting cook. Many social scientists tend to agree with the theory that poverty and lack of formal education breed overall ignorance and crime. This is the scheme of thought that generates the push behind social prevention and intervention programs, such as stay-in-school and anti-gang programs that have proven necessary in some instances. However, *Bastard Out of Carolina's* Anney Boatwright and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn's* Katie Nolan are examples of extremely poor mothers, who rely on honest, hard work for survival even in the worst of times.

Another coping strategy involves the recognition of parenting failures and making appropriate adjustments. In some situations, the mother struggles not to repeat the parenting blunders inflicted upon her during her own childhood. In other instances, the mother recognizes her own parenting failures and corrects them. Sometimes the only corrective measure is a drastic one. This is the case with *Bastard's* Anney Boatwright and her decision to relinquish her mothering duties to her own sister. Lastly, another coping strategy is the association with women-centered support networks. Again, these women may be relatives, friends, and/or othermothers. However, in some of these situations the network aids the daughter against the mother's will. For example, Silla Boyce, in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, considers the three women who aid in her daughter's positive development as mere meddlers and actually hates two of them and works toward getting rid of them.

By focusing specifically on the mothering of daughters, this study continues the discussion and exploration of what is considered by many theorists, such as Adrienne Rich and Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, as the most intense parent-child relationship that exists in literature and even in real life. By intense, I mean extremely emotional, highly sensitive, and deeply strained. The fictional mother-daughter relationships in this study provide engaging examples of this characterization. Brown-Guillory writes the following about mother-daughter theorizing: “Research suggests that [the] mother-daughter dyad experiences a love/hate relationship, often because the mother tries painstakingly to convey knowledge about how to survive in a racist, sexist, and classist world while the daughter rejects her mother’s experiences as invalid in changing social times” (2). Many might argue that there are certainly great examples of intense parent-child relationships that involve fathers and/or sons. This should definitely be recognized, but it is not, however, the focus of this study. Although, in four of the novels chosen for this study, the father-daughter bond is explored in some depth but only as a means of understanding the greater intensity and importance of the mother-daughter bond with which it is compared and contrasted. Also in the two novels in Chapter 3 of this study, the mother-son bond is treated in very much the same fashion; that is as a comparative tool, and also as a means to explore the mother’s experiences and coping strategies.

So then, one might ask why so much intensity exists within the mother-daughter relationship. One analysis that would certainly contribute to that intensity is that women who live in a society where they are considered inferior to their male counterparts and who choose to become mothers must teach the daughters they rear how to survive in a male-dominated society. A second analysis that would certainly contribute to that intensity is that some women, who never learn independence themselves, must rear daughters who desire autonomy. Another

analysis that would certainly contribute to that intensity is that some women almost automatically rear their sons as inheritors of autonomy but rear their daughters with the double-standard hand of cautious subservience. Because men are usually reared with the expectation of the position of superiority, these analyses do not apply to their father-son relationships. Because mothering daughters involves these complications and so many other oppressive circumstances, the need for coping strategies should be readily understood.

While examining the mother-daughter relationship utilizing a vast array of criticism, it is my intention to discuss the mother-daughter relationship with a central focus on the mother, taking into account that these relationships are real for both mother and daughter, and do not resemble the idea of the perfect mother-daughter relationship. In the chapters of this study, the mother-daughter relationships vary to a great degree and have their own unique complications, failures, and successes.

The pairings of novels were selected due to their treatment of similar mothering complications and coping strategies. They are also arranged by chapters according to the increasing success of the mother-daughter relationships analyzed in the works chosen for particular chapters. The chapters progress as follows: Chapter 1 focuses on the worst mothering examples, Chapter 2 focuses on fervent, yet ineffective mothering, Chapter 3 focuses on initially misunderstood, yet moderately successful mothering, and Chapter 4 focuses on difficult, yet successful mothering. Successful mothering refers to producing autonomous children who are or are capable of becoming productive citizens and successful parents themselves. These novels were chosen as examples of how mothering is represented in our society because: 1) they can provide examples of how particular oppressive circumstances associated with mothering may be addressed, 2) they can provide examples of how various coping strategies may affect those

oppressive circumstances under which mothering takes place, and 3) they can provide examples of behaviors or beliefs associated with mothering that may be or may become detrimental to individuals or groups. Mothering, whether fictional or real, is a topic so powerful that it invites perspectives from several areas of scholarship. The following sections are surveys of those different perspectives and how those perspectives intersect with this study.

### **Feminist Perspectives on Mothering:**

In her essay, “The Truths of Our Mothers’ Lives” (1984), Gloria Wade-Gayles writes the following: “Because women are biologically capable of bearing children, we assume that they are, by definition, capable of nurturing children, but there is no gene for parental nurturing. Women bring to the role of mother their individual strengths and weaknesses as persons, and what they feel about themselves as persons influences their performance as mothers” (11). One might also add that women’s strengths, weaknesses, and sense of self-worth are all affected by outside forces, which in turn affect their performance as mothers. These forces include societal discriminations. These are issues that have been and are being discussed in depth in an extensive array of feminist discourses since the early 1960’s. This discussion is one that has ranged from questioning motherhood as an option in the 60’s and early 70’s, reaffirming mothering in the 80’s, to pragmatizing motherhood in the 90’s (Ross 1995, 397-8).

Within this chronology, one work is credited more often than others for its groundbreaking treatment of mothering due to its use of both personal and scholarly analyses and its particular treatment of the mother-daughter relationship. Because it relied on both multi-disciplined research and personal experience, this work broke ground for a new and fresh form of feminist scholarship. This work is Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience* (1976, 1986). Rich and many feminists, such as Nancy Chodorow, Marianne

Hirsch, Patricia Hill Collins, and Barbara Christian, writing from the mid-1970's until now, realized that they were and/or are writing within a discourse with which they identify, which they have lived, which they are living and/or observing, and which they are attempting to repeat, not repeat, or change. This physical, social, and psychological process is simply referred to, by many, as the mother-daughter-mother circle. It is from inside and from outside this circle that I choose my dissertation topic, in which I examine the mothering oppressions and coping strategies in fictional mother-daughter relationships, as they exist, as ordinary mothers exist, in a gendered, sexualized, racialized, commodified, age-ized society (Morrison, *Playing 4* and Brown-Guillory 13).

The scope of my project analyzes oppressive mothering circumstances and coping strategies within mother-daughter relationships in modern novels written by a diverse group of United States women authors. Although the mother-daughter relationship is a highly popular contemporary topic, this dissertation is unique in some ways. Recent dissertations focus on a totally different aspect of the mother-daughter relationship or focus on the mother-daughter relationship primarily within the works of one author, on the works of authors of the same race, on other literary periods or countries, or on mother-daughter dyads or triads, while I examine mother-daughter dyads and triads in works by seven different United States women authors of different ethnic and racial backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> For example, *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Twentieth-Century Literature* (1996), edited by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, covers mother-daughter relationships in many different cultures and national literatures; but this collection of essays by different feminists has no common thesis, though there are connecting issues in some of the essays. Also, this collection excludes any major focus on works by white women writers. My study includes texts with African-American (United States and Caribbean

born), Chinese-American, Cuban-American, and White American (Irish and Appalachian) protagonists. In addition, I focus on mothering as a reaction to oppressive circumstances in the mother's life and not just as a system of natural instincts that the mother should have because she is a woman. Some of the earlier material on mothering works toward a celebration of maternity even when analyzing its problems. It is intended for this study to extend that work on mothering by focusing realistically on mothering failures and successes, but recognizing that there are not celebratory aspects in all mothering situations. Also, I evaluate the effects that particular instances of mothering have on society by virtue of the citizens produced and by the contribution they make to overall opinions on the ideas about both "good" and "bad" mothering. For this is just as important as the effects that forms of societal discrimination have on the task of mothering in general.

I focus on the mother-daughter relationship, by examining this relationship in light of the stereotypical idea of the "good mother" as the teacher, protector, provider, and nurturer who must be everything to her child(ren) at once and who is ultimately (though, in many instances, unfairly) held responsible for the adult woman that her daughter becomes. It would seem that because being a "good mother" is stressed in United States society, our society would, in turn, support the mother in her endeavor to be teacher, provider, and protector. Instead, motherwork is made even more difficult since the mother must strive to protect her daughter from the same oppressive factors that created her mode of mothering in the first place. Within the aforementioned definition of the "traditional role of the good mother," the mother is ultimately responsible for the rearing of her children, especially the daughters (due to same-sex identification) and blamed for defying that role whenever her needs as a woman take any precedence over her role as mother. In my analysis, the issue of discrimination in our society

renders the cultural stereotype of the “good mother” or the “perfect mother” a myth. All of these analyses are definitely predicated on the differences between women and men that make a patriarchal society possible in the first place. The greatest difference between men and women is not sex but the manner in which males have arbitrarily and historically constructed a world where privilege is based on sex, i.e. those with the penis have the privilege. Therefore, women’s strengths, weaknesses, and sense of self-worth are all affected by discriminatory factors as well as personal experiences, which in turn affect their performance as mothers, especially when rearing daughters. As we understand mothering as a primary act of nurturing and developing those children who become adult members of society, we must examine and understand the many forces that determine the types of mothers that a society produces.

Because I have thirty-three years of experience as a daughter but only four years of experience as a mother (of sons), it would be easy for me to move within the historical trend of "mother blaming" which sometimes results in the scholarly analysis of the mother-daughter relationship. For example, when discussing *Bastard Out of Carolina*’s Anney Boatwright, I acknowledge Anney's needs as a woman even when they outstrip her role as a mother. Yet, I struggle not to blame her for her choice to be a wife and not a mother even when I know she is unable to be a “good” mother due to her own incompleteness as a person and her own problems with her identity as a daughter. This tendency to blame is often the case; for as Ladd-Taylor and Umansky write, in their historical account of mothering (1998), “the mother who attended too diligently to her own needs felt the sting of familial, clerical, and community disapproval” (7). Anney Boatwright feels this sting in Chapter 1 when she chooses her husband instead of her daughter. She is brave enough to make the choice that will satisfy her needs as a woman, but she makes the choice that causes her daughter lasting emotional pain. My analysis of Anney and the

other literary mothers in this study is quite often affected by my judgments of their mothering, but I am reminded of the importance of fair and unbiased evaluation in my analyses.

For as Ladd-Taylor and Umansky also write, “throughout the twentieth century, the label of ‘bad’ mother has been applied to far more women than those whose actions would warrant the name. By virtue of race, class, age, marital status, sexual orientation, and numerous other factors, millions of American mothers have been deemed substandard” (2). Alice Adams goes a step further when she writes that mothers who fall outside of the narrow limits used to describe the normal mother are basically represented by writers as psychologically and socially dangerous (414). This is often the analysis in which poor and minority mothers fall victim to societal discrimination. Although being white, married, middle class, and educated in the United States does not necessarily make one a better mother, these characteristics often shield the mother from the criticisms she would face if she were ethnic, single, poor, and uneducated and her child was considered a problem child. In fact, in our society, a child born to the mother of the latter description is automatically labeled “at-risk” from birth, meaning that the child has a much greater chance of becoming a non-productive citizen than her counterpart who is reared in a non-ethnic, two-parent, middle class home where both parents are educated. As the number of “at-risk” factors decreases, the child’s chance of a better life increases. One must definitely take into account that the effects of such discrimination directly complicate the mother-daughter-mother cycle, thereby contributing to the negative childhoods and negative personal choices made by the mother. So, the oppressive power of societal discrimination can have a snowball effect. For instance in *Beloved*, Sethe Suggs’s status as a slave mother limits her choices when she is trapped by the slave catchers. Being a poor, African-American, uneducated slave woman gives her no recourse in the nation’s family court system, so she chooses death rather than losing her

children. In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, poor, white trash, uneducated Anney Boatwright easily chooses to marry Glen, because she believes his upbringing in an upper middle class home makes him a great catch. Soon, she realizes that money and status have not protected him from abuse and that he is much more damaged by his childhood than she is. In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate Dead is discriminated against even within the poor, African-American community because she has no navel. As a result, she ignores societal rules and beliefs; but because she never teaches her daughter and granddaughter to exist within those rules, they never achieve autonomy and her granddaughter is eventually crushed by those values and beliefs.

When writing about aspects of mothering and the mother-daughter bond, many modern feminist theorists seem (as they should) to bear in mind that women have their own personal perspectives on and experiences of mothering and that there are varying causes for mother-child relational conflicts (Adams 1995, 415). This move toward inclusiveness in this field of research when addressing issues of mothering seems to be a positive response on the part of white feminist theorists to the call of feminists of color for inclusiveness in analyses of women's issues. In *Mother Daughter Revolution* (1994), Debold, Wilson, and Malave' suggest that all mothers' truth-telling should be recognized because "the well-worn paths into patriarchy lead to treachery between mothers and daughters and among women across lines of race, class, and sexual orientation" (36). For many years, feminists of color have challenged critiques of women's issues which seem to have very limited utility for the differences concerning non-white, non-middle-class women (Joseph, "Black Mothers and Daughters: Traditional and New Perspectives" 1993, 18-19). This is the same challenge, which most probably causes Rich to produce the "Ten Years Later" introduction (1986) to her ground-breaking *Of Woman Born*, an introduction which includes commentary on women writers of color. In fact a renewed interest

in the mother-daughter relationship itself has developed since the mid-1980s, signaling the inclusion of all women's perspectives.

The fact that women have been considered the "second sex" throughout the history of the United States and still continue to be deemed as such is evident in the nearly eighty-year struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment and the constant redefining of affirmative action policies in our country.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, sex discrimination is evident in both the public and private spheres, affecting women's lives in their places of employment as well as their own homes. Discrimination of this sort is deeply ingrained in our society and is a dominant issue in the lives of women (Norton in Clayton/Crosby 1992, viii). These crucial issues affect the way mothers rear their children and the different manner in which mothers rear daughters as opposed to sons, thereby making the continued discussion of rearing daughters that much more important.

Nancy Chodorow, in her commentary on the significance of the child's sex/gender in the mothering process, argues in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and "Gender as a Personal and Cultural Construction" (1995) that "mothers treat sons as differentiated beings but daughters as extensions of themselves because of their gender similarity or otherness" (*Reproduction* 82-83, "Gender" 522). In such cases, the mother encourages her son to be autonomous because she understands that his maleness grants him a position of privilege in our society, but her daughter's autonomy is discouraged for that same reason. This analysis can be connected to the situation in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* in Chapter 4; however, the mother's reasons differ greatly. Katie Nolan sees her daughter as an extension of her strong being, and she nurtures her less because of this belief. She dotes on the son, because she believes his ego needs strengthening. Chodorow, Hirsch, and Patricia Hill Collins analyze the negative aspects of mothering in their bodies of work, one being the fact that some mothers sacrifice nurturance in order to instill endurance in

their daughters. This is an area of great concern when I discuss Silla in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and Katie in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. Both mothers' strong dispositions contribute to the battle of wills between their daughters and themselves. Consequently, that stern disposition is created by a hard, ambitious life and the constant struggle to deal with an incompatible husband.

This discussion of women's second-class citizenship is also central to Jean Baker Miller's groundbreaking 1976 work, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. According to Miller, there are two major types of subordination or inequality: temporary and permanent. Temporary Inequality involves the adult as dominant and the child as subordinate, and Permanent Inequality involves the white, middle-class male as dominant and those categorized as different by birth (i.e., sex, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) as subordinate (3-12). For women, this hierarchy of inequality is more than just two-fold. Their lifelong struggle as subordinate within Permanent Inequality taints their role within the Temporary Inequality of adult and child. It is in this area of Permanent Inequality that women learn and internalize sex inferiority, and that ethnic women learn and internalize inferiority due to race and nationality as well. Women who internalize subordination within Permanent Inequality will often then act as dominants within Temporary Inequality, and there is no more common form than maternity. It is within this realm of Temporary Inequality, the adult/child dichotomy, that "the superior person is supposed to engage with the lesser in such a way as to bring the lesser member up to full parity; that is, the child is to be helped to become the adult" (Miller 4). In the mother-daughter relationship, this task is extremely difficult since, within Permanent Inequality, women can never reach full parity. In opposition to this premise, Debold, Wilson, and Malavé write: "The fierce connection that a daughter feels for her mother is reciprocated by a mother's fierce love for her child. The power

balances here can sometimes offset the power difference felt as inequality” (Debold 42). The same can be true for both mother and daughter as they attempt to offset the state of Permanent Inequality.

In many of the mothering examples in this study, the mothers’ coping strategies aid them in turning Miller’s analysis upside-down. In this case, the power that women do have changes the whole picture for the mother-daughter relationship, whether in the form of the mother’s summoning of inner strength, the example of another strong woman, or the presence of a women-centered network. The universality of Miller’s analysis is also challenged by feminists of color with whom I agree, such as Gloria I. Joseph, who take the stance that many daughters of poor and minority mothers respect their mothers’ strength and survival skills in the face of oppressive circumstances. This is exhibited in both novels in Chapter 4, in spite of the daughters’ objections to the manner in which their mothers are rearing them. The conflict here concerning the differences in mothering for women of color is also largely reflected in both political and literary feminist ideas.

### **Feminist Women of Color Perspectives on Mothering:**

In “African-American Feminist Thought on Motherhood, the Motherline, and the Mother-Daughter Relationship” (2000), Andrea O’Reilly describes feminist theory on motherhood as “racially codified,” and asserts that “maternal identification in black culture gives rise to daughters’ empowerment” (143). She situates her comment with the writings of well-known feminists of color. In “Revolutionary Parenting” (1984), bell hooks makes the following observations about the early stages of the modern women’s liberation struggle: “Some white middle-class, college-educated women argued that motherhood [was] the locus of women’s oppression. Had black women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named

a serious obstacle to our freedom as women. Racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills or education...would have been at the top of the list—but not motherhood” (133). For most feminists of color, women’s issues had to take a backseat to race issues depending on the impact that an issue might have had for a greater number of people regardless of sex and ethnicity. This conflict often made women of color believe that the mainstream women’s movement did not have space for them or was a waste of their talents and energy at the time.

In *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Patricia Hill Collins suggests that there is still “the absence of a fully articulated [African-American] feminist standpoint on motherhood” (117). In addition, many African-American feminists feel that false images of the “white-male-created ‘matriarch’” and the “the Black-male-perpetuated ‘superstrong Black mother’” must be debunked by both an African-American and feminist analysis of motherhood (Collins 117). In “Black Mothers and Daughters: Traditional and New Perspectives” (1993), Gloria I. Joseph rightfully argues that “while white feminists have effectively confronted white male analyses of their own experience as mothers, they rarely challenge controlling images such as the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother and therefore fail to include [ethnic] mothers [...]. As a result, white feminist theories have had limited utility for [ethnic] women” (18-19). These critiques and many others like them led to the production of many volumes on mothering by women of color.

Continuing on the subject of the mothering of women of color, Debold, Wilson, and Malave’ present evidence about the differences in rearing daughters:

Many African-American girls manage to hold on to their voices and their belief in themselves in adolescence, more so than white or Latina girls. To do so, they draw on strong family connections and communities, and on the role that women play in those

families and communities. In a protective but costly maneuver, they distance themselves from schools and other institutions in the culture that tell them they are worthless. (17)

This may be true for some. Albeit, sometimes ethnic students distance themselves from certain philosophies such as mainstream values about family structure, marriage, and religion taught in schools, while still pursuing a traditional mainstream education. This is the case for the poor, Irish immigrant daughter, Francie Nolan, in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* in Chapter 4. Francie rejects her teacher's idea that her drunken father and his beautiful songs are not honorable subjects about which she should write her English class themes. In some situations, depending on the importance that the mother places on success (whether she is a formally educated woman or not), the daughter will continue to achieve because she has been made aware that her education will be a bargaining tool in the mainstream marketplace and a maneuvering tool in a patriarchal power structure. In *Brown Girl* in Chapter 4 of this study, this is the belief that drives Silla Boyce in her relentless pursuit to educate her daughter Selina. Silla understands what it is like to be an ambitious, ethnic immigrant without a formal education in the United States. She never wants her daughters to experience her plight.

Similar to the argument of Patricia Hill Collins, African-American feminists and other Black feminists describe Black women's mothering, contrary to white mothering, as a duty to social community activism. In "Passing the Torch: A Mother and Daughter Reflect on Their Experiences Across Generations" (1998), African-Canadian theorists Wanda Thomas Bernard and Candace Bernard write:

More than a personal act, black motherhood is very political. Black mothers and grandmothers are considered the 'guardians of the generations.' Black mothers have historically been charged with the responsibility of providing education, social, and

political awareness, in addition to unconditional love, nurturance, socialization, and values to their children, and the children in their communities. (47)

Their task, as mothers of color, has been more multi-faceted than that of their non-ethnic counterparts. This discussion leads to the importance of othermothering within ethnic and poor communities.

Othermothers and community mothers aid biological and/or legal mothers in their difficult occupation of motherwork. Such are the examples shown in each chapter of this study when analyzing the effectiveness of the women-centered network as a coping strategy for the difficulties of mothering. This idea of communal child rearing in the African-American culture dates back to slavery and even earlier in African culture. Ladd-Taylor and Umansky write: “In spite of conditions,” such as poor nutrition, low birth weight, and inadequate health care, “slave mothers did protect and nurture children in manifold ways. Yet where the maternal ideal for white women dictated that they nurture their own children exclusively and in private, enslaved mothers developed networks to protect and care for children communally” (8). And, they did so effectively. It was understood in slave culture that if a child was separated from his or her parents, other adults reared that child. Therefore, when slave owners used slave mothers’ domestic and maternal labor for the use of their own families, the slave children depended on the slave community for their care (8). These networks have served as comfort zones for the self-imposed and society-imposed guilt that often accompanies the motherwork of a mother who also works outside the home in which she rears her children. This has always been an issue for poor and non-white mothers in the United States, since the great majority of them have never been acquainted with the concept of the “stay-at-home” mother until recent years. However, the

comfort of women-centered networks does not remove all the difficulties of rearing children in a racially discriminatory society.

The difficulty of mothering is only compounded for ethnic women because discrimination due to race and ethnicity is added to that of sex. Judith Arcana writes: "We learn how to be women from our mothers. They teach us, consciously and unconsciously, what women are" (35). All forms of discrimination come into play here. So, daughters either learn second-class or even third-class citizenship from their mothers' lives, or they learn to overcome it. Issues surrounding lesbian mothers and interracial mother-daughter pairs take this commentary to still another level of analysis. Although this study does not fully analyze any lesbian mother or daughter characters or interracial mother-daughter pairs, West's *The Wedding* analyzes an African-American daughter reared by her white grandmother and *Bastard Out of Carolina*'s Bone Boatwright is left safely in the care of her lesbian aunt at the close of the novel. The grave importance of discussing the causes and coping strategies for oppression signifies the need for responsible action of all feminists. It is now the responsibility of all intellectuals to write inclusively of different perspectives of motherhood. With this issue in mind, I must recognize all women's critiques of mothering so as not to participate in the "othering" of the mother that white feminists are so often accused of enacting.

### **Historical-Political Perspectives on Mothering:**

The topic of this dissertation, which draws on work in the area of women's studies as well as in American literature, is not only tied to historical and political struggle due to the issues that surround mothering, but is also politically charged because it deals with women's issues at all. The historical chronology of even establishing Women's Studies programs in universities across this country was and is a struggle worthy of comment. Edited by renowned women's

studies pioneer Florence Howe, *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers* (2000) is a testament to that fact. Because of these founding “mothers” and their efforts, there is a voluminous body of work that has been composed concerning the historical-political and socioeconomic reasons for the oppressed existence of women in society. It is quite valuable to view the debate on the topic of mothering in the United States Women's Movement.

In *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters* (1998), political analyst and news correspondent Cokie Roberts declares that one of the hottest topics for the past four to five decades has been the following: “What is woman's place?” She also notes that a huge societal problem for women is that “women make each other's lives harder by trying to impose their own choices on their sisters” (186). This statement is a portion of her commentary on the biggest argument about mothering today: stay-at-home mothers versus working mothers. She cites the following as support for her own opinion: “A few years ago the *New York Times* published a poll which revealed that two thirds of all women aged eighteen to fifty-five work outside the home, half said they provided at least half the family income, and almost 20 percent were the sole providers. Regardless of job, 90 percent said they were the principle caretakers for their families” (191). Such statistics only show that regardless of the increasing numbers of women in the workplace, the traditional domestic duties of women have changed little over time. The increase in the number of working mothers only makes rearing children that much more complicated and finding successful coping strategies even more important.

It would seem that the increase in the number of working mothers would make the stay-at-home mothers versus working mothers debate lose most of its steam. However, the debate about which mother is the “good mother” still goes on; in fact, the debate becomes even more

heated when it is viewed within the arguments of feminists versus anti-feminists. In *Good Enough Mothers: Changing Expectations for Ourselves* (1993), Melinda M. Marshall interviews contemporary mothers (working outside the home and inside the home) in order to analyze feminist and anti-feminist sentiments about mothering. She supports “good enough mothering” (a phrase she borrows from pediatrician-turned-psychotherapist D. W. Winnicott) as being able to excel at compromise in a mother’s life (xiv). Marshall comments on the attitude that society perpetuates about the working mother: “There is something heroic about a woman who puts bread on the table, something not so heroic about one who works to afford a nicer table. The former warrants our sympathy; the latter, our condemnation” (xv). Consequently, this does not take into account the stigma placed on all working mothers when compared to those middle class mothers who choose to stay at home. Ladd-Taylor and Umansky write: “Wage-earning mothers, single mothers, slave mothers—in short, everyone except middle-class whites—fall outside the narrow good-mother ideal” (3). This categorization only adds to the oppressive state of the mother who has to manage (due to economics or personal fulfillment) an outside job along with the job of rearing her children. In addition, historically, the poverty level of ethnic and poor white families in the United States has required a great majority of the mothers in those families to work outside the home. So, they have always overwhelmingly fallen outside of the good-mother ideal and have had to develop coping strategies to manage the responsibilities in their lives.

Marshall also cites the gender gap and ideas about work and how women allow themselves to be trapped into venues of guilt:

Men accept work as a given, a nonchoice, and yet manage to exercise plenty of free will in structuring their personal goals and ambitions around this mandate. But women,

despite overwhelming evidence that they're in the work force to stay, insist on tormenting themselves or antagonizing each other with 'ideal' scenarios in which work plays no part, as though any kind of job outside the home were automatically a detraction from a mother's job within it. (xvi)

Some of the examples in this study show daughters who do not fault their mothers for their work outside the home, but have the opposite reaction to their employment. Regardless of the battle-filled relationships between mother and daughter pairs in both novels in Chapter 4, the daughters greatly respect their mothers as hard workers. In *Brown Girl*, Selina is in awe of Silla's ability to perform such a powerful job in the factory. In *Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie wants to do all she can to help her mother's job of cleaning the apartment house less of a burden.

Labeling herself a feminist for the '90s, Melinda Marshall questions the mothering debate further: "Who speaks for us, if antifeminists cannot appreciate the lure of the workplace and feminists cannot understand the primacy of motherhood? How can we make choices when all around us insist we are leading a less compromised life that denies us choice, that we are victims of our sex differences and 'feminine' predilections" because we mother? (11). A search for answers to these questions requires a look at previous literature on the subject.

In her 1986 work, *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America*, sociologist Sylvia Ann Hewlett discusses that fact that both feminists and antifeminists refuse to recognize the needs of working mothers. Sharing her own scenario in which her hard-core feminist peers at Barnard College denied her tenure due to the fact that she devoted potential working hours to mothering instead, Hewlett attests to the fact that feminists refuse to see the special needs of working mothers; and finds that just as harsh as the fact that the anti-feminists refuse to see the need of some mothers to work. She writes: "Motherhood is the problem that

modern feminists cannot face. The modern women's movement has not just been anti-men; it has also been profoundly anti-children and anti-motherhood" (185). Hewlett argues that women's freedom of choice is predicated on economic security, therefore signifying on the fact that women have yet to secure such freedom: "Neither the feminist movement nor the antifeminist movement has yet had much success in improving women's economic security" (334). In my opinion, the status of women in economic arenas has been advanced via the feminist movement; however, the disparity between the positions of men and women in those arenas has shifted little over the decades. It is still a rarity to boast about when women, like Oprah Winfrey (who is not a mother), beat all odds and outweigh the majority of her male counterparts.

Of course, Hewlett has her opposition. Considered "feminist heir apparent" by many, sociopolitical feminist Susan Faludi's 1991 work, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* charges the holders of views like Hewlett's as the backlashers who halted the real progress of the Women's Movement. In contradiction to Hewlett's assertion, Faludi asserts that "when feminists pushed for women's rights in other areas—employment opportunities, pay equity, credit rights, women's health—mothers and their children benefited, too" (316).

Here, Faludi takes the attitude that mothers should be grateful for benefiting from the movement, even if only indirectly. However, Faludi's definition of feminism encompasses the beliefs of Hewlett: "Women should be free to define themselves—instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men" (xxiii). I admit that I find myself in agreement with Faludi's statement; except, I would add that a woman's identity and her mothering methods should not be defined by other women either.

## **Sociological and Psychological Perspectives on Mothering:**

In *For Mothers of Difficult Daughters* (1998), self-proclaimed mothers' advocate and veteran psychotherapist Dr. Charney Herst has become a well-known expert on addressing the problems of and healing the relationships between mothers and their daughters. She has made it her mission to retaliate against the mother-blaming techniques still practiced in areas of psychology. She writes: "It's no surprise [mothers] blame themselves: for the past thirty years, most psychologists have held Mom responsible for her child's personality. Our daughters, often at the urging of their therapists, reason that their unhappiness has been caused by a bad childhood—which basically translates to bad mothering" (xiv). According to Debold, Wilson, and Malave', even some of the terms often used in our culture to describe mothers' behavior falls into the trend of mother blaming: "*controlling, intrusive, engulfing, enmeshed, seductive, overprotective, cold, critical, competitive, distant, depleted, narcissistic, abusive, crazy*" (26). In fact, some of these same terms appear within the chapters of my study. However, despite the causes of their behaviors, these descriptions are correct in certain instances. Some of the examples in this study show mothers whose childhood experiences as daughters affect their mothering in a negative manner. So, regardless of the truthfulness of some diagnoses, it is still obvious from a historical survey of the past psychological literature on mothers that "the basic message is clear: Look no farther; the cause of what ails you is your mother" (26). Herst acknowledges that part of her focus on this familial relationship in particular is its extreme power: "As mothers and daughters both know, there is no bond more intimate than the one they share. It's same-sex, it lasts a lifetime, and it can be intensely rewarding or brutally painful. When a relationship that profound goes awry, it takes effort to get it back on track" (xv). The extreme difficulty of getting the mother-daughter relationship back on track is exhibited in *The*

*Kitchen God's Wife* and *Dreaming in Cuban* in Chapter 3 of this study. So many years of distance, resentment, disagreement, and misunderstanding are hard to overcome for both the daughters and the mothers in these works.

Herst's years as a therapist are characterized by "trying to bring together women who see each other as rivals, martyrs, or manipulators, but rarely as equals" (4), which she believes is directly linked to a trend that makes most of the population believe that it should "toe the psychology line and blame Mother for her child's behavior" in almost all circumstances (6). The fact that biochemical and genetic mental disorders are diseases that were once blamed on the mother is a prime example of the perplexing tendency to blame mothers for what goes wrong with their children (Herst 13). Herst also points out that almost all of the literature and research on mother-daughter relationships "came from the daughter's perspective" and that "someone had to take the mothers' side" (6). This uneven depiction of the mother-daughter relationship is an issue that inspires this study; purposes of this project are to continue to tell the mother's story and to examine the oppressive circumstances under which mothers rear their children.

Debold, Wilson, and Malave' also comment on the pressure to measure up to the unattainable ideas of the perfect mother myth: "The culture of mother blaming creates a psychological prison for mothers of daughters. Whether or not a mother is conscious of these forces within the culture, the desire to do right, to provide a daughter with new opportunities, makes mothering incredibly pressured" (31). This is the case with Silla Boyce in *Brown Girl* in Chapter 4 of this study. She is obsessively driven to give Selina the opportunities (neighborhood, education, socialization, travel, etc.) that she has never had for herself. Such pressures unfairly goad mothers into believing that they "can't afford to fail; failure would damage their daughters. By being set up by impossible expectations, mothers are doomed to fail"

(31). Mothers feel the pressure that they must be everything at once—the “Super Mom” complex. Most would agree that charging mothers to empower their daughters in a society that has constructed vehicles to un-empower women is definitely leaving mothers to contend in a no-win situation. Attempting to be a “perfect mother” in an imperfect society is an exact recipe for failure. However, this is where the issue of effective coping strategies becomes extremely important. Some examples in this study show mother characters who benefit greatly from coping strategies. Though, some coping strategies are more effective than others.

In *Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship* (1989), Paula Caplan describes “aspects of girls’ and women’s socialization that creates or exacerbates problems between mothers and daughters, as well as methods that mothers and daughters have found helpful in repairing the rifts between them” (238). Also, in opposition to some of her other colleagues already mentioned in this introduction, she depicts the mother-daughter relationship as no more a struggle than other parent-child relationships, but she cites socially-created barriers for women as issues that complicate this relationship more than other parent-child relationships. In “Don’t Blame Mother: Then and Now” (2000), Caplan revisits her previous work and makes new observations and assessments. It is the depressing analysis that the basic principles that existed when she wrote the book still existed that is her purpose for writing this encore essay. Acknowledging that her interest in mother blaming was initiated when she was working in a clinical setting where families were psychologically evaluated, Caplan’s motivation to initiate her own documented studies was a reaction to the fact that “it seemed that there was nothing that a mother could do that was right” (237).

The pressure of mother blaming leaves mother’s desperate to be the best but hard-pressed to find the best ways to cope with the burdens of mothering. As a result of women’s own

conditioning: “Throughout history and across cultures most women mother according to the prescribed institution of motherhood; that is, women’s mothering practices and identities are defined and controlled by the larger patriarchal society in which they live” (O’Reilly and Abbey 7). I must agree with this assertion. Women often mother as a reflection of how they were mothered, usually consciously and unconsciously duplicating the methods with which they are most familiar, regardless of whether those acts are negative or positive. Only learning to question this particular structure can eliminate the failures that it predetermines for the process of rearing independent daughters.

Women must tell others about their experiences, so that others can learn from their examples. This validation of women’s voices is positively extended to telling women’s stories in novels as well. These are the kinds of stories associated with Naomi Lowinsky’s definition of the “motherline.” In “Mother of Mothers, Daughter of Daughters: Reflections on the Motherline” (2000), Lowinsky defines the motherline as the “ancient lore of women” (227) and stories from the motherline as those stories of “female experience: physical, psychological, and historical; stories of the life cycles that link generations of women; stories that show how times have changed and that show that nothing much changes at all” (227). She writes about the fact that “women lament the lack of narratives of women’s lives, yet women’s stories are all around us. We don’t hear them because our perception is shaped by a culture that trivializes ‘women’s talk’ and devalues the passing down of female lore and wisdom” (228). In fact, female lore and wisdom is usually referred to as “old wives’ tales” and retold with a great amount of skepticism. Lowinsky also refers to the struggles between mother and daughter as “mother-daughter wrestling, a struggle at once to identify and differentiate from one another. Mothers and daughters wrestle with bodily, temperamental, stylistic, generational, and emotional differences,

with the power of the feminine mysteries and how little they are honored in our cultures” (232). Daughters struggle not to relive their mothers’ existences, existences that they believe they know about but do not really understand (like Pearl Brandt in *Kitchen God’s Wife*), existences characterized by living as those oppressed in a patriarchal society.

Obviously, the strain of living with oppressive circumstances might very well create emotional barriers in a mother’s rearing of her child, especially her daughter, whom she sees as a potential mother. These challenges make for many different forms of mothering, resulting from the mothers’ experiences as a mother, a daughter, a woman, and as a person and demand that the mother find beneficial coping strategies, which make her life and the lives of her children better. These ideas are reflected in the various chapters of my study. In some cases in this dissertation, mothers emerge triumphant despite their oppressive circumstances.

### **Literary Perspectives on Mothering: An Outline of Chapters:**

In Chapter 1, “Mothering as Dilemma in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” I argue that these novels demonstrate how oppressive circumstances, such as social discrimination, the mothers’ childhoods, marital/love relationships, and abusive behaviors, can create the need for inner strength, mothering mentors, surrogate mothers, escape methods, and women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. In addition, I argue that examples in these novels show that when those circumstances are too overwhelming, the coping strategies may be rendered ineffective and result in failed mother-daughter relationships. Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* are works that show how women’s lives can be oppressed by circumstances both beyond and within their control. Both novels tell fictional stories that examine women’s lives in the midst of

emotional pain and confusion. Examples in these novels show women whose relationships with their daughters are gravely affected by the dilemmas in which the mothers find themselves.

By dilemma, I mean a situation that involves a choice between equal but unsatisfactory alternatives. For Anney Boatwright Waddell in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the dilemma is the choice between her oldest daughter and Anney's husband, with neither of these alternatives being satisfactory since choosing one of them means she definitely cannot have the other in her life. In *Beloved*, Sethe Garner Suggs' dilemma comes long before her children can understand the consequences of her choice. She must choose between living with her children under slavery or killing them and herself. Her choice of the latter alternative does not work out according to plan, and she spends much of her life paying for the unplanned outcome.

In Chapter 2, "Mothering as Difficulty in Dorothy West's *The Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," I argue that these novels show how oppressive circumstances, such as childhood experiences, socioeconomic philosophies, social isolation, and family discord, can create the need for inner strength, mothering assumption, mothering mentors, surrogate mothers, and/or women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mothers. By mothering assumption, I refer to the taking over of or laying claim to the mothering responsibilities of a child. Examples in this chapter show at least two women (grandmothers) who assume the mothering responsibilities of rearing their granddaughters, because their daughters are portrayed as being incapable of fulfilling those mothering responsibilities alone or at all.

In this chapter, the works end with the relationships being somewhat more successful than those in Chapter 1. Although some of the mothering relationships end tragically, there remains a mutual love relationship that is also manifested by their physical togetherness. For example in one of the relationships in *The Wedding*, the mother and her daughters do not respect

each other's choices and philosophical beliefs, but they do preserve their mother-daughter relationships and remain connected physically and emotionally. However, some of the oppressive circumstances that affect mothering lead to the dissatisfaction and depression of the daughters and some semblance of the mother-daughter relationship remains, in some instances, until death parts it. Although the relationships examined in this chapter do not show how effective coping strategies can be most successful for mothers who must combat oppressive circumstances, they do seem more successful than those relationships examined in Chapter 1. Their greater success seems to be predicated on, but not limited to, several aspects: 1) the management of different oppressive circumstances, 2) the absence of physical child abuse, and 3) the perspectives of older adult daughters. However, these relationships are by no means as successful as they could be.

In Chapter 3, "Mothering Understood in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Christina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*," I argue that these novels show how oppressive circumstances, such as the mothers' childhoods, abusive behavior, father-daughter bonds, and cultural barriers, can create the need for inner strength, secret sharing, therapeutic story-telling, and support networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. Although the mother characters in this chapter mother under some of the same oppressive circumstances as those in Chapters 1 and 2, the outcomes are more positive, but certainly not completely successful. For instance, the circumstances of abusive behavior in Chapter 1 and the mother's negative childhood experience in Chapters 1 and 2 are also examined in Chapter 3.

However, almost all of the daughters are able to find a certain understanding of their mother's rearing of her children. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, even when the daughter is not able to totally forgive her mother for her mothering mistakes, she is still left with a way to understand

the circumstances under which the mothering takes place, by evaluating her mother's past. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, mother and daughter actually find common ground after they break down barriers and the mother tells her own story. Possible reasons for these more successful relationships may be: 1) the more intense connections between granddaughters and the grandmothers (even though the grandmother has serious problems in the relationship with her own daughter), 2) a more genuine interest in mothers and daughters communicating some understanding of the past, and 3) a real effort to explain the mother's motives and actions through secret sharing and storytelling.

In Chapter 4, "Mothering as Transition in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," I argue that oppressive circumstances, such as marital stress, socioeconomic issues, nurturance issues, and mother-daughter conflicts, create the need for inner strength, economic security, and women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. I analyze examples of mothering in stormy, but productive mother-daughter relationships. By "mothering as transition," I refer to the Bildungsroman experience of the daughter character in each work and how the work shows the positive development of the mother-daughter relationship through the stages of the daughter's maturation from adolescence to her late teens. During that period, mother and daughter do not always agree. Actually, I refer to their relationships as a battle of wills that develops into a mutual respect for each woman's strength. Throughout the progression of the stages, the mother-daughter relationship makes great gains in mutual understanding, respect, and love.

In this final chapter, each mother-daughter pair comes to a mutually successful understanding of their relationship, as in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, except that the daughters reach this point as very young women in the examples in Betty Smith's and Paule Marshall's novels.

Several issues make these mother-daughter relationships more successful than those examples found in the previous chapters: 1) the mother characters discussed are extremely strong, ambitious, intelligent, hardworking, money-conscious women, 2) the daughter characters discussed are also strong, ambitious, intelligent, and hardworking, 3) the mother characters recognize their daughters as younger replicas of themselves, and 4) networks of othermothers are very effective in guiding the daughter to an understanding of her mother. The examples of successful mother-daughter relationships discussed in this chapter show how the right coping strategies can alleviate the negative circumstances under which mothering can take place. This balance is the effective management of mothering.

On the topic of managing motherhood, Elizabeth Bourque Johnson writes: “What makes mothering a dynamic practice is the need to respond to changing situations. Children grow; to grow with them, mothers must be able to analyze what works and what doesn’t, a critical component of maternal practice that is less obvious than glancing or feeding but is no less integral to the ongoing work [of mothering]” (24). In other words, the management of mothering is as important as the act of mothering. In this study, examples of how that job of mothering exists under oppressive circumstances and survives due to coping strategies are examined. It is always understood that there can be no perfect mothers, only those who attempt to mother “good enough” by negotiating the everyday complications of mothering, those who attempt to manage motherhood with womanhood.

## Chapter 1

### **Mothering as Dilemma in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* are works that show how women's lives can be oppressed by circumstances both beyond and within their control. Both novels tell fictional stories that examine women's lives in the midst of emotional pain and confusion. Examples in these novels show women whose relationships with their daughters are gravely affected by the dilemmas in which the mothers find themselves. By dilemma, I mean a situation that involves a choice between equal but unsatisfactory alternatives. For Anney Boatwright Waddell in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the dilemma is the choice between her oldest daughter and Anney's husband, with neither of these alternatives being satisfactory since choosing one of them means she definitely cannot have the other in her life. In *Beloved*, Sethe Garner Suggs' dilemma comes long before her children can understand the consequences of her choice. She must choose between living with her children under slavery or killing them and herself. Her choice of the latter alternative does not work out according to plan, and she spends much of her life paying for the unplanned outcome.

*Bastard* focuses mostly on Anney's life leading up to her choice, and *Beloved* focuses, in great part, on Sethe's life after the choice; however, both novels lend themselves to an in-depth exploration of the similar oppressive circumstances in these mothers' lives and the coping strategies that fail to alleviate the effects of those circumstances. Even though these mothers differ in race, ethnicity, and locale, great similarities exist in the coping strategies in their lives. These similarities exist despite

their differences. In fact, one might argue that their differences are not that great since both women are (at one time) poor, uneducated, lonely teenage mothers. In addition, described by Appalachian Studies scholar David Reynolds as "white trash" (356), Anney's faces much of the same discriminatory treatment that Sethe faces as an African-American woman. In this chapter, I argue that these novels demonstrate how oppressive circumstances, such as social discrimination, the mothers' childhoods, marital/love relationships, and abusive behaviors, can create the need for inner strength, mothering mentors, surrogate mothers, escape methods, and women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. In addition, I argue that examples in these novels show that when those circumstances are too overwhelming, the coping strategies may be rendered ineffective and result in failed mother-daughter relationships.

The importance of telling women's stories or allowing women to tell their own stories directly affects the understanding of women's mothering experiences. Analyzing these fictional accounts of mothering provides an opportunity to view how mothers may be able to rear their children in certain oppressive circumstances and how successful their coping strategies can be in those circumstances. Also, one must take into account the point of view from which the mother's story is being told. For instance in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Bone narrates the account of her own abuse and her mother's reaction to her ordeal. This is a situation in which the narrator might be unreliable due to her own negative emotions about what took place. However, Bone seems quite reliable since she narrates the most horrific events but simultaneously seeks understanding of others' actions and others' reactions to her ordeal. In fact, the most heartfelt justification for

Anney's choice comes from the daughter she leaves behind. Bone leaves her listeners with these thoughts on her mother's choice:

Who had Mama been, what had she wanted to be or do before I was born? Once I was born, her hopes had turned, and I had climbed up her life like a flower reaching for the sun. Fourteen and terrified, fifteen and a mother, just past twenty-one when she married Glen. Her life had folded into mine. What would I be like when I was fifteen, twenty, thirty? Would I be as strong as she had been, as hungry for love, as desperate, determined, and ashamed? (Allison 309)

Bone's words echo the oppressive circumstances under which both these mothers lived.

In *Beloved*, Morrison takes the newspaper story of Margaret Garner (1856) and creates Sethe's fictional story.<sup>1</sup> Sethe's story is one in which she is the accused abuser of her own daughters, "murdering" the oldest daughter, Beloved, and isolating the youngest, Denver. Karla F.C. Holloway writes: "The narrative of *Beloved* is not entrusted to the single discourse of any of the three women implicated in the myth. Neither is it left to only one dimension. Instead, a collective telling validates the literate text. Each of the voices of the three women in this novel, Denver, Sethe, and Beloved, is distinct—a different kind of discourse" (174). This is basically true; however, Sethe relays her own version of the story through her "rememory" of the past and her place in the present after her daughter reappears in her life. Marianne Hirsch writes: "This novel does allow the mother to speak for herself, to speak her own name and the daughter's, to speak, after eighteen years, her unspeakable crime to her daughter. It allows Beloved to return so that mother and daughter can speak to each other" (8). It is within this journey of words with her daughters and her lover that Sethe reveals her belief that she saved her children by

this mothering act. The complicated acts of mothering for both women are discussed in terms of the circumstances that challenge their mothering and the strategies that attempt to help them manage the job of mothering.

Issues such as social discrimination can affect mothering in profound and irreversible ways. According to Patricia Hill Collins in "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood": "Racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context for all women" (45). This is accurate because we live in a society in which race and economics are acceptable tools for measuring success. Poor women are expected to be less than "good" mothers in our society. They are barred by sex and economic status already; and if race becomes another barrier for women who are negotiating their way in this patriarchal, white, middle-class dominated society, it only exacerbates the mothering situation. Because society reifies the social discrimination under which Anney and Sethe rear their daughters, our society should acknowledge what Evelyn Nakano Glenn calls, "the differing cultural contexts and material conditions under which mothering [must be] carried out" (5), but this is often not the case. In most cases, the mother is painted as the guilty party whenever she strays from the idea of the "normal mother," rather than one who mothers according to her resources, limitations, and coping strategies.

Because "normal" mothering instincts are considered natural by societal standards, any mother who does not seem "naturally inclined" to mother is often labeled a "bad" mother. Glenn reminds us that "mothering is constructed through men's and women's actions within specific historical circumstances. Thus agency is central to an understanding of mothering as a social, rather than biological, construct" (3). Because

mothering is affected by social conditions, which shape the mother's actions toward her child, especially her daughter to whom she has the social responsibility of being a female role model and the “protector/shaper of her womanhood,” discrimination contributes to the undermining of mothering in the United States. This is indeed connected to the fact that both women’s mothering is affected by their negative childhood as well, since both women are mothered by women who lived and mothered under the some of the same circumstances under which they live and mother.

Also, common to both women’s stories are the analyses that her lover fulfills a great need when he comes into her life, that his coming interferes with her mothering either in her and/or her daughter(s)’ opinions, that he has a disturbing rivalry and/or deviant sexual relationship with at least one daughter, and that the mother, either by choice or default, is still with him at the close of the work. The need fulfilled by the male lovers seems to center around their actual occupying of space in the mothers’ lives: physically, sexually, and emotionally. Similarly, the issue that Paul D and Glen both consume space is the first good and bad point that surrounds their coming into the women’s lives.

When they enter these mothers’ lives, these men are also either directly (Glen) or indirectly (Paul D) linked to the issue of abusive or obsessive behavior that occurs in these mothering stories. Eventually though, the mothers are examined as perpetrators. By the end of the works, both women suffer the loss of a child(ren). Sethe’s loss of her daughters and Anney’s loss of Bone are outcomes for which some textual figures and many critical theorists blame the mothers and by which both groups further implicate them as either abusive mothers or abusive enablers. Perhaps, these two groups’ reactions

are grounded in the beliefs of the authors themselves. Morrison says of Sethe's sacrificial act: Sethe did "the right thing, but she had no right to do it" (*Book TV*). Allison, in an interview with Carolyn E. Megan, says, "[Anney] is going to pay for what she does by the place she puts herself into at the end of the book. It's just, but it's hard" (76). It is obvious that such overwhelming oppressive circumstances would make the job of mothering an extremely difficult one to manage. This would definitely bring about the need for coping strategies. However, the fictional stories of these mothers demonstrate just how coping strategies can fail when the circumstances are too overwhelming. Although the mothers rely on inner strength, mentors/surrogates, escape, and networks to help them manage their task, it is only the support networks that save the daughters in the end when the mother-daughter relationships are lost.

These mothers' rough choices are somewhat padded from their full blunt force by other women in the textual community (women-centered networks), who step forth to help the daughters cope with their experiences. For the good of the daughters and the mothers, these circles of women, some of whom may be considered othermothers and/or community othermothers, step in when they are needed in the mother-daughter relationships. Othermothers are defined as those who play "central roles in defusing the emotional intensity of relationships between bloodmothers and their [children]" (Collins, "Meaning" 56). "Sometimes [...] 'othermothers' are grandmothers, aunts, or cousins, united by kinship with the bloodmother," and sometimes they assume kinship by choice (Troester 163). Their jobs are very important in both these women's mothering stories.

In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Anney's mothering is complicated by several oppressive circumstances. Social discrimination is one of the complicating and

oppressive aspects in her life. She is limited by her sex, class, education (a sixth-grade one), and hunger (for food and for love). She becomes a mother and a widow while still in her teenage years; she is mothering while still a child herself. Never having had a close relationship with her own mother, Anney is left to devise her plan for mothering on her own. Hardworking and struggling to raise two daughters alone and considered "white trash" in Greenville, South Carolina, in the mid to late 1950s, Anney attempts to be a "good" mother and still have some personal satisfaction in her love life. Anney is twenty-one and a sad widow, and her economic position makes Glen Waddell, an employed man from a good family background, look attractive; however, Glen is attracted to Anney's "white trash" image in some strange way. Rejected and belittled by his own upper class family, Glen wants to "marry the whole Boatwright legend, shame his daddy and shock his brothers" (Allison 13). Anney's belief that life with Glen will make a better life for her girls and her never materializes, not even in an economic sense. In fact, his low-wage job and bad temper on the job make it necessary for Anney to work just as hard as she did before they married, which serves to further alienate them from the Waddell family, since the men in Glen's family "spoke badly of women who would leave their children to 'work outside the home'" (98).

However, the greatest reminder of her marginal social status is the red "illegitimate" stamp on the bottom of Bone's birth certificate. Anney wants so much for her daughter not to live with the same stigmas she has had all her life. Bone makes the following analysis of Anney: "Mama hated to be called trash, hated the memory of every day she'd ever spent bent over other people's peanuts and strawberry plants while they stood tall and looked at her like she was a rock on the ground. The stamp on that birth

certificate burned her like the stamp she knew they'd tried to put on her. No-good, lazy, shiftless” (Allison 3). To Anney, having that stamp removed meant that at least their social status wouldn't be legally documented. Even when she decides to leave Bone behind, she leaves her with a “clean” certificate of her birth, a clean slate with which to start her life over, without Anney in it.

Anney does realize that she has already given Bone what she was bequeathed by her own mother—negative childhood experiences with which to contend as an adult. Anney's negative daughterhood is another oppressive circumstance that affects her mothering. Anney strives to have a different mothering experience than her own mother as a result of her memories of her daughterhood. Anney's mother, Granny Boatwright, is alive, well, and quite opinionated. Although Anney's mother plays a central role in and is a source of fun and truth in Bone's life, Bone is able to see, through the relationship of her mother and her grandmother that all mothers and daughters are not lovingly close like she wants to be with Anney. In fact, Bone realizes that these two women have, at times, different philosophies about life. About the issue of her birth certificate status, Bone thinks:

Granny said it didn't matter anyhow. Who cared what was written down? Did people read courthouse records? Did they ask to see your birth certificate before they sat themselves on your porch? Everybody who mattered knew, and she didn't give a rat's ass about anybody else. She teased Mama about the damn silly paper with the red stamp on the bottom. If granny didn't care, Mama did. (Allison 13)

Granny, a woman who did not adhere to others' opinions, certainly did not care about the opinions of her daughter.

There is no lasting bond in this mother-daughter relationship at all. In fact, all of Granny's children considered Ruth, the oldest daughter, to act "more like their mother than Granny ever did" (129). In addition, Anney informs Bone about her Granny's other bias: "She's always loved her boy children more. It's just the way some women are" (18). Granny only confirms Anney's information to Bone. Allison writes: "Granny loved all her grandchildren, but she was always announcing that she didn't have much use for her daughters" (18). Perhaps Granny Boatwright continues to act out of the societal mode of thought that has already limited her due to sex. This is connected to Nancy Chodorow's argument about mothers rearing boys to be autonomous individuals and not their daughters (*Reproduction* 82-83, "Gender" 522). In this fictional example, Granny actually prefers her sons more than she does her daughters. She creates a position of privilege for them in her home much like society does for men in general.

On the other side of Granny's biases and harsh manner, Anney does find some useful strategy as a result of Granny's rearing of her. When Anney has to deal with Bone's stealing from Woolworth's General Store, she relies on Granny's example:

She told me about when she and Aunt Raylene were girls, how they had worked for this man picking strawberries for pennies. "[...] sometimes we'd pull up the ones that weren't quite ripe, you know--the green ones, or half-green anyway. Grandpa laughed about it, but your granny didn't laugh. She came over there one afternoon and turned half a dozen boxes upside down. Collected a bucket of green strawberries and paid the man for them. Took us home, sat us at the kitchen table, and made us eat every one of them. Raylene and I puked strawberries all night long." (Allison 95-6)

Anney makes Bone return the stolen goods to the store manager, who obviously thinks he is better than they are. Anney is aware of Granny's attempt to instill an honest work ethic in her girls, even though she is also painfully aware of the fact that her attempt with her boys on this subject was not as great an effort. Even Granny affirms that her lack of discipline with her son Earle contributes to his going to prison (215).

Granny, obviously, sacrifices the respect of and possible loving relationships with her daughters due to her life choices. Anney, by the close of the novel, loses those same values with Bone. Dorothy Allison comments on Anney's loss in an interview with Carolyn E. Megan: "What [Anney's] most afraid of is losing this family she's held together. That's not what she should be afraid of; she loses her family when she loses her daughter. She doesn't know enough to be really afraid of that" (77). She does not realize that she is imitating Granny's mothering and that it will cost her an important connection with her daughter in the end.

Perhaps the greatest complication for Anney's job of rearing her girls is her decision to marry Glen Waddell. That decision becomes Bone's, worst nightmare. Glen comes into the family and takes up space, leaving no room for Anney's and Bone's relationship. Allison makes the reader aware of Glen's ambition moments after he sees Anney for the first time. Glen decides early that he wants to marry Anney (Allison 13). Similarly, Anney's thoughts are along marital lines soon after she meets Glen. At this point, even Bone only has good feelings about Glen. Bone remembers: "Glen Waddell turned Mama from a harried, worried mother into a giggling, hopeful girl" (35).

However, as the marriage matures, Anney's choice of a husband is another imitation of Granny's choices. Granny's approach to rearing sons mirrors her choice of a

husband. Earle comments to Bone: "Your mama ever tell you about our daddy? Man was something, all right. People called him 'that Boatwright boy' till the day he died. Took better care of his dogs than his wife or children--not that Mama needed much taking care of. Your granny is tougher than all her sons put together. She sure never seemed to expect much out of Daddy" (125). Once they are married, trouble soon enters Anney's life again due to Glen's coming. Anney discovers soon that Glen is not steady at all. His temper and his emotional frustrations lead to financial hardships for the family. These financial woes, along with Glen's jealousy and molestation of Bone, severely interfere with Anney's mothering of her daughters. Like Granny, Anney will sacrifice much because of her choice of a husband.

When Glen joins the family and begins to inflict his reign of abusive terror on Bone, Bone must rely on the memories of the close relationship she had with her mother to ease the pain of her new living situation. Bone fondly recalls the wonderful feeling of being close to her mother: "If I got a permanent, I would lose those hours on Mama's lap sitting in the curve of her arm while she brushed and brushed and smoothed my hair and talked soft above me. I would have cut off my head before I let them cut my hair and lost the unspeakable pleasure of being drawn up onto Mama's lap every evening" (Allison 30-31). In this passage, it is obvious that Bone truly senses the importance of their mother-daughter connection. This nurturing side of Anney is common in Bone's childhood until Anney marries Glen and everything about Anney's mothering connections with Bone (though not with her youngest daughter Reese) changes. And, in order not to upset Glen, Anney begins to participate in their mother-daughter separation by spending more time with Glen and less time with Bone. Despite Anney's initial nurturing disposition, she

eventually loses her daughter—because of her husband’s sick and abusive jealousy of Bone. Bone will eventually revert to blaming and excusing her mother regardless of the nurturing relationship that they once had.

In Anney’s case, her desperate love for Glen and sacrifice of her own needs for her children begin to take a toll on her motherly nurturing. In fact, Anney begins to participate in Glen’s reign of abuse by hiding it from her family. In “‘Sadism Demands a Story’: Oedipus, Feminism, and Sexuality in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*,” Deborah Horvitz writes: “Silence, fear, obsession, and trauma narratively structure *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and the text, like [Bone], is haunted and invaded by more than Glen’s viciousness. Anney’s need to camouflage her family’s secret proves almost fatal for Bone” (255). Not only do I agree with Horvitz here, but I also believe that it is Anney’s need to hide the family’s abusive secret and Bone’s plan to hide the sexual abuse that lead to Anney’s loss of her daughter. Bone realizes early on that her mother cannot protect her because she is lost in her passion for Glen.

Bone analyzes their returning to Glen’s house after the two-week break-up (the first split), which ends with Glen’s public weeping apology for Bone’s broken tailbone:

Mama would watch him close and make him earn her trust again. He would be good, he would be careful. One day, maybe months from now, there’d be something I’d done that would make it all seem justified. Then Daddy Glen would take me into the bathroom again, crying that it hurt him more than it could ever hurt me. But his face would tell the truth, his hands on my body. He would show me just how much he hurt when Mama left him in that parking lot, and then

when he beat me, we would both know why. But Mama wouldn't know. More terrified of hurting her than of anything that might happen to me, I would work as hard as he did to make sure she never knew. (Allison 117-8)

Of course, Bone's gut feeling proves to be an accurate assessment of the situation. When Anney leaves Glen again, it will be because the family's secret has been revealed; and as a result, Anney will reveal some secretive beliefs and feelings of her own. Following Ruth's funeral, after Raylene discovers that "that son of a bitch beat [Bone] bloody, like a dog" and informs the uncles (245), Anney blurts out: "'I'm so ashamed. I couldn't stop him, and then [...] He loves her. He does. He loves us all [...]. Oh God. Raylene, I love him. I know you'll hate me. Sometimes I hate myself, but I love him [...]. I've just wanted it to be all right. For so long, I've just hoped and prayed, dreamed and pretended. I've hung on'" (246-7). Even the exposure of the terrible family secret that Anney has hidden only temporarily separates her from Glen.

When Anney acknowledges that she has considered returning to Glen, she initiates the process that will cause her the loss of her daughter. Actually, Anney's loss of Bone is foreshadowed in terms that Anney can definitely understand in the intimate conversation that Allison constructs between mother and daughter after Anney leaves Glen for the second and last time. The conversation about their mother-daughter-step-father triangle unfolds as follows:

"Bone, I couldn't stand it if you hated me," she said.

"I couldn't hate you," I told her. "Mama, I couldn't hate you."

"But you're sure I'm gonna go back to him."

"Uh-huh."

"Oh God, Bone! I can't just go back. I can't have you hating me."

"I an't never gonna hate you. I know you love him. I know you need him.

And he's good to you. He's good to Reese. He just [...] I don't know."

"I won't go back until I know you're gonna be safe."

"I won't go back."

"I wouldn't make you, honey."

"I know you'll go back, Mama, and maybe you should. I don't know what's right for you, just what I have to do. I can't go back to live with Daddy Glen. I won't." (Allison 275-6)

At this point, Anney attempts to convince herself that she may still be able to provide safety for Bone in the same home that she makes with Glen. Bone, who does not have the dilemma of having to choose between two people she desperately loves like her mother does, seems to be more realistic as far as her own safety in Glen's house is concerned.

The most oppressive circumstance for Anney's mothering is actually not the emotional and physical abuse that she knows Glen has inflicted on Bone, but it is the sexual abuse that she has yet to discover. Before they have proof of Glen's truly dark nature, some family members sense that something is strange about Glen Waddell when he first enters Anney's life, but they try to reconcile their feelings with Anney's need for happiness with her husband. Many of the Boatwright family members, especially the women, believe something is wrong with Glen. Alma defends Anney's choice in quite a strange manner: Anney "needs him, needs him like a starving woman needs meat between her teeth" (Allison 41). The first suspicion is raised, for the men, by Glen's desperate need for his and Anney's baby to be male. Uncle Nevil, who rarely speaks

aloud, comments on Glen's need for a son: " 'Me, I'm hoping Anney does give him a son. That Glen's got something about him. I almost like him, but the boy could turn like whiskey in a bad barrel, and I'm hoping he don't. Anney's had enough trouble in her life'" (45). The loss of their baby boy and Anney's inability to have more children is just what turns Glen sour. However, the first instance of his sexually abusing Bone begins that night, before he even knows the bad news about Anney and the baby. He rapes her in the car while they wait outside the hospital, and then laughs when she is finally able to pull away (47). This early scene is absolutely shocking, and the reader is probably as unprepared for Glen's attack as Bone is.

The sexual abuse is not discovered until near the end of the novel, but the physical abuse, of which Anney is very aware, is a sure sign that something is really wrong with the man she loves. However, Glen's abuse of Bone (and not Reese) seems only to be connected with the closer relationship he believes Anney to have with Bone. Bone comments on Glen's jealousy of her relationship with her mother: "It was those hands, the restless way the fingers would flex and curl while he watched me lean close to Mama. He was always watching me, calling me to him whenever Mama and I would start talking [...]" (Allison 62). Bone longs to be a part of the no-harm zone in which Glen treats Reese like his own beloved daughter. Even after the abuse begins, Bone wants to be a part of Daddy Glen's "family," Anney and Reese. Bone's desire to be a daughter outweighs her hatred for her sexually abusive stepfather. She feels helpless in his dominating world. Christine Froula writes: "The abusive or seductive father does serious harm to the daughter's mind as well as to her body, damaging her sense of her own identity and depriving her voice of authority and strength" (635). Bone's voice and

strength are reclaimed later through her relationship with her aunts, especially Raylene. However, I would argue that it does more to damage Anney's voice and sense of self than it does for Bone. Steeped in doubt, guilt, and confusion, Anney obviously begins to believe that she does not deserve to be Bone's mother and perhaps she is right.

Before Anney reaches this point of no return in her mothering, she relies on some coping strategies to ease the oppressive circumstances under which she rears her daughters. Although it is obvious by Anney's decision to leave Bone behind and go with Glen that her choice of coping strategies eventually fail, the picture of Anney with which the reader is presented early on in the novel does not resemble the shell of a woman who says good-bye to Bone at the end of the novel. Of course, this weak, desperate side of Anney does not reveal the bold, protective woman she appears to be in her early years as a teenaged mother and in the early part of her marriage to Glen. When the reader encounters Anney at this juncture in the work, she has been broken by her circumstances and the denial of her own personal needs as a woman in the face of her mothering responsibilities. In fact, Bone begins to realize the change in her mother when they leave Glen the first time, after the discovery of Bone's broken tailbone: "Her face was thinner, her skin rougher, and there were shadows under her eyes that never went away. People no longer talked about how beautiful she was, but about how beautiful she had been" (Allison 120). However, before Anney begins to break, she demonstrates great inner strength as a mother, who struggles to protect and provide for her girls.

Her first acts of motherly protection are her efforts to remove the stigma of the "Illegitimate" stamps placed on Bone's birth certificates. As a teenager, she realizes the repercussions of such a label on one's documentation of being. Bone recounts the

following: "Mama waited a year. Four days before my first birthday and a month past her sixteenth, she wrapped me in a blanket and took me to the courthouse" (Allison 4). This was a fight she kept until the night the courthouse and its records burned. Even early on in her marriage to Glen, Bone narrates two memorable instances in which Anney opposes Glen's choices, because they negatively affect her daughters. Bone recalls the following after her first severe beating with Daddy Glen's belt: "When Daddy Glen unlocked the door, Mama slapped him and grabbed me up in her arms. He held one hand to his cheek and watched as I hiccuped and cried into her neck. 'You son of a bitch,' she cursed him, and ran water to wash my face" (Allison 107). Although Bone would sulk as she listened to the evidence of forgiveness in her mother's and Glen's love-making later that night, she, nonetheless, feels some redemption in her mother's display of concern and love for her.

On another occasion, Anney sacrifices her marriage vows to Glen in order to provide food for her daughters:

"Soda crackers and ketchup," she hissed at him. "You so casual about finding another job, but I had to feed my girls that shit while you sat on your butt all afternoon, smoking and telling lies." "Not my kids," she told Daddy Glen, her voice carrying like a shout, though she was speaking in a hoarse whisper. "I was never gonna have my kids know what it was like. Never was gonna have them hungry or cold or scared. Never, you hear me? Never!" (Allison 73)

In an effort to assert her mothering power or powerlessness, depending on one's reading of the passage, Anney dresses up in "her shiny black patent-leather high heels" and "a grim little smile" and goes out to earn the money necessary to feed her girls (74). She

decides to bargain with her body in order to erase that night's hunger. One might say that Anney is powerless to earn money in any lawful manner so she resorts to prostitution or that she uses her power by taking charge of her own body in order to make money to provide for her family. Whichever one chooses to argue, in this instance, Anney is strong enough to choose her girls, her mothering responsibilities as her top priority instead of caving in to Glen's needs.

Another coping strategy on which Anney is able to rely is her sister Raylene, who is a surrogate mother for Bone. The relationship that Bone forms with Raylene is a positive spiritual, emotional, intimate, and nurturing experience. It is truly the best thing that happens to Bone at that point in her life. Bone recalls: "Raylene told Mama I was the kind of girl she liked, quiet and hardworking, and said she'd pay in kind for my help a couple of days a week. So I started spending all my time with Raylene while Reese went off to afternoon Bible classes at the Jesus Love Academy" (Allison 181). Vincent King passionately champions Raylene's newfound role in Bone's life in the following critique: "It is Bone's Aunt Raylene who finally offers her that elusive magic. There is much to admire about the fiercely independent Raylene. In addition to being strong and independent, Raylene is also caring and nurturing, and during her stay with Raylene, Bone decides never to live again in the same house with Daddy Glen" (134). It is with Raylene that Bone develops the confidence she needs to defend herself from Daddy Glen's brutal rape at the end of the text. At Raylene's, Bone is able to recapture the self-assuredness she initially learns from Anney, but later loses to Daddy Glen's abuse. Also while spending time with Raylene, Bone learns to relinquish the hate she has for others (those she believes look down on her due to her socioeconomic status) in order to escape

its total consumption of her life. Allison ends the text with Raylene's assuming the role of Bone's mother: "I wrapped my fingers in Raylene's and watched the night close in around us" (Allison 309).

Unlike Anney, Raylene has no element of her life at this point that rivals her responsibility to rear Bone. Anney's struggle to love and to have Glen creates his own neurotic sense of a rivalry with Bone's place in Anney's life, which results in Anney's having to make her rough choice, a choice from which Bone most likely will never recover, yet a choice that Raylene is there to ease and to correct. Aunt Raylene, (who is considered an outsider to some because she is a lesbian), strong and unhindered by people's opinion's of her and her life, becomes Bone's savior more than once.

Raylene is not the only woman in her family who provides Anney and her girls with support, however. One of the most important coping strategies on which Anney relies is the support network composed of the women in her family. This is the kind of support that sustains mothering and enhances the lives of children regardless of the mother's race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, education, and locale. These female communal women's responses are of what Adrienne Rich so timely speaks in the following passage written a year before *Bastard* was published: "In recent writing by women ... in this country the affirmation of the mother-daughter bond is powerfully expressed, not primarily in terms of a dyad but as a culture of women and a group history that is not merely personal" (xxviii). Anney realizes early on that "she needed her sisters' help with her two girls" (Allison 8).

Initially, Bone recognizes the power of men as opposed to the power of women in her life. Early in the text, Bone worships her uncles: The uncles "looked young, while

the aunts seemed old, worn-down, and slow, born to mother, nurse, and clean up after the men" (Allison 23). As her abused state progresses, she comes to see the power of women's mothering as her refuge. Bone remembers: "I liked being one of the women with my aunts, like feeling a part of something nasty and strong and separate from my big rough boy-cousins and the whole world of spitting, growling, overbearing males" (91). Aunt Ruth's bout with cancer is Anney's first chance to provide Bone with a lengthy escape from her abusive home and Bone's initiation to her future love for gospel music. For the first time, Bone has the opportunity to reveal her sexual abuse to someone, but she withdraws. The fact that Glen recognizes the power of the aunts and that their capability of aiding Anney is evident in his need to live far enough away from them in order to keep them out of Anney's and the girls' day-to-day lives.

Throughout the novel, Anney's sisters attempt to discuss the negative aspects of Anney's marriage to Glen with Anney on more than one occasion. Ruth's conversation with her is perhaps the most in-depth example of those networking efforts. Ruth and Anney discuss Glen's past and his disposition towards Bone:

"No, listen to me. I an't gonna tell you to leave him. He's your husband, and it's clear he thinks the sun rises and sets in your smile. I an't sure whether he's crazy jealous of Bone like Granny thinks, or if it's something else. But he an't never gonna be easy with her, and she an't never gonna be safe with him."

"He does love her. I know he does." Mama's whisper was fierce.

"Maybe. Still, I look at Glen and I can see he an't never been loved like he needed to be. But the boy's deeper and darker than I can figure out. It's you I worry about. I know the kind of love you got in you. I know how you feel about

Glen. You'd give your life to save him, and maybe that'll make it come out right, and maybe it won't. That's for God to fix. Not me."

"Ruth, think about what you said about him. Anybody can see how Glen got bent, what his daddy's done to him. I an't never seen a boy wanted his daddy's love so much and had so little of it. All Glen needs is to know himself loved, to get out from under his daddy's meanness." (Allison 132)

Anney tries to justify Glen's actions. She even reasons that the emotional and verbal abuse that Glen suffers at the hands of his father possibly cause his violent manner.

Ruth's prediction that Anney will give her life to save Glen is almost on target. She does not exactly give her life; but she does sacrifice her relationship with Bone in order to continue her crusade of finding happiness with Glen, even after she witness the sexual abuse with her own eyes. And, it definitely does not "come out right" for Bone.

For the first few moments, the revelation of the sexual abuse drives Anney to protect her child by any means necessary, at first; but the truth, that she is hopelessly addicted to Glen, eventually forces Anney to choose between Bone and Glen. She makes the unpredictable choice, the choice that will cause irreparable harm for her and for her abused daughter. This is where the coping strategy of escape comes into play. Although, in the end, escaping does nothing to save Anney's relationship with Bone, Bone is left in a safe and nurturing home because of Anney's escape. However, this strategy of escape is initiated even before the end of the novel.

After they leave Daddy Glen for the second time, Anney's shame metamorphoses into silence, which drives a further wedge between her and Bone. Bone mischaracterizes Anney's shameful silence for anger and rightly characterizes Reese's for the same.

These evaluative beliefs make Bone leave her first physically safe home (her mother's apartment) since her mother's marriage and go to Raylene's, a place both physically and emotionally safe. Her departure leaves Anney to contemplate a future with or without Bone. Anney is left to make the ultimate choice. She must choose between her husband and her daughter. That choice is the final deconstructive element in this mother-daughter alliance. Anney witnesses Glen raping Bone and ultimately cannot resist forgiving him even before she leaves the scene of the horrid act. Bone recalls, "I hated her now for the way she held him, the way she stood there crying over him. Could she love me and still hold him like that?" (Allison 291). The fact that Anney could actually see Glen raping Bone and still be a slave to her love for him is more than Bone can accept, least of all understand at that moment. It is more than readers can accept.

Anney is eventually blamed for Bone's abuse, but her harshest condemner is Anney herself. Anney's guilty feelings about the abuse is something which does not enter Bone's thoughts until Raylene presents its possibility to her after the uncles have beaten Glen for his bloody act. Bone attempts to understand her aunt's description of their situation: "That night at Aunt Ruth's, Aunt Raylene had told me not to brood, that it would take time for Mama to forgive herself. For what? I wondered. Mama hadn't done anything wrong. I was the one who had made Daddy Glen mad. I was the one who made everybody crazy" (Allison 250).

Although never directly blamed for Bone's torturous life, because Glen is accused forthright for that, Anney considers herself an enabler and admits to that much when she stops lying to herself at certain times. Anney's ability to pretend that she can

make a happy home regardless of Glen's loathing of Bone enables Glen to continue his reign of abuse. Horvitz correctly cites that *Bastard*

addresses the potentially cataclysmic repercussions of lying to oneself and refusing to bear witness to one's own story. At the close of the novel, [Bone], though far from happy, is finally safe. Anney 'wakes up' to the truth regarding Glen's cruelty and simultaneously confronts her own inability to leave him. Only then can she leave Bone safely within Raylene's protection. ("Sadism," 255-256)

It is Anney's final decision to leave Bone and to take Reese and follow Glen for which she is most condemned. One might argue that, in a different way, Anney is protecting Bone from further harm by Glen or any other man she might have, by leaving her with Raylene. On the other hand, she simply leaves her child behind in order to have the man she so desperately desires.

Although critics (mentioned in this chapter) and the characters, alike, understand the difficult mothering decision of having to choose between her lover and her child, they do not support the choice of the lover. Raylene attempts to explain to Bone how agonizing her mother's choice is. She uses the story of her own ex-lover, who is forced to choose between Raylene and her own child. However, the mother still chooses the child in that case. In Anney's case, she recognizes her weakness and probably believes that Bone is better off without her anyway; and that fact frees her to make a decision that allows her to satisfy her own needs as a woman. However, one may be left wondering whether or not she will be haunted by her "rough choice" to escape. In *Beloved*, Sethe Suggs is haunted by her choice for the rest of her life.

Sethe and Anney must each deal with the loss of a daughter due to her choice as a mother. Regardless of their actions and their choices, no one ever questions whether each woman loves her daughter. Morrison comments: "Loving a child is not automatic. Caring for a child, protecting a child, yes; but loving a child is not automatic" (*Book TV*). For both these mothers, it seems that loving the child comes easily; it is the care and protection that are hindered in these mother-daughter relationships. Comparable to Anney, Sethe's mothering is affected by similar oppressive circumstances and coping strategies, and the ultimate outcome of her relationships with both her daughters is unfavorable. At least Anney is left with Reese; however, Reese only seems to remain in the picture because Glen does not fear her relationship with Anney and does not abuse her like he does Bone.

For Sethe, social discrimination is a circumstance that oppresses her ability to mother her children, also. Even though Sethe is limited by race, education, economics, and family structure due to her status as a runaway slave woman, it is the African-American community of which she is a member that discriminates against her due to what they see as her unjustifiably proud attitude. This is their judgment of Sethe's raised head and straight back as she is being led to jail after murdering her oldest daughter and attempting to murder her other three children and commit suicide.

In contrast to Anney, Sethe is directly blamed for abusing her children. Even her lover, Paul D, passes judgment on Sethe's mothering: "Your love is too thick. Your boys gone you don't know where. One girl dead, the other won't leave the yard" (*Beloved* 164-5). This is Paul D's reaction to Sethe's claims that her plan to save her children from Schoolteacher's reign, from a life of slavery, did indeed work (164). Paul D's beliefs

here only mirror those of the community. Sethe is condemned for killing her oldest daughter, for attempting to kill the other three children, for scaring off her sons later, for disabling Denver to exist in the outside world, and for not being sorry enough for her decisive acts.

The situation into which Sethe is placed by the community, that being the Suggs family's unawareness of Schoolteacher's approach, is a direct result of the community's initial condemnation and jealousy toward Baby Suggs (Sethe's mother-in-law) for the excessively bountiful celebration of her family's escape from slavery. However, their guilt only lasts for a few hours. Their community excommunication of Sethe begins almost immediately after Sethe's fatal act. Their disapproval began that fateful day:

Holding the living child, Sethe walked past [the crowd] in their silence and hers. She climbed into the cart, her profile knife-clean against a cheery blue sky. A profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared in the doorway of the house on Bluestone Road. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about, headed west to town. And then no words. Humming. No words at all. (*Beloved* 152)

Perhaps the most scathing indictment of Sethe comes from the one woman in the community who can understand Sethe's feelings that lead to infanticide, since she too has committed the same act (258-9). That woman is Ella.

Ella, who was Sethe's closest friend for that twenty-eight days, is Sethe's most verbal critic after the incident: "I ain't got no friends take a handsaw to their own children'" (*Beloved* 187). Morrison writes about Ella, who has also sacrificed a child in

connection with her own slave experience, and her reaction to Sethe: “She understood Sethe’s rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated” (256). In addition, the community further blames Sethe as a result of the dead baby’s reaction to her killing. The fact that she chooses to haunt Sethe, to them, is proof that Sethe should be punished. Even Baby Suggs believes that the baby exhibits angry blame in her return. Baby Suggs explained to Denver that “the ghost was after [Sethe] and [Baby Suggs] too for not doing anything to stop it” (209).

Baby Suggs’s beliefs about the wrongness of the act is one of the reasons that she refuses to continue her Clearing ministry and withdraws from outside life:

There was no grace--imaginary or real--and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that. Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived. [Baby Suggs] could not approve or condemn Sethe's rough choice. One or the other might have saved her, but beaten by both, she went to bed. (*Beloved* 89, 180)

Morrison also comments on the transition in Sethe’s existence in a before-and-after accounting: “Years ago—when 124 was alive—she had women friends, men friends from all around to share grief with. Then there was no one, for they would not visit her while the baby ghost filled the house, and she returned their disapproval with the potent pride of the mistreated” (95-6). She chose a “knotted, private, walk-on-water life,” of which the community further disapproved (97). As a result, according to Morrison, “just about everybody in town was longing for Sethe to come on difficult times. Her outrageous claims, her self-sufficiency seemed to demand it” (171). Whatever the reason for the

community's mother blaming, Sethe's life is transformed because of it. At first consideration, this might seem to be a strange occurrence in a Black community, because a twentieth-century or twenty-first-century notion of motherhood in America would almost require that Sethe be a fiercely independent, self-sufficient woman. However, one must then consider that this narrative takes place during the slave era, a time in which the concepts of working together, forming networks, and "it takes a village to raise a child" all still ring true, especially in the African-American slave community. So, her seeming rejection of the community's aid or simple refusal to admit the need for friendship is taken as offensive. Importantly in Sethe's twenty-eight days of freedom, her "aggregation goes beyond mother-in-law, children, and women friends to the community at large" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 118). She actually has neighbors of her own.

Samuels and Hudson-Weems continue:

Morrison emphasizes the significance of place, but goes beyond the mere identification of place to the actual grounding of Sethe in a specific community. Thus Sethe is able to transcend her [slave] marginality through the act of 'groundation,' in short, through her incorporation into a community of women and into a community at large (a neighborhood). She thereby achieves a dimension of identity. (118)

This fact is true, but that dimension is short-lived. This identity is later attacked as a result of Sethe's horrendous act and her seemingly prideful reaction to the act.

Perhaps the most significant circumstance that affects Sethe's mothering is her own negative childhood experience. Sethe's mother was hanged as a slave as punishment for a failed escape attempt or insurrection. So, Sethe never has an opportunity to know

her mother. Before her mother's death, work hours prevented their interaction. For a short time anyway, Sethe is able to gain some daughterly connection with her mother-in-law in the absence of her own mother. Although Sethe has a mother-daughter relationship with Baby Suggs and is able to rely on her physically and spiritually, her biological mother is never far from her "rememories" after her daughter Beloved returns from the dead.

Sethe's mother is unable to perform mother-work due to the demands of her slave-work. Sethe tells her own daughters:

"I didn't see [my mother] but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks--that's the way the others did. She didn't even sleep in the same cabin most nights I remember. Too far from the line-up, I guess." (*Beloved* 60-61)

Sethe's longing to have known her mother and to have shared even the most fundamental times with her results in her desperation to be the best mother she can possibly be. Sethe recalls that Nan, the slave nanny and her mother's friend, "had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left" (200). The most important moment that Sethe ever has with her mother is when she shows Sethe the slaver's mark upon her body, the cross in the circle burned into the skin under her breast, by which Sethe will be able to identify her if the need should ever come

(61). As a result of her motherless childhood, Sethe desires to be the woman and the mother who has “milk (love) enough for all” (100). As Paul D informs Sethe, this kind of love is unhealthy for a former slave woman, who might have anyone or anything taken from her at a moment’s notice. She is considered overprotective, obsessed, and too prideful because of her attitude about her mothering.

Even though Sethe lacks a real knowledge of her mother when she is a child, she is still able to claim some knowledge of her from Nan, who is assigned to care for Sethe and the other slave children. Her "rememory" of the past also connects her infanticidal act to that of her mother. Sethe recalls Nan telling her her mother's story:

She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. “She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arm around him.” (*Beloved* 62)

Therefore, Sethe is the only child her mother conceived in love or conceived willingly at least. Deborah Horvitz even suggests, in "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*," that *Beloved* is not only the reincarnation of Sethe's dead daughter but she is also the detailed representation of Sethe's mother (158). Not only is she a representative of Sethe’s mother, but she represents much more. This idea is aligned with Morrison's stated intent to have *Beloved* represent all of the African and African-American women connected to the Middle Passage and slavery (Morrison, *Book TV*). *Beloved*'s reappearance thus becomes Sethe's link to her oldest daughter and to memories of her own mother. In sharp contrast to the theory of *Beloved* being the

resurrected daughter of Sethe are the arguments of Elizabeth House that this strange Beloved is not Sethe's daughter at all but possibly the daughter of a woman who committed suicide during the Middle Passage.<sup>2</sup> For the sake of my analysis of Sethe as a mother, Beloved is considered Sethe's resurrected daughter if for no other reason than Sethe's own belief that she is her daughter. Beloved's appearance, without question, makes Sethe examine her performance as a mother and her denied need to have been a daughter.

Sethe longs for the relationship she was denied with her mother. Sethe tells Beloved: "You came right on back like a good girl, like a daughter which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma'am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one" (*Beloved* 203). Her obsession with mothering her children is a direct result of her denied role as a daughter, but it includes more than her need to protect her children. She is also obsessed with isolating her children from the community that has condemned her behavior.

Simulating the impact of her negative daughterhood experience on her mothering, Sethe's love relationships also become oppressive circumstances in her life and affect her mothering as well. However, at times, these same relationships enhance Sethe as a person. First, there is her marriage to Halle Suggs, the Sweet Home man she chooses to marry and the slave father of her four children. Then, there is Paul D, who Sethe knows from the same plantation, but does not see again until eighteen years after she escapes from slavery with her children. It is truly Halle's weakness on the last day she ever sees him that affects Sethe's mothering for many years to come, but she does not find this out until Paul D brings her the news after eighteen years. Sethe's youngest daughter,

Denver's thoughts reveal information about Halle for the reader: Grandma Baby "said she was always a little scared of my daddy. From the beginning, she said, [her son] was too good for the world. My daddy was an angel man. He could look at you and tell where you hurt and he could fix it too" (*Beloved* 208). Halle was a healer who could not heal himself. Apparently driven insane (Sethe discovers after given new information by Paul D) as he witnessed Sethe's animalistic abuse at the hands of the cruel slavemaster Schoolteacher and his nephews, he was never able to follow the family in their quest for freedom. Seeing the very pregnant Sethe held down and raped of her breast milk by Schoolteacher's nephews is what finally breaks Halle Suggs. The man who hired himself out for years to buy his mother's freedom is broken by the degradation of his pregnant wife. The rape and the whipping that follows (because she reported the act to the slave mistress) make Sethe's escape plan immediately necessary, and Halle never comes to the meeting place. His absence not only makes Sethe stay behind to search for him, but requires her to make the tremendous journey to freedom alone. It is the sheer will to get to her children, her breasts filled with the milk from her first daughter, and Amy Denver's help that sustain her throughout the journey.

By the time her second lover enters her life, she is an isolated woman who is suspicious of those who do not live in her house, and she has not opened herself up to or depended on a lover in almost two decades. Although Paul D enhances her life as a woman, her daughters would definitely argue that he interferes with Sethe's mothering. Her choice (Paul D never asks her to choose, but her daughters want her to make a choice) is always her girls, even though she definitely wants Paul D in her life.

His presence almost immediately forges him into Sethe's life, a life that she has lived in exile, with no friends since her first twenty-eight days of freedom and no man in her life since leaving Halle behind on the slave plantation. Paul D is always aware that she was first Halle's wife; but from the day he arrives at 124, she is very willing to be with him under the right circumstances. However, the circumstances are always important for Sethe, and she never truly trusts that he will not break her heart. In "Morrison's Womanist Remembrances of Things Past," Bernard W. Bell, with whom I agree, comments on Sethe's state of being: "On a sociopsychological level, *Beloved* is the story of Sethe Suggs's quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness" (95). Sethe battles with the horrible memories from the past and with the present revenge of "the infant daughter that she killed in order to save her from the living death of slavery" (Bell 95). Sethe's search for wholeness definitely includes Paul D, but only under the right circumstances, and those circumstances always include what is right for her girls.

Sethe's willingness to be with Paul D is very apparent to Denver from the beginning. Paul D's arrival is the first time Denver has ever seen her mother interested in a man, "acting like a girl instead of the quiet, queenly woman Denver had known all her life" (*Beloved* 12). This makes Denver scared and lonely. However, Denver's loneliness increases in a matter of minutes. Paul D's arrival quickly leads to emotional and sexual encounters, also. Upon entering, Paul D clears the house of its ghostly inhabitant (Denver's "only other company" [19]), cradles Sethe's heavy breasts in his hands, kisses away past pain from her whipped-scarred back, and takes her upstairs for the first sexual experience she's had in more than eighteen years. Although the sex itself is too quickly had (surmises Sethe as she becomes ashamed of the fact that they never had time to

undress), it is the first of many times to come in which Sethe's needs are fulfilled, sexually and emotionally by Paul D.

However, the resurrection of Beloved, Sethe's oldest daughter, makes the daughters believe that Paul D's presence in Sethe's life is more of an intrusion on their relationship with her. So, Beloved invokes her back-from-the-grave powers in order to rid 124 Bluestone Road of him. Beloved is the initiator and aggressor in her sexual relationship with Paul D. Because Beloved longs to be what Sethe is and to have what Sethe has and to possess her completely in the process, she must have what Sethe has with Paul D. He is aware of the strangeness of Beloved's actions, but she "moved him nonetheless, and Paul D didn't know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself. Imperceptibly, downright reasonably, he was moving out of 124" (*Beloved* 114). When she moves him out of the house into the cold room, she comes to him and makes him "touch [her] on the inside part and call [her by her] name" (116). Not only does Beloved move Paul D out of Sethe's bedroom, but she also wants him to touch her like he touches Sethe. She wants to feel what Sethe feels, so she uses her power to "make" Paul D comply. Beloved wants to be in possession of every aspect of Sethe's life and to get Paul D completely out of Sethe's world. Ultimately, however, it is not Beloved who completes Paul D's separation from Sethe, but it is Stamp Paid's newspaper clipping and the story of Sethe's attempt to murder her children eighteen years earlier which sets his departure in motion. Even though it is the act, which makes him leave Sethe's house, it was still Beloved's intention to drive him away from Sethe so that Sethe's time will be all hers. Some notion about Sethe's mothering initiates both acts. Beloved feels like Denver does when Paul D first arrives, displaced by the presence of Sethe's physical lover. So,

Denver is definitely in agreement with the need to get rid of Paul D. At least, at first she is.

The need to drive Paul D away does not really seem necessary on some level, though. When Sethe analyzes Paul D's desire for her to have his child, even she acknowledges his "outsider" role in their family:

What did he want her pregnant for? To hold on to her? Have a sign that he passed this way? He probably had children everywhere anyway. Eighteen years of roaming, he would have to have dropped a few. No. He resented the children she had, that's what. Sharing her with the girls. Hearing the three of them laughing at something he wasn't in on. The code they used among themselves that he could not break. Maybe even the time spent on their needs and not his. They were a family somehow and he was not the head of it. (*Beloved* 132)

As Marianne Hirsch writes: "Sethe's family is determined by the dynamics of the relationships among the women. The intensity of the women's passion becomes so stifling. At such moments, Paul D comes in to make the story move along, but until the last scene, he is consistently excluded from the power of their interconnection" (7).

Because Paul D is neither girl's father, he has no lasting substantial connection to Sethe's family. He cannot penetrate their mother-daughter circle because of this. He is powerless in this female-centered domain and has no way to break the circle, resembling the way he comes into the house breaking up the place when he first arrives. Heinze writes: "Sethe's family is a complicated matrix: power and control, familial roles, sexual relations, and reality continually shift. Family becomes a function of time and place

rather than a fixed and static construct of father-role, mother-role, and children-roles” (94). Heinze’s assessment should add that before the past returns in the forms of Paul D and Beloved, Sethe’s home is a steady environment, not a shifting one. It is also an isolated, lonely place, but it holds to the strictest definition of family until newcomers from the past arrive.

However, it is Paul D’s earlier connection with Sethe, his Sweet Home connection within which the girls have no power and which has little connection to motherhood, that enables him to save Sethe’s life by the close of the novel after both daughters are gone from 124 Bluestone Road and Sethe believes that she has no one left, that the best part of her is gone forever. Another important thing that occurs because of Paul D’s presence in her life is that his inquiry into the past requires that Sethe tell her own story about the act of infanticide that has led to her isolation from the community. She justifies her “thick love” completely for the first time.

These revelations lead to an exploration of how the “act,” the aftermath, and its consequences affect her mothering and how the oppressive circumstances of violence and obsession affect her mothering, also. Sethe, in a whirlwind of decision-making when recaptured in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1854, attempts to kill her children and herself as an act of motherly protection. Her plan is not carried out fully and the fallout from the decision is immense. Years later, Denver’s words show her own fear of Sethe: “I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I’m scared of her because of it. She missed killing my brothers and they knew it” (*Beloved* 205). These are words from the daughter she nurtures to adulthood. After she is released from jail, Sethe attempts to nurture and nourish her surviving children as always. However, the

boys are too afraid of her to accept her intimacy with them again. Eventually, they both run away from their mother and the baby ghost at 124 Bluestone Road. Sethe is a strong mother, but she is protectively and obsessively strong and that frightens her children.

The question of whether Sethe's act of cutting her daughter's throat (and other slave mothers' infanticidal acts) is murder or sacrifice is one that has been asked repeatedly over time; but it is evident by Beloved's return from the dead and by her treatment of her mother that Beloved believes Sethe is guilty of murder, abuse, or abandonment at least. In *Moorings and Metaphors*, Karla F.C. Holloway critiques Sethe's story: "In *Beloved*, Morrison has written a tragedy of mother-love denied and has revealed its consequence. Sethe, who has lost one daughter to infanticide and whose sons have run away (afraid of the ghostly presence that haunts their house), is vulnerable to the killing spirit of her dead daughter. It is a tragedy complicated by history" (180). Sethe repeatedly pays for her decision to kill her children regardless of her intent to save her family from a much worse fate. Her act is also a tragedy from which Sethe will eventually have to be saved.

Stephanie J. Shaw comments on that topic in "Mothering under Slavery in the Antebellum South": "Even when slave women had abortions, refused to conceive, or committed infanticide in order to protect children from a lifetime of slavery, they often did so in [what was considered] the interest of mothering" (249), which often served as the slave mother's last options. In fact, Morrison presents the issue of infanticide with Sethe's mother throwing the babies overboard and Ella starving her baby. Although, their actions save the children from living as slaves, their motivations are tainted by their emotions about the circumstances under which the children are conceived. Sethe

completely loves the children she plans to kill. Still, she spends most of her life justifying her actions, for as Deborah Horvitz writes: "Certainly one reason Beloved comes back is to pass judgment on Sethe" ("Nameless" 161). Not only does this seem true, but I would add that Beloved also returns to inflict punishment on Sethe.

Because Sethe, as the widow she believes herself to be, puts her personal all (however much she has been scarred as a person) into mothering. When asked by Paul D to have another child, the thought of beginning again as a new mother is exhausting for her. However, once she knows who Beloved really is, Sethe automatically begins to nurture her even more intensely, and the two women reclaim each other. After Sethe recognizes Beloved as her daughter, she gladly assumes that "'she ain't even mad with me. Not a bit" for her sacrificial act (*Beloved* 182). Beloved easily reclaims Sethe, at first, regardless of the act: "Sethe's is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost" (213). However, it is Denver, the daughter who has had Sethe all along, who cannot forget the act regardless of her mother's love.

Once it is discovered and accepted by both Denver and Sethe that Beloved is really their very own, it is not long before Beloved wants all of Sethe's attention for herself and "Denver was alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for Sethe" (*Beloved* 104). After Sethe loses her job and happily settles in to give Beloved all of her attention, their relationship transforms into "furious arguments. The poker slammed up against the wall, all the shouting and crying that followed that one happy January when they played. [...] the more [Beloved] took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children" (241). Sethe soon

finds that Beloved's return "to see her face" is not for forgiveness or for the erasure of her past act, as she believed it to be (75). Instead of experiencing the joys of their mother-daughter relationship, the results are quite different for the women at 124 Bluestone Road:

The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur. (250)

After observing the punishment Beloved continuously inflicted on Sethe, "Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that, and seeing her mother diminished shamed and infuriated her" (250, 251). It is that infuriation that eventually saves Sethe's life, physically anyway.

In the midst of so many oppressive circumstances, Sethe's need for coping strategies is definitely understood. It is obvious that her inner strength is the first one on which she relies. There is no doubt that Sethe is an extremely strong woman, made strong by surviving a slave mother's life. In fact, she is ostracized by the African-American community for being too strong, too independent, and too proud. Even the best friend she has in the community stops associating with her. One of the first examples Morrison provides of Sethe's strength to endure anything for her children is Sethe's sacrifice of her

body for the engraving on her daughter's gravestone. Sethe bargains with her body for the seven precious letters:

Ten minutes for seven letters. Rutting among the stones under the eyes of the engraver's son was not enough. Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life. (*Beloved* 5)

Of course this act of sacrifice, one by which Sethe hopes to make a statement to the community that her past actions have all been for the love of her children, is Sethe's attempt to say how much she loved her dead daughter by providing just the right word, "Beloved." Although Sethe's love for her children is characterized as "too thick" by many, no one refutes the fact that she sacrifices greatly for her children (164). Her mothering is predicated on her goal to keep her children safe and to keep them free from slavery.

Yet, another example of Sethe's dependence on her own strength is the account of Sethe's own escape from the grips of slavery in order to protect her children from what Morrison describes as Schoolteacher's brutal empire (*Beloved* 196-8). Sethe is married by 14 and a mother by 15; but she is older and pregnant with her last child before she has to become supreme protector of her children. Twenty-eight days after being a free woman, Sethe is forced to make the ultimate sacrifice as a mother. Although she is jailed as a murderer, her attempt to kill her four children and herself is done so that her children would never know the life of a slave, so they would never be acquainted with "what Baby

Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble" (*Beloved* 251).

The justification of her act definitely forces her to rely on her own strength. Being questioned by others about her act forces Sethe to "rememory" her past in order to justify her actions. Sethe warns Denver: "'Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over--over and done with--it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what'" (*Beloved* 36). Mothering is something Sethe takes very seriously. Sethe recognizes the sacrifices of other mothers, like those of the Saturday girls who trade with their bodies to support their children by working the slaughterhouse yards after the men have been paid (203), and for herself (as a mother and a daughter): "I wouldn't draw breath without my children. I told Baby Suggs that and she got down on her knees to beg God's pardon for me. Still it's so. My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is (203).

Sethe also works hard to nurture her children as well as to protect them. After Paul D's baby request, Sethe "was frightened by the thought of having a baby once more. Needing to be good enough, alert enough, strong enough, that caring--again. Having to stay alive just that much longer" to protect and care for her child. "O Lord, she thought, deliver me. Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (*Beloved* 132). Morrison, here, echoes renowned clinical psychiatrist D.W. Winnicott's theory on "good enough mothering." Winnicott writes: "Only if there is a good-enough mother does the infant start on a process of development that is personal and real. If not, then the infant becomes a collection of reactions to impingement, and the true self fails to form or

becomes hidden behind a false self which complies with and generally wards off the world's knocks" (17).<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps Stamp Paid captures the words that best describe Sethe's mothering strength: " ' She ain't crazy. She love those children. She was trying to outhurt the hurter'" (*Beloved* 234). Bell pinpoints the self-sufficient strength that Morrison creates in Sethe's character:

Sethe's black awareness and rejection of white perceptions and inscriptions of herself, her children, and other slaves as non-human—marking them by letter, law, and lash as both animals and property—are synthesized with her black feminist sense of self-sufficiency. Although Sethe's racial and sexual consciousness are blended, the structure and style of the text foreground the ambivalence of slave women about motherhood that violates their personal integrity and that of their family. (96)

Sethe's consciousness is always working, always a part of her decisions, because her decisions affect her children, the best things in her life. She is, indeed, ambivalent too what should destroy her mothering. As strong as Sethe is, she cannot stop her children from leaving; and her strength is what scares some of them.

Another coping strategy that aids Sethe in her difficulties of mothering is her relationship with Baby Suggs, who serves as Sethe's own surrogate mother and a mothering mentor for her as well. Sethe's need to be mothered is somewhat fulfilled by her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. After Sethe has been raped of her breast milk by Schoolteacher's nephews, beaten severely by Schoolteacher, and delivered her last child while escaping, in a monstrous condition, she arrives at 124 Bluestone Road where she

meets Baby Suggs for the first time. Although she would come to know and love her mother-in-law well, she had yet to know the full possibilities of the power of their relationship. Before Baby Suggs, the slave mistress Mrs. Garner had been, with extreme limitations, Sethe's only mother figure. As a precursor to their relationship, Sethe's first encounter with Baby Suggs is one of nurturing, acceptance, and healing:

Baby Suggs kissed her on the mouth and refused to let her see the children. She led Sethe to the keeping room and, by the light of a spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then, while waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and stitched gray cotton. Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. When Sethe's legs were done, Baby looked at her feet and wiped them lightly. She cleaned between Sethe's legs with two separate pans of hot water and then tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. Finally she attacked the unrecognizable feet. She helped Sethe to the rocker and lowered her feet into a bucket of salt water and juniper. The crust from her nipples Baby softened with lard and then washed away. Roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulders. Baby Suggs hid her mouth with her hand. Wordlessly the older woman greased the flowering back and pinned a double thickness of cloth to the inside of the newly stitched dress.

*(Beloved 92-93)*

Those same healing hands would comfort Sethe again, and she would live her life according to many of Baby Suggs' life lessons. Sethe became a student, as many others already were, of Baby Suggs' unchurched preaching in the Clearing. That is, until Sethe's

infanticidal act ended Baby's deliverance of the Word (178). Their bond quickly develops into one so strong that it is this comfort for which Sethe longs even after the older woman has been dead for nine years.

Baby Suggs is an inspiring figure for Sethe and for the African-American community. She preaches and lives survival, at least she does until Sethe's act in the woodshed changes everything for her, too. Baby Suggs, "decided that, because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,' she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart--which she put to work at once. Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher" (*Beloved* 86-87). Per Baby Suggs Holy's example, Sethe strives to be as loving with her own children. However, Baby's experience as a slave mother has been quite unlike Sethe's--eight children with six fathers, only one of whom she was allowed to keep and to remember, Sethe's husband Halle who buys his mother's freedom. Sethe and the grandchildren were all she had left, for Halle never arrived. Therefore, she is just as willing as Sethe is to form their mother-daughter dyad. Baby Suggs is like Sethe's "real" mother, since Sethe had never really known her biological mother anyway and her memories of her slave mistress Mrs. Garner are tainted by the horrific events of her last days at Sweet Home, and Sethe's mothering is enhanced and made easier with Baby Suggs' help and guidance. However, her alliance with Baby Suggs is not enough to save her relationships with her children, since Baby Suggs herself is unable to deal with the isolation that results from the act.

Relatively similar to Anney, Sethe is able to rely on escape methods to help ease the burdens of her mothering. For example, she believes in the therapeutic power of

Beloved's resurrection. She believes that her return signifies a new freedom for her. Sethe believes that she is not only offered a replacement for her dead daughter but that she is re-given the same daughter. Osagie suggests that "Beloved's resurrection is [not] an easy therapeutic course that brings the past to the foreground and that her disappearance completely exorcises the past. Indeed, the past cannot be forgotten" (430). Most of us would probably align ourselves with Osagie's point, but it appears quite evident that Sethe believes Beloved's resurrection to be a direct avenue of therapeutic forgiveness for and possibly even the erasure of her sacrificial act, an exorcism of the pain of the past eighteen years. Sethe obviously believes that a supernatural power has given her a second chance with the daughter she only wanted to save in the first place.

Other methods of escape for Sethe are her separation from the community and Paul D. Sethe's isolation from the community seems two-fold; it is partly due to ostracization and is partly self-imposed. Separation from the community means that Sethe does not have to deal with the community's accusations about her act or her attitude. No one would be able to accuse her of having "too-thick" love. It works until Paul D enters her life and makes connections to the community and questions the intensity of her love. However, Paul D also provides Sethe with a means of escape by providing her with new opportunities and a new outlook on making a life with someone. He was the answer to her loneliness and uneasiness at the same time, because she knew him. Sethe contemplates her love for Paul D: "The weight and angle of him; the true-to-life beard hair on him; arched back, educated hands. His waiting eyes and awful human power. The mind of him that knew her own. Her story was bearable because it was his as well—to tell, to refine and tell again" (*Beloved* 99). Of course this should be

understandable for the reader, since Morrison describes his power early in the work:

Paul D “had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. There was something blessed in his manner. Women saw him and wanted to weep—to tell him” their private thoughts (17).

Paul D is known as one of the most worthy, compassionate, hard-working men in African- American literature. Samuels and Hudson-Weems accurately assess Morrison’s portrayal of his character: “Throughout the text Paul D’s actions prove that his [promises to Sethe] are not empty words, in spite of his human frailties, and in spite of his life experiences, which for the most part have been as horrendous as Sethe’s. He is unique in Morrison’s canon, but so is the relationship that he seeks to develop with Sethe” (123). The relationship he seeks with Sethe is, like Paul D’s character, as positive as it can be, especially under the right circumstances. Paul D comes into Sethe’s house and breaks up the place, making room for himself, making room to stay. In fact after both daughters have left Sethe’s home, Denver’s belief that he may be the only one who can reach her mother is what encourages her to agree with his desire to go to 124 to visit Sethe. Paul D slowly enters Sethe’s life again. This time it is when she needs him the most, when she is alone. Again, he offers “to put his story next to hers” (*Beloved* 273). His second coming again fulfills a great need. His second coming also signifies his willingness to understand the desperation and “pure love” from which Sethe’s infanticidal act springs (251). Although he is unable to save Sethe’s relationships with her daughters, he may be just the person who saves Sethe’s life by continuing to put his story next to hers.

The strategy that is able to save Sethe from Beloved’s vengeful wrath and Denver from isolation is the power of the women-centered network, with which the Suggs family

is re-connected via Denver's humbleness. It is Denver's shame and infuriation that result in the re-inscription of the family into the community, which both saves Sethe's life physically and causes her daughters to leave her. Denver, despite the sheltered life that Sethe has made for her, must perform the traditional act of role reversal when her mother is in need of assistance. As most children must do when their aging and/or sick parents need help, Denver becomes the primary caretaker of the family, of Sethe. It is left up to her to save her mother, from starvation and from her other daughter. Denver, relying on the stories of the past and the remembrances of a few school lessons, re-enters the community with a cry for help that leads to food and support for the family, a job and socialization for Denver, and Beloved's physical and spiritual exorcism by the community's women. So, at the close of the novel, the resurrected Beloved has disappeared from 124, Denver is forging a new life, and Sethe believes she's lost her "best thing," her children (*Beloved* 272). Concerning Sethe's relationship with her daughters, Morrison's triadic mother-daughter relationship, Wilfred Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems poignantly state the following:

It is possible to argue that the most tragic result of Sethe's heinous crime is the damage that it does to the single most important community of women to her: the community she forms with her daughters, Beloved and Denver. With Sethe's perennial sense of guilt, Denver's sense of alienation, and Beloved's need for retribution, their unity remains superficial, in spite of the external evidences to the contrary. Each response forms a wedge that widens the existing fissure in their superficial bond. (121)

Sethe can only evaluate the fragility that plagued their relationship after her daughters are gone from 124.

Sethe, knowingly and unknowingly, is aided by community women and other women at very crucial times during her mothering experience. When Beloved is destroying Sethe, Denver steps out of the yard and seeks aid from the female community. Remembering the story of the help that Amy Denver, a white runaway girl and quite an unlikely ally, gives her mother when she is escaping from Sweet Home, rubbing Sethe's aching, swollen feet, wrapping her open back, and helping Sethe birth her last child, Denver recognizes that there are people outside her home who are probably willing to help her family. Amy's helping Sethe is a story immortalized for Denver by her own name, a testament to Amy's brief but true sisterly connection to Sethe. So, pondering that connection and relying on the strength provided by the spirit of Baby Suggs, Denver steps out and seeks help from the Black female community: "[Denver] would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (*Beloved* 243). She hears Baby Suggs' spirit clearly tell her to " 'Go on out the yard. Go on'" (244).

Denver's first appeal is to her teacher of many years ago: "Lady Jones gave her some rice, four eggs and some tea." She told Denver, " 'if you all need to eat until your mother is well, all you have to do is say so'" (*Beloved* 248). Lady Jones then becomes the first communicator of the Suggs family's distress. In response to the plea for help, the community supplies the family with physical nurturance: "They whispered, naturally, wondered, shook their heads. Some even laughed outright at Denver's hussy clothes, but it didn't stop them [from] caring whether she ate and it didn't stop the pleasure they took

in her soft ‘Thank you’” (249-50). Although their willingness to help so swiftly is aided by their satisfaction in Sethe's state of need, Denver's appeal to Lady Jones for food and to Janey for employment lead to the development of a women's network designed to address the problems at 124 Bluestone Road. The network takes on the mission of breaking up Beloved's ghostly punishment of Sethe. When Sethe has been literally whipped by Beloved's anger and is holding on for dear life, community, neighbor “women embark on the necessary purification ritual to cleanse 124 Bluestone Road and the community once and for all of Sethe's original sin” of cutting her daughter's throat (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 120). In addition to the process being one of purification (cleaning), it is also an exorcism (clearing). Morrison writes: "Thirty women made up the company and walked slowly, slowly, toward 124" (*Beloved* 257), ready to go to war on behalf of the sacrifices of mothering. Morrison continues: “...where the yard met the road, they saw the rapt faces of thirty neighborhood women. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash” (261). Through their unity and spiritual force, they are successful in driving Beloved's destructive force away from 124 and out of Sethe's life. As Sethe has been helped many years ago when she needed it the most, Denver is aided by the women with whom she is willing and ready to form alliances and admit to her need of their aid.

Amy Denver is the first woman, outside of Sweet Home and in her ex-slave life, with whom Sethe forms any type of relationship or partnership. It is a relationship that is temporary for both women but has a lifetime benefit for Sethe. The two unlikely partners

have more in common than what appears on the surface. Amy is the daughter of a former indentured servant who, like Sethe's mother, died leaving her daughter to a life of bondage. Both are also impoverished escapees (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 113). This is an analysis that is not lost on either woman's assessment of their alliance and their differences as individuals existing at this time. However, it seems that in this case, opposites simply attract and Amy answers a cry for help that she could have ignored.

They know that even though both women are fugitives, Amy does not have to hide, because no one has been sent to bring her back to her place of servitude. Her whiteness alone gives her the freedom to move about that Sethe does not possess. Amy can travel openly without a travel pass, without restriction (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 114). This is true even though Amy is, according to Sethe's description of her, "the raggediest looking trash you ever saw" (*Beloved* 31-32). Amy's being poor does not compare to Sethe's slave status in the least. Although, it is not their commonalities that make their alliance forever remembered by Sethe. Sethe remembers Amy because of her saving acts and the fact that it was so unlikely for someone so different to come to her aid. Sethe's rememory of their meeting is so significant that she seals the moment into her life forever when she names her youngest daughter for Amy Denver. In addition, Morrison names this brief character for the purpose she serves in Sethe's life. Samuels and Hudson-Weems state: "The fact remains, however, that Amy, a name that interestingly enough means friend or beloved, stops, assists, protects, and helps to heal Sethe. She could easily have journeyed on, or certainly turned in the fugitive Sethe. She does neither one" (116). As significant or more significant than Amy's moment in Sethe's life is the alliance that Sethe forms with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs, the only

real mother Sethe ever has. A priestess and healer, Baby Suggs offered her great big heart, in a manner similar to Amy's offering of her strong hands in the woods. It took both, the rational (Amy) and the emotional (Baby Suggs) to enhance Sethe's journey to recovery and self. Both women, along with the chorus of women, make a real difference in Sethe's life, exemplifying the grave importance of mothers' connections to other women who can aid in their living and in their mothering (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 117).

In the following passage, Nancy Jesser's words address the future repercussions of one's negative choices, which characterize the motives for and results of the acts committed by both Sethe and Anney, acts carried out in the interest of mothering, but also in the interest of living as women:

We are bound, to some degree, to act and make rough choices within the narratives that we live. The specificity of historical moments allows for and demands certain and, at times, mixed-up choices. None are choices for all time, and none are apocalyptic enough to end the history in which we find ourselves.

But, Morrison suggests, we bear a kind of haunting from these choices that in turn haunts the future. (341)

The stories of both women in these fictional accounts demonstrate how the decisions that women make as mothers can affect the other areas of their lives; and how the decisions that women make as lovers, employees, daughters, sisters, and friends can affect their mothering. For Anney, who so desperately wants and needs to be with Glen, his abuse of her daughter Bone becomes a huge barrier to her love relationship with him. Finally as a result of her shame, desperation, and confusion, she decides that everyone is better off if

she just goes away with Glen and leaves Bone behind. The psychological repercussions for her daughter and for herself are immeasurable in such a decision. Similar to Anney, Sethe's choice is one made out of desperation and need. She needs to spare her children from a life of slavery, a life she knows about firsthand. Dissimilar to Anney, Sethe believes that she has no other available choice to make. She believes that she makes all of her decisions in the best interest of her children. Obviously though, Sethe does consider that fact that her choice is not one with which she may be able to live, because she plans not only to kill her four children but to also kill herself. Her failed plan leads to a lifetime of regrets. These women's stories examine how oppressive and complicating circumstances can lead to mothering dilemmas and a need for effective coping strategies to manage the responsibilities of mothering. In these mothering accounts, the circumstances are so overwhelming that the coping strategies cannot work effectively enough to save the mother-daughter relationships, even though they work "good enough" to leave the daughter with some chance of a productive life despite the mothering she has received.

## Chapter 2

### **Mothering as Difficulty in Dorothy West's *The Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon***

Examples in the novels in Chapter 1 of this study show the mother character whose rearing of her young daughter(s) is negatively affected by dilemmas caused by oppressive circumstances in their lives, which leads to the separation of mother and daughter by the end of the text and to the breakdown of the mother-daughter relationship. The mothers in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Dorothy West's *The Wedding* in this chapter are not affected by all of the same oppressive circumstances, nor do their oppressive circumstances lead to the same level of failure in the mother-daughter relationship. For these mothers, discrimination along racial and ethnic lines is not addressed as a major affront to their abilities to mother their children. In this chapter, however, the issue of skin color within the African-American culture becomes a major aspect of raising children in *The Wedding*. In addition, class discrimination is analyzed in a different manner in this chapter. Examples in this chapter show three mother characters who discriminate against people of a lower socioeconomic status, and a poor mother character in *Song of Solomon* who is basically oblivious to the societal limits of class.

In addition, the novels in this chapter focus on the mothers of older adult daughters rather than on adolescent and older teenage daughters as the novels in Chapter 1 do. This chapter also evaluates how the differences in oppressive circumstances can contribute to the more positive effectiveness of the mother characters' coping strategies. The mothering situations in these novels are more successful than in the novels in Chapter 1, since the issue of mother-daughter separation is not presented in the same

manner. Mothers, daughters, and granddaughters are separated due to death in Chapter 2 and not because they choose to be separated. Similar to the mothering situations discussed in Chapter 1, examples in this chapter present mothering situations that are adversely affected by oppressive circumstances which create the need for coping strategies for the mother characters. In Chapter 2, "Mothering as Difficulty in Dorothy West's *The Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," I argue that these novels show how oppressive circumstances, such as childhood experiences, socioeconomic philosophies, social isolation, and family discord, can create the need for inner strength, mothering assumption, mothering mentors, surrogate mothers, and/or women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mothers. By mothering assumption, I refer to the taking over of or laying claim to the mothering responsibilities of a child. Examples in this chapter show at least two women (grandmothers) who assume the mothering responsibilities of rearing their granddaughters, because their daughters are portrayed as being incapable of fulfilling those mothering responsibilities alone or at all.

In the novels discussed in Chapter 1, the complications of mothering responsibilities lead to dilemmas. The choices made in those dilemmas then lead to the breakdown of the mother-daughter relationship. In this chapter, the works end with the relationships being somewhat more successful. Although some of the mothering relationships end tragically, there remains a mutual love relationship that is also manifested by their physical togetherness. For example in one of the relationships in *The Wedding*, the mother and her daughters do not respect each other's choices and philosophical beliefs, but they do preserve their mother-daughter relationships and remain connected physically and emotionally. However, some of the oppressive

circumstances that affect mothering lead to the dissatisfaction and depression of the daughters and some semblance of the mother-daughter relationship remains, in some instances, until death parts it. Although the relationships examined in this chapter do not show how effective coping strategies can be most successful for mothers who must combat oppressive circumstances, they do seem more successful than those relationships examined in Chapter 1. Their greater success seems to be predicated on, but not limited to, several aspects: 1) the management of different oppressive circumstances, 2) the absence of physical child abuse, and 3) the perspectives of older adult daughters. However, these relationships are by no means as successful as they could be.

Of those oppressive circumstances that affect the mothering situations in *The Wedding* and *Song of Solomon*, the mother's childhood experience is an important one. The major mother characters' discussed in this chapter, Caroline "Gram" Shelby and Corinne Coles in *The Wedding* and Pilate and Ruth Dead in *Song of Solomon*, all have daughterhoods characterized by absent natural mothers and strong, ambitious fathers. Linked to their childhoods is the powerful influence that socioeconomic philosophies has on their mothering. Issues of race and class essentialism plague the legacies of the families in both novels and directly influence the life philosophies with which the mother characters rear their daughters.

Critics, such as Herb Boyd and Sharon Fitzgerald, assess the following about the treatment of race and class in Dorothy West's body of work: "To West, racism and classism formed a lariat that ensnared all American values. Whether worn by blacks or whites, its strength, empowered by pretense and ignorance, strangled any possibility of joy and humanity" (33). However, because of her positive portrayal of Black bourgeois

culture, West has been criticized, in the words of Dorothy Clark, “for her seeming dismissal of the pervasive specter of racism that haunts blacks in America” (47). On the other hand, many theorists clearly see her indictment of race, color, and class elitism in works like *The Wedding*.<sup>1</sup> It is more than evident that stereotypically informed beliefs about race and color shape the mothering of Gram, Josephine, and Corinne in West’s novel. Like her characters in the *Oval*, West herself was born into the black bourgeois culture of Martha’s Vineyard. In addition, being one of the darker-skinned members of such a cultural circle must have inspired her continuous treatment of the subject well past the era, the pre-1960s Black pride era, when such issues were so publicly pervasive. However, the fact that such subjects were still able to draw such a large end-of-the-twentieth century reading audience (and a large television audience for the movie which followed) speaks volumes about the fascination of contemporary Americans with race and color discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison’s treatment of class distinction between the two Dead households is just as compelling as West’s discussion of color prejudice. Ruth Dead’s family fits into that same culture of class elitism as the Coles family, but Pilate Dead is a prime example of how one can choose to live outside of the socioeconomic holds of society with surprising success (for herself, but not for her granddaughter). Barbara Christian makes the following assertion about Morrison’s power of character creation: “Morrison’s dramatization of human societies emphasizes the tension between the natural order and the unnatural points of discrimination—race, sex, money, class—employed by human societies” (“Community” 62). However, it is the reality of social isolation that encourages Pilate to live by such a lasting socioeconomic philosophy.

Social isolation is yet another complication for mothering in these novels, whether it is self-imposed or societal-imposed. In some of the relationships, isolation is connected to issues of race and class, as is the oppressive circumstance of family discord. These novels show how such circumstances can create the need for coping strategies. The coping strategies of inner strength, mothering assumption, mother mentors/surrogate mothers, and women-centered networks can work together to eliminate some of the negativity of the oppressive circumstances that affect the mother's rearing of their children, especially when rearing daughters.

These mothers are strong in their beliefs about how to negotiate one's way through life, and they attempt to protect their children even if it is against the child's wishes. Concerning Ruth Dead, who seems to be a predominantly weak mother character, she even has situations in which she displays sheer determination. Gram Shelby and Pilate Dead also assume the role of primary parent (mother) to their granddaughters when the need arises. In order to provide support for the mother characters, the need for a mothering mentor and/or surrogate mother is also a coping strategy, along with women-centered networks. Contrary to the networks discussed in Chapter 1, the networks in these chapters seem to be relegated to households that these mothers and their adult daughters share at certain points in their relationships, in triads in *Song of Solomon* (but, Ruth and Pilate support each other) and triads and a foursome in *The Wedding*. Other women from the community seem to be insignificant to these networks, since there is no presentation of any genuine friendships with non-familial women in these works.

In, *The Wedding*, Gram is a white, early twentieth-century, Southern-bred woman with an aristocratic past (West 29), who regards society's social and racial classifications as strict codes of existence, even though her daughter Josephine "crossed her true white blood, her blue blood, with colored" (28). Shockingly, Josephine opts to marry Hannibal, the college-educated son of Melisse, the former slave cook for Caroline's family, rather than one of the available "white-trash" suitors in her community. After Caroline's husband dies due to frail health and financial ruin, Caroline and Josephine are left with little to live on (32). The powerful grip of hunger and poverty drives Josephine from her mother and from her beliefs and into Hannibal's arms, but only for a matter of months. However, by that time, it is too late; she is already pregnant with Hannibal's child. With the creation of such a course of events, West tips the scale on examining race relations within a family. Boyd and Fitzgerald characterize West's power of the pen in the following: "With lighthearted wit and sturdy principles, West was in fact a dissector of the innards of African-American society. [She] laid bare our foibles—the divisions of class, wealth and color that undermine our relationships and strengths" (33). Racial beliefs and color codes, in this novel, certainly shape Gram's (Caroline's) mothering for at least the next three generations. She makes sure to pass on her tainted values from one daughter to the next. There is certain, however, to be a different story for the fourth generation, since her great-granddaughter Laurie's skin color is a reflection of her dark blood.

Gram's mothering is tainted by philosophies that teach the women in her family that heritage gives one the right to discriminate against others, that race and class should determine those with whom one associates. This is a way of life and mothering that

begins with her childhood experiences. She has an enduring connection to a dead father who treated her like royalty when he was alive. Her mother is not even discussed in the text. She is the prized daughter of a father who loves her dearly, and she remains connected to her father's beliefs. Gram never loses her connectedness to Xanadu, her father's grand Old South plantation, which exists during the United States slave era and firmly establishes the positions for the races and the classes in Gram's mind. Gram embraces her father's elitist ideology without hesitation on any aspects of it, even considering her starving family better than "the new rich" whites who populate the South after the Civil War (West 33) and too proud to accept money from Melisse, the ex-slave with whom she was reared like a sister (36).

Such a background encourages Gram's mothering to teach her daughter and granddaughter to discriminate against others in the community. Even though the privileges of living white to which Gram so desperately craves are last associated with hunger and poverty for her, it does not keep her from discriminating against the hand that feeds her, the hand of her African-American son-in-law, to whom she only refers as "Professor." Even though she is repulsed by having lived among African Americans (in upscale New England and in the Oval in Martha's Vineyard) for almost half a century, Gram would have to admit that her life as such has been one of wealth and comfort. It is her racist disposition that makes her life so difficult, that marginalizes her whiteness in the African-American community, and which affects her mothering even after Josephine has been dead for so many years; Josephine's defection from her race has been "forgotten by everybody but Gram" (West 28). Instead of embracing her family and the community

in which they live, Gram makes her life uneasy by allowing her race to isolate her within the contexts of her physical and emotional lives.

Even though she passes racist and elitist values on to her daughter, Josephine's fears of starvation and poverty seem greater than her racist beliefs. Josephine's marriage to Black Hannibal, the birth of her daughter Corinne, and her death of consumption all spiral Gram into the "bitter legacy of living colored" (West 49), so she passes on her oppressive beliefs to her African-American granddaughter Corinne in the form of color and class prejudices.

Gram's racial biases work to socially isolate her from the community in which she now lives. Of course, Gram's isolation is self-imposed, since the upper-scale, blue-vein African Americans gladly treat her as the "grandam of the faculty wives" (West 48). Gram has no desire to be a part of or the queenly head of this community. However, since she now has the primary responsibility of rearing Corinne, Gram is careful not to verbally offend the community in which she lives (45-46). Initially, she is aware that this is the community in which Corinne must live and marry; and later she realizes that, by Corinne's means, here she must also exist, among the people she thinks of as "strangers and savages" (30). Her only reason for socializes with them is to improve her and Corinne's socioeconomic status, first through Hannibal and then through a husband for Corinne.

Of the strangers and savages to whom Gram refers, Hannibal is definitely one of her references. It is ironic, though, that Gram unknowingly serves as mentor for his academic pursuits; she is his "lodestar" (West 46). In addition to his mother's financial and motivational support of his efforts, it is Gram's grand stories of the past that inspire

him to become a history professor, an undertaking from which she will directly benefit along with her daughter and granddaughter. West writes: “His major was history because Miss Caroline had sparked his interest in worlds that had already taken their place in time in contrast to the world of the present, which had not been tidied up in a book with an ending and an evaluation” (40). Although Hannibal’s household becomes the place of economic safety for Josephine and later for Gram, there never exists any true family harmony for these characters. Based purely on racial difference and discrimination, this family discord both determines and directs how Corinne will be reared. First, Josephine determines that she cannot rear Corinne because of the baby’s Negro blood. Then, Gram is directed by their common white blood to rear Corinne in Josephine’s stead. After Josephine is no longer in the picture, Hannibal and Gram still never act like family members. That is, except when there is a necessity for her to play hostess in order to further his career and to move the family higher up the socioeconomic ladder of success. This way of doing things further informs the liberty of Gram’s rearing of Corinne. Due to the non-existent bond between Gram and Hannibal and his belief that Corinne needs a mother to rear her properly in their community, he never truly uses his power as the head of the household and allows Gram to totally oversee Corinne’s upbringing. While he devotes his time and attention to becoming “the first Negro president of his college” (48), he also allows Gram to become the most significant figure in Corinne’s life, which cuts her off from the values and beliefs of anyone else.

This strengthens Gram’s influence on future generations of her family and provides a small inroad to possibly having the chance to live as a member of the white community again someday. Although this is a triumph for Gram, her mothering, as far as

she is concerned, is oppressed by having to live with African Americans, people she abhors. Her strong disposition for survival extends into the mothering area of her life as a coping strategy for having to mother in a community of which she definitely would rather not be a part. In addition, her strong sense of responsibility to her family heritage will not allow her to leave Corinne, a Shelby, to be reared by “savages.”

Gram assumes the role of mother to Corinne; though she does so mostly out of necessity and responsibility rather than choice. Because of Josephine’s refusal to be a wife and mother and to ever “leave the sanctuary of her room” again, Gram “took her place in Hannibal’s house, sat at his table—with Hannibal standing [to serve her as his mother once had]—took charge of his child, exchanged civilities with his few acquaintances, and moved among the colored strangers, never one of them, but made a part of them” (West 45). By taking on Josephine’s role, Gram embarks on a new way of life and way of being which position her as the head of a “cross-generational and cross-racial” family, to which she is never fully connected, since race always separates her in her mind, even from those she loves and protects (Pignatella *Colby*). However, assuming the mothering responsibilities of Corinne, Josephine’s offspring, provides Gram with a coping strategy to confront or to address how her rearing of Josephine could ever allow her to betray her heritage in such a way. She has a second chance to do it right, and for all public purposes, Corinne completely follows Gram’s guidance. When she betrays what she has been taught by Gram, she attempts to do so privately.

As Gram ages, Corinne and her daughters become Gram’s only system of emotional support. Of course, Corinne’s marriage, makes certain that Gram will be have the financial support she needs, just as Hannibal had done before. Josephine’s marriage

causes Gram to leave her white Southern friends behind forever, and Josephine's death causes Gram to live "with no one now who was true white with whom she could identify herself" (West 49). The only women with whom Gram has any true form of socialization are the women in her family. They form the women-centered network that loves and supports her, even when they defy her teachings.

Corinne heads the triad that is Gram's system of support. However much these women support each other, Corinne Coles is unable to forge the closest relationships with her own two daughters. Shelby and Liz do seem to love their mother (and the fact that she has hired servants), but respecting her is much harder than loving her. Her well-rumored lust for dark-skinned, socio-economically inferior men is her major fault. Mary Helen Washington writes the following comment on West's treatment of her upwardly mobile characters: "When Dorothy West wrote about the black bourgeoisie, she did not merely tout their achievements. Understanding them as only an insider can, she became one of the black elite's most insightful critics" (12). West's portrayal of Corinne's dark trysts is a perfect example of the criticism about which Washington writes. Corinne lusts after the kind of man Gram forbade her to approach long ago. In addition, neither of her daughters marries the type of light-skinned African-American man that she and Gram want them to choose. Corinne attempts to re-enact the same prejudicial legacy in her mothering that has made her so unhappy all of these years, but her daughters "affront all the subtle tenets of their training" (West 4). Liz "had married a dark man and given birth to a daughter who was tinged with her father's darkness," but at least he is a "man of medicine" (4). Shelby marries a "nameless, faceless white" "music maker" (4). In the same manner of her bourgeois characters, West was still (1997) careful about her

references to skin color. John Skow reveals: “Brown [not Black] is her word, used carefully and with mild amusement, because among the Massachusetts resort island’s summering black aristocracy, light has always been right, and shadings of color are measured with precision” (78). This is representative of the same societal rules with which Corinne is reared.

Her negative childhood experiences have a lasting impact on her mothering decision, even her decision not to have more children. These elitist values, Gram passes on to Corinne to the point that Corinne fears birthing a child who may be dark enough “that she might reject her child as Josephine had rejected her” (West 66) because she had been “tarred by Hannibal’s colored sperm” (46). In turn, Corinne discriminates against those who do not have “sizable amounts of blue blood in their veins” and the correct amount of money in their pockets (47). Corinne’s initiation into this way of thinking and way of living begins when Gram influences Corinne and Clark to marry. Unlike the match of Josephine and Hannibal, which Gram abhorred, Clark and Corinne are the right skin color and from the proper social class (Rayson 34).

The way Corinne mothers her own daughters is directly affected by the same socioeconomic philosophy with which she is reared. Her participation in carrying over Gram’s bigotry to the next generation is seen in her relentless color and class discrimination of others in the African-American community. Corinne’s discrimination is characterized as what Barbara Smith calls “the oppressed being oppressive” (xiiiv). However much Corinne does discriminate, she knows that light skin is not white skin and is as disturbed as much by Shelby’s choice to marry white as by Liz’s choice to marry dark.

Ann Rayson makes the following assessment about the community's and the family's uproar over Shelby's choice of a marriage partner: "Even though she is a blue-eyed blonde, due to generations of careful color breeding, Shelby is still not supposed to marry white; neither is she supposed to marry very black. The allowed parameters of the black bourgeoisie are narrow" (33). In fact, both Shelby's father and sister are even verbally critical of her choice of whom to marry, her choice to "marry white." Merle Rubin writes the following about the charge West assigns to Shelby's character: "The challenge of seeing beyond racial prejudice—and racial pride—falls to Shelby, who learns to see the individual, not the stereotype, by looking through the eyes of love" (11). However, it is an assignment that Shelby only indirectly carries out. Consequently, Gram sees Shelby's choice as an opportunity for her at least to "die white." Gram wanted Shelby's hand to cling to her own "because it was being joined in marriage with a true white one, and that union, in the time of generations, would return to its origination, the colored blood drained out, degree by degree, until none was left, either known or remembered" (West 49).

Corinne's positions on skin color and class are redesigned replicas of Gram's views on race and class; she replaces race prejudice with color prejudice. As a true "product of her conditioning," she allows those views to limit her true happiness (West 216). She is pushed into a proper, but loveless marriage because of those values and is thereby forced into "secret," sexual "self-indulgence with the men who were dark enough to excite her" (66), while her husband does the same with his dark mistress. Her tainted values socially and publicly isolate her from the kind of man with whom she would really

like to be. Regardless of Corinne's true desires, she still mothers her daughters with the same discriminatory ideals that oppress her life choices. Liz recalls that

her mother found a thousand ways to pressure her into considering the consequences of marrying somebody nobody knew [...]. Her mother blew the trumpet of praise for marriage to her own kind, if not color, the right color being preferable but not as mandatory as the right class. That class and the posture it demanded had given her the self-assurance to feel that no barrier was insurmountable, and to say with ease that she looked white but wasn't. (90)

Though elitist, this is Corinne's way of steering her daughters clear of the poverty her mother and grandmother have endured.

Ellen Pignatella writes that *The Wedding* "emphasizes the ability and power of the past to either hinder one's relationship with others or to transform and liberate one from the chains of previously held societal convictions" (*Colby*). This comes to fruition when Liz and Shelby liberate themselves from the chains that have made their mother's life so emotionally depressing. Jones rightly assesses the Coles sisters' choices of mates: "Liz and Shelby defy the family history of marrying light-skinned blacks to continue the blue-vein society of the Oval. West accurately portrays and deftly criticizes color and class consciousness through the two women's decisions to defy social customs that define color, class, and community" (Jones, *Rereading* 146). They realize, at least in part, the ideological dangers, which encircle the impenetrable social walls of the Oval. Liz is even more aware of these dangers when her darker-skinned baby daughter becomes the latest victim of discrimination in the Coles household. Gram even refuses to touch her tinted skin. However, this is not the only example of discord in the Coles household.

There is no harmony in the marriage of Corinne and Clark Coles. At this point, they are socioeconomic mates. Their marriage begins to deteriorate when Corinne refuses to have more children with Clark. He then sets his sights on eventually having a lasting relationship with his mistress, who reminds him of the beautiful, dark-skinned, working-class girl he really wanted to marry instead of Corinne. The infidelities of both parents result in their daughters' serious lack of respect for both of them, which possibly leads the daughters to question their parents' philosophies about life and to challenge those philosophies.

In response to such challenges, Corinne is strong about her convictions whether they are right or wrong. Like Gram, who assumes the position of mother to Corinne and later functions as Corinne's mothering mentor, Corinne is a strong woman whose inner strength aids her in coping with oppressive historical circumstances in her life, such as the haunting of Josephine's rejection, the breakdown of an arranged marriage, and her jealousy of Clark's mistress (West 64-66). Despite these issues that plague her, Corinne is always a survivor, the kind of woman who "[takes] the house in hand" and takes care of everybody in it (50). Also, similar to Gram, Corinne takes comfort in the support of the network formed by the women in her family. Other than with them, she finds no genuine form of love and support.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison's two major mother characters leave the kind of lasting impression that West's mothers do, although their daughters do not react to life's circumstances as well as those in *The Wedding*. Resembling Caroline and Corinne in strength but not in social philosophy, Pilate Dead is a dark-skinned African-American, small-time bootlegging woman with "berry-black lips, a man's haircut, and unlaced

boots” (*Song of Solomon* 151, 37-38), who disregards most of society’s social classifications. Brenner accurately comments on Pilate’s sense of values: “No rural throwback who lives on the margins of modern society, Pilate inherits our celebrated American tradition of individualism, and she challenges and rejects her society’s values by living in its very midst, refusing to retreat from it” (122). Brenner, as I do, also sees Pilate’s individual stance as heroic: “Pilate’s heroism resides in her self-acceptance and self-content, the heroism of performing routine responsibilities without fretting about whether she is ‘macon’ something of her life” (123). Here, we see the emphasis on Pilate’s resistance of those material things that drive her brother “Macon” Dead’s entire world. Just as heroically as Pilate lives out her convictions, she also mothers her children. She mothers fiercely in the midst of oppressive circumstances.

One of those circumstances is her childhood experience, which begins as tragically as it ends. The ancient midwife, Circe, gives a personal account of Pilate’s strange birth: “‘Borned herself. I had very little to do with it. I thought they were both dead, the mother and the child. When she popped out you could have knocked me over. I hadn’t heard a heartbeat anywhere. She just came on out’” (*Song of Solomon* 246). As if to confirm this phenomenon of Pilate’s birthing herself, she is left with no sign of a navel after the cord has healed and separated. From birth, Pilate has no guidance from a mother. She learns to love herself and others via the example of the loving relationships she has with her father, and especially with her brother, Macon Dead II, while growing up on their farm in Montour County, Pennsylvania. Even years after her brother’s love has turned to hatred, she still loves him and fondly remembers his caring for her (40). However, it is her father’s anger with God concerning her mother’s death that results in

her disconnectedness with her mother's story. Pilate tells twelve-year-old Milkman, "'I'd know her ribbon color anywhere, but I don't know her name. After she died Papa wouldn't let anybody say it'" (42). During Pilate's twelfth year, her father is murdered, she and her brother fight and separate, and she begins a nomadic life. She comes into her womanhood alone and haphazardly, except for the connection she establishes with her father's ghost thereby providing some life instructions along the way. When she becomes a mother and later a grandmother, she can only offer her unconditional love in rearing them. In fact, she cannot even offer them the positive types of male influence that she has had early in her life. Although her initiation into womanhood is not specifically a guided process, Pilate emerges as a self-actualized woman (Samuels 61).

As self-sufficient as Pilate is, her daughter and granddaughter (Reba and Hagar) are nothing like her. One would think that Pilate's life philosophy of loving and helping as many people as one can and ignoring society's socioeconomic limits would carry over to the women she rears. However, this mothering relationship displays how one's life can be a constant example of strong social and spiritual beliefs, and have more of a positive impact on the community than in one's own household. In "Distant Mothers and Incomprehensible Fathers," Denise Heinze composes the following about Pilate's abode: "Pilate's household represents a retreat from the world of accumulation because it is based on aesthetic and emotional rather than material needs. It is a pre-industrial way of life, devoid of capitalistic influence and patriarchal restraints so that the women perform only enough work to satisfy their immediate needs" (84). Fabre also describes this home as "a communal world rooted in ancestral lore, located in the margin of the city" and as "the seedbed of cultural activity which brings a promise and suggests the possibility of

flight” (110). Unlike her brother Macon Dead’s house, Pilate’s is a place one runs “to” not “from.” Pilate serves as guide or “pilot” to those in her family and others, whom she meets along her life’s journey.<sup>3</sup> I agree that there is a definite positive energy in Pilate’s home. However, that energy is not positive enough to transform the world, nor is it positive enough to save Hagar from the world.

Pilate’s powerful independence and deeply rooted caring do not construct any type of personal immunity from discrimination and isolation. It almost seems obvious that Pilate’s marginal position in society would be a direct result of her gender, low socioeconomic level, lack of formal education, and African features. But, it is not these things that hinder Pilate’s daily existence in Pennsylvania and later in Michigan. In fact, Pilate’s rejection of the standards of a predominantly white, middle-class society leaves her successfully living, in the words of Brenda Marshall, “outside society, often outside the laws of man, and seemingly outside the laws of nature [...]. Pilate slips into the shapes and forms that society recognizes when it suits her purpose” (486-7). Pulling her Aunt Jemima routine at the police station in an attempt to free her nephew is an example of her abilities. She wears the mask of experience and survival as most of us do, but she is always successful in maintaining true self-awareness. Unlike most of us, she is never in the least danger of assimilating to race, class, or sex standards.

As a result, she eliminates the manners, dress, and values of mainstream society. All of the things that are so important to Gram, Corinne and Ruth; Pilate rejects without a second thought. However, Pilate’s rejection of society’s standards does not keep society from rejecting her. Considered dirty, ragged, and strange, Pilate probably has few options for supporting herself other than boot legging. As a young mother, Pilate “began the

wandering life that she kept up for the next twenty-some-odd years, and stopped only after Reba had a baby” (*Song of Solomon* 148). Her mothering becomes a response, in part, to the rejection that she herself has endured within her own cultural/racial community. In fact, the most stinging rejection of her ideals comes from within her own home. Hagar, weaker than Pilate, cannot live without outside friends or without a lover. In fact, not only does she not see Pilate’s way of life as positive, but she “hides as best she could the fact that Pilate and Reba embarrassed her” (151). Pilate, being a woman of great insight, realizes early on that Hagar is different from them. This is her reason for locating her family and hoping that her brother Macon and his family will be the “other” people whom she needs so desperately.

Also important is the social statement that Morrison’s work makes with the depiction of this female-headed household. On one hand, its portrayal is considered positive. Heinze states: “Morrison’s familial representations undergo a complex and bewildering evolution. She scrambles the structure, locus, ideology, and value system of the family, dramatically illustrating that the home is not necessarily housed in a two-parent nuclear family but where the heart is” (66). Her picture of the traditional two-parent home, Macon Dead’s household, is dysfunctional at best. On the other hand, the Pilate-headed household garners negative response, also. Heinze also states: “Morrison exhibits an increasing discomfort with her female-constructed households[...]. The Pilate household is barely more than a mirage in a vast desert soon to disappear in the glaring light of reality. The Pilate household crumbles like the House of Usher, not from internal pressures but from external ones” (85). This assessment rings true concerning Hagar’s

character. The marginalizations that Pilate seems to successfully live in spite of actually lead to the destruction of Hagar and the loving triad, which is her nuclear family.

Living, thinking, dressing, and acting differently from those in mainstream society can serve to isolate one. Pilate's isolation indirectly affects her mothering, in that, she focuses closely on her family when her isolated state provides her access to nothing else. Isolation, thereby, becomes another oppressive circumstance that affects Pilate's ability to mother her daughters. Pilate confides in her sister-in-law Ruth about the importance of having her dead father's spirit in her life in the face of loneliness and isolation: "'It's a good feelin[g] to know he's around. I tell you he's a person I can always rely on. I tell you somethin[g] else. He's the only one. I was cut off from people early. You can't know what that was like'" (*Song of Solomon* 141). Pilate admits that she would rather not live this way, however, she seems powerless in any effort not to do so. In addition, there are so many things that define Pilate as different.

Some theorists think of her as otherworldly and refer to her as a spiritual shaman, a natural healer, root-worker, black blueswoman, ancestral pilot, supernatural priestess, and fierce protectress.<sup>4</sup> These accurate otherworldly descriptors of Pilate all derive from something she did not possess rather than what she did possess. Pilate's stomach was "as blind as a knee," having no trace of a navel or where one had once been (*Song of Solomon* 149): "Pilate, who helped everybody, was believed to have the power to step out of her skin, set a bush afire from fifty yards, and turn a man into a ripe rutabaga—all on account of the fact that she had no navel" (94). Morrison writes that this bodily omission "isolated her. Already without family, she was further isolated from her people, for, except for the relative bliss on the island [with her only significant lover and where

Reba was born], every other resource was denied her: partnership in marriage, confessional friendship, and communal religion. Men frowned, women whispered,” and she was not accepted (149).

In retaliation, Pilate accepts her position as outsider and rejects mainstream ideals. Like Gram and Ruth, she is a victim of friendlessness (Weems 99); so her navel-less body becomes a symbol of her isolation from others (V. Smith, “Continuities” 280). Stelamaris Coser writes the following assessment of Pilate’s character: “Modeled after strong black women, [...] Pilate is the only sign of a vital black tradition surviving in the urban industrial environment. Like a tribal woman, she keeps her family name in a box hanging from her ear. She was “not born natural,” a different person from the very beginning” (144, 246). These qualities are just what make people afraid of Pilate. Coser’s assessment can actually be linked to Morrison’s own. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Morrison recounts the following about the navel-less character she creates:

I was trying to draw the character of a sister to a man, a sister who was different, and part of my visualization of her included that she had no navel. Then it became an enormous thing for her. It also had to come at the beginning of the book so the reader would know to expect anything of her. It had to be a thing that was very powerful in its absence but of no consequence in its presence. It couldn’t be anything grotesque, but something to set her apart, to make her literally invent herself. (128)

The navel-less issue takes on a life of its own in literary criticism. It becomes an ever-present link to Pilate’s supernatural beginning, otherworldly existence, and ultimate

death-flight. However, in the novel, it shows how difference can isolate a person who only wants to know and love others.

However, it is not her navel-less body that causes her brother to reject her. He is ashamed of her appearance and behavior and how it reflects on him as a wealthy, African-American businessman in the community, and he is still angry about the way they fought and separated so many decades before. This form of family discord is another oppressive circumstance for Pilate's mothering. Hagar's admiration of the finer things in life and a more refined, traditional lifestyle is what drives Pilate to locate her brother in the first place. It is Pilate's intent to move closer to Macon in order for Hagar to socialize with his family and have access to the traditional, materialistic, middle-class life that intrigues her, the kind of life Pilate and Reba can not give her. Pilate wants Macon to supply Hagar with the same male influence that she grew up knowing, the kind of male influence that teaches a woman to love herself and to rely on herself. Macon refuses to have any public connection with Pilate's household at all. His rejection of them is not a part of Pilate's plan. Hagar needs interaction with more people than those who live in her house. She needs this in order to be a complete and secure person.

The situation with Hagar only makes Pilate a fiercer protector of her family, but she refuses to be a meddler. Samuel Allen assesses that Pilate functions as a "moral lodestone" for the community around her: "[...] Pilate, deformed in the world's view and derelict, but whose gift is forbearance and love and a surrendering to life to possess it. Pilate is an arresting figure who emerges as the focus of moral concern, a guardian for those lacking her strength" (30). Morrison comments on the power of Pilate's very complicated character:

Pilate can tell everybody what to do, but she's wide-spirited. She does not run anybody's course. She is very fierce about her children, but when she is told by her brother to leave, she leaves, and does not return. She is wider scaled and less demanding about certain things. She does behave in a protective way with her children, but that's purely maternal. That strong maternal instinct is part of her other-worldliness. (McKay, "Interview" 419)

Pilate intensely and successfully asserts her independence as a woman, but she protects and [s]mothers her daughter and granddaughter so vehemently that they are unable to have that same kind of independence themselves. They are left to rely on her strength, having none of their own. They, like the other "Dead" women, "are clinging, self-effacing women who are easily humiliated or exploited by men" (Rubenstein 143). The fact that the indomitable Pilate rears such a weak daughter and granddaughter is an issue for which Morrison has been negatively criticized.<sup>5</sup> Reba and Hagar, like Ruth, are "doormat women" (*Song of Solomon* 310). They allow men to use them and to walk all over them, and they are unable to defend themselves properly and rationally. Pilate serves as Reba's protector from her own misguided choices of lovers. During one such incident in which Reba's angry lover attacks her, Pilate uses a quarter inch of the tip of a knife to provide necessary protection and explains to him that "mamas get hurt and nervous when somebody don't like they children" (94). Reba's shallow wit is not something that Pilate is able to change by her own exemplification, so she remains the constant protector for her, which leads to another copying strategy—mothering assumption.

Just as Gram does in *The Wedding*, Pilate assumes the role of mother to her granddaughter. Reba, for the most part, relinquishes her mothering role to Pilate, whom

she sees as the more capable and true “mama.” In one instance, Reba warns Hagar “don’t contradict your mama,” and instructs her to listen to Pilate (*Song of Solomon* 48).

Throughout the work, Hagar consistently refers to her mother as “Reba” and to her grandmother as “Mama.” Perhaps, an African-American cultural theorist, like Patricia Hill Collins, might find this practice quite normal for a household in which grandmother and mother both exist. In fact, it might be said that Pilate is only grand-mothering, merely sharing the mothering responsibilities, but is not actually assuming the mothering in this situation. However, I disagree with that idea in this particular circumstance. Pilate’s treatment of Reba as a child is evidence that she considers herself the more capable parent. She is indeed the head of their household. Pilate even reprimands Reba for interfering with her mothering: ““Shut up, Reba. I’m talking to Hagar”” (44). Morrison also describes Reba’s childlike disposition: “Reba had the simple eyes of an infant” and “looked as though her simplicity might also be vacuousness” (46). In addition, Pilate feels less than comfortable with Reba’s decision-making skills when it comes to men and life in general. As Morrison informs us, Reba simply lives “from one orgasm to another” (151).

In an attempt to give Hagar the guidance that she knows Reba cannot provide, Pilate falls short of providing just what Hagar needs, also. Pilate mistakenly believes that protection and pampering are what Hagar needs to be happy and whole. In fact, Hagar never really works or contributes to the household’s survival. Even Reba helps with the wine making. The discipline and direction that Hagar needs as a child is never really supplied. Also, having dark skin and kinky hair like Pilate, Hagar obviously needs to understand that everyone will not accept and love her for who she is and that a man will

not keep loving her because she wills him to do so. However, it is not Pilate's way to didactically teach others how to live their lives. Brenner chides critics like me, who place some blame (malicious or not) for Hagar's demise on the way Pilate rears her:

Pilate knows well the hazard of trying to teach others her values, shows by the example of how she lives what it is that she values, letting the results be what they will; besides, the responsibility to raise Hagar is primarily Reba's, not Pilate's. And finally, since no amount of parental guidance guarantees the values one's offspring will acquire, to fault Pilate for Hagar's death exposes the judgmental attitude of someone looking for a scapegoat. (122)

Although I do not primarily fault Pilate or Reba for Hagar's choices, I cannot help but speculate that a more direct approach in rearing her or making sure that she had other positive female examples might have allowed Hagar to fare better in the business of living.

Hagar, who is "not strong enough, like Pilate, nor simple enough, like Reba," becomes the perpetrator of "graveyard love" (*Song of Solomon* 128) and the victim of invasive stereotypical ideals of beauty. The fact that Hagar has an incestuous and tragic love affair with her cousin Milkman is also something that Pilate is unable to stop from happening. Her disapproval of the relationship is clouded by her unyielding love for both Milkman and Hagar. Because Pilate is secure in who she is and what she looks like, she cannot comprehend the insane, monthly, attempted-murdering tirade on which Hagar goes, after Milkman rejects her and she sees him with "the girl whose silky copper-colored hair cascaded over the sleeve of his coat" (126). In "'Artists Without Art Form': A Look at One Black Woman's World of Unrevered Black Women," Renita Weems

discusses the greater predisposition to depression and weakness of the modern African-American woman as opposed to her foremothers. Hagar is a supreme example: “While Hagar was crushed under the weight of unreturned love, the same lovelessness in her mother and grandmother’s lives made them love each other the more” (Weems 102). Because Hagar does not truly love herself for who she is, being rational in her situation is made that much more difficult. African-American women’s therapist Eleanor Johnson comments on the fact that self-hatred, in one form or another, is what brings Black women into therapy (323).

With therapy not even being an option for Hagar, she believes that she can finally win Milkman back with straight hair, fashionable clothes, and light-colored make-up. Her failure to complete the newly packaged version of herself sends her into a feverish incoherence from which she never returns. Hagar’s death, in Pilate’s opinion it seems, becomes the ultimate example of failed mothering in the public eye, which Pilate and Reba must refute publicly at her funeral by informing the world that she was truly loved (*Song of Solomon* 323). Pilate and Reba suffer from what psychotherapist Rozsika Parker describes in the following passage: “The personal and cultural pressures under which women mother often render us inordinately anxious and guilty, until all that is stimulated by conflict is shame, or an unmanageable sense of persecution” (xi). Pilate’s grief seems to exhibit self-persecution in this instance. Inner strength is not necessarily genetic, and Pilate is unable to instill in Hagar the qualities that she so tremendously values. Hagar dies because of that inability which directly leads to her weaknesses, on which Milkman’s rejection has a fatal effect. Pilate is mothering and teaching by example, but Hagar cannot follow her example. Hagar is the victim of the mothering

mistake Debold, Wilson, and Malavé discuss: [...] if [mothers] do not teach their daughter[s] simply how to get along in [the] world, [...] they leave their daughters adrift in a hostile world without survival strategies” (xvi). Hagar is a casualty of not understanding the way the outside world works, for it is a world of which Pilate chooses not to be a part.

In the development of her mothering style, Pilate relies on only one mentor. Morrison writes: “But most important, she paid close attention to her mentor—the father who appeared before her sometimes and told her things” (*Song of Solomon* 150). It is ironic, though, that the thing he wants to tell her the most is her mother’s name, so that she can have some connection with her mother. Pilate is missing the mother-daughter connection that Morrison’s works emphasize so much. In fact, Circe is the only woman with whom she forms a significant attachment up to the age of 12. From ages 12-15, she becomes a member of a group of migrant workers and befriends the root-working woman in the migrant camp, and she does form a relationship with her lover’s mother and other people of the island where Reba is born. However, she makes no attachment to anyone there that is great enough to make her want to remain on the island after a few years.

This lack of connection to others due to their isolation of her provides Pilate with few avenues to be a part of or have her mothering benefit from associations with other positive women. Just like the women in *The Wedding*, the women in *Song of Solomon*’s only connections to women-centered networks are the women in their families. With them, they find their only real sources of support and love. However, for Hagar, that love and support was not enough to save her. Milkman’s friend Guitar Bains suggests that Hagar needs a community of women in order to become a secure and independent person

(*Song of Solomon* 48). Morrison chronicles the voices to which Guitar refers and those that he remembers hearing:

What had Pilate done to her? Hadn't anybody told her the things she ought to know? He thought of his two sisters, grown women now who could deal, and the litany of their growing up. Where's your daddy? Your mama know you out here in the street? Put something on your head [...]. Uncross your legs [...]. Hush your mouth. Comb your head. Get up from there and make that bed. Put on the meat. Take out the trash. Vaseline get rid of that ash. She needed what most colored girls needed: a chorus of mamas, grandmamas, aunts, cousins, sisters, neighbors, Sunday school teachers, best girl friends, and what all to give her the strength life demanded of her—and the humor with which to live it. (310-311)

In Guitar's and other critics' opinions, Pilate (and Reba) are not able to provide Hagar with all she needs to help her survive outside of her home. She needs the voices and wisdom of othermothers to help her know how to succeed at living in the outside world, a world with a system of beliefs that Pilate rejects. Pilate's example of strong, individual womanhood is not one that Hagar knows how to or even wants to duplicate. Pilate cannot control Hagar's emotions or choices, nor can she change her fate.

Similar to Pilate, Ruth Dead, is a mother who has no power to change the fate of her daughters and son either. In fact, Ruth seems to display little power at all in *Song of Solomon*. She is a woman who fits more into Corinne's social circle than she ever would fit into Pilate's. In fact, she marries beneath her in socioeconomic status when she marries young and economically rising Macon Dead, Pilate's only brother, but she does so with the blessing of her father Dr. Foster, the first colored doctor in the city. The

elitist Dr. Foster approves of the marriage, because he realizes that Macon's ambitions will carry Macon up the socioeconomic ladder. So, in this contract, Ruth is passed from the care of one snobbish master of control to the next. Consequently, within the marriage, she becomes, in her own words, "a small woman" (*Song of Solomon* 123), because she bends to the will of Macon, and her mothering is destroyed by his power and his jealousy. She, like Pilate and Gram, is a woman without the guidance of a mother, and her history and status in the community leave her friendless, except for the strange alliance she forms with her sister-in-law Pilate. Ruth's rearing of her children is plagued by her marriage choice and her past.

Her childhood experience is one of the oppressive circumstances that affect Ruth's mothering. Ruth comes into her womanhood without a mother's guidance. Her mother's death leaves her to be reared by a devoted but busy father. His status as the first and only colored doctor in the city actually places him in a social category of his own within the African American community. From her father, she learns the values of bourgeois culture and the art of displaying one's status. These values only isolate Ruth from others in the community. In addition, the fact that the community worships her father's unique status is not lost on Ruth; she is definitely his number one fan. Even after his death, Ruth maintains a connection with her dead father. I agree with Wilfred Samuels in his assessment of Ruth's daughterhood: "The fundamental bond between mother and daughter that Morrison in her work insists is necessary is lacking here. Although she receives love from her father, Ruth appears psychologically damaged and incomplete" (55). Unlike Pilate, Ruth does not become a self-actualized, independent

woman. She clings to her father and considers him her only true friend. He directly causes this when he isolates her from others in the community.

Married at sixteen, with the blessing of her father who fears the incestuously flavored overtones of their own relationship (*Song of Solomon* 23), Ruth has been the victim of an elitist father who medically treated the Black citizens of Danville, but thought them beneath him and his family, even though he was addicted to ether. To her son Milkman, Ruth recalls the following about her childhood: ““I was pressed small. I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package. I had no friends, only schoolmates who wanted to touch my dress and white silk stockings. But I didn’t think I’d ever need a friend because I had him. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died”” (124). Ruth realizes that her father loves her, but she also knows that he ““was not a good man,”” but ““ ‘an arrogant man, and often a foolish and destructive one’” (124). However, Ruth uses his same elitist ideals when rearing her own children, especially her daughters.

Ruth’s socioeconomic philosophies lead her to discriminate against those who have less than she does. She and Macon’s ideas about how to rear their daughters are strictly associated with their finding the best husbands. Ruth, like Corinne, utilizes extreme measures in attempting to ensure that her daughters make proper marriages. On the other hand, Corinthians and Lena Dead are hardly the assertive women that Liz and Shelby Coles are. Of course, assertiveness and independence are not characteristics that Ruth can teach her children by example. Brenner describes Ruth in the following passage: “Ruth Foster Dead seems little more than a weak replica of her biblical namesake, exemplar of dutiful, self-abnegating obedience, certainly no candidate for

praise. Yet Ruth's small-scale concerns [family, father, and flower] show her carving some minimal means of sustenance and significance for her life" (120). Brenner might add that she is a victim of her role as a wife and her "smallness," which is intensified daily by Macon's verbal, emotional, and physical abuse of her. And, the daughters live in fear of his verbal and emotional abuse.

Ruth, in the tradition of her own rearing by her father, incorporates other isolating tenets within her mothering which cause her children to be marginalized as outsiders within the African-American community, regardless of their light skin (except for her son Milkman) and their social status. They cannot escape the isolation that accompanies the socioeconomic philosophies of their parents. Karla F.C. Holloway correctly assesses: "Foster rears Ruth away from her heritage—establishing her as the 'doctor's daughter' and therefore less Black than the townsfolk he services. He values her lighter skin precisely because of his desire for this demarcation between his daughter and other Black people" ("Lyrics" 106). Holloway's assessment of the doctor's rearing of Ruth can also be applied to the way Ruth and Macon rear their three children. Similar to Ruth's own childhood experiences, her children are used to display Macon's wealth and position in the community. They are dressed differently than other children and not allowed to befriend most children. The family even ritually takes Sunday afternoon drives through town for the purpose of being set apart from others. Morrison writes: "For [Macon] it was a way to satisfy himself that he was indeed a successful man. It was a less ambitious ritual for Ruth, but a way, nevertheless, for her to display her family" (*Song of Solomon* 31). The onlookers in the community soon recognize the lifelessness of this family and jokingly call the big car "Macon Dead's hearse" (32); and some women in the

community already pity rather than envy Ruth, since they believe that their big, beautiful house is “more prison than palace” (9). So, Ruth purposely participates in putting her children through the same experiences that made her childhood lonely and sad. Ruth, by never challenging Macon’s rule (except to conceive Milkman), contributes to the same victimization of her children that was inflicted on her as a child.

Corinthians and Lena Dead have the opportunity to select no men when they are young. Melvin Dixon, poignantly describes these sisters’ lives as a “steady awful silence” (29). Ruth’s strict desire, early on, for them to marry colored doctors like her own father and Macon’s violent attitude of possessiveness transforms these daughters into “doll babies” (*Song of Solomon* 197) who “lack drive” and are “a little too elegant” for any possible marital mates in their community (189). As the daughters grow older and the suitors dwindle in number, Ruth and Macon find the interested men less than desirable based on occupation, background, and status. Slowly but surely, her daughters begin to exist, as their mother does, in what Peter Bruck calls a “deathworld” (304), with no fulfillment whatsoever except making red velvet roses and Ruth’s trips to her father’s grave (*Song of Solomon* 123). Milkman, due to his maleness and association with the outside world through his father’s business, escapes this stigma in many ways; he also escapes his father’s verbal abuse early on. He is reared to be autonomous, while his sisters become more and more dependent.

Those red velvet roses that the Dead women make “spoke to [Corinthians] of death,” and she chooses to break with the classist values of her parents (*Song of Solomon* 200). This is a good assessment since she rebels and finds work and love while she still can. She chooses Porter, the yardman and former unfavorable tenant of her father, “the

only [one who] could protect her from the smothering death of dry roses” (200).

Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos refers to Corinthians’ choice as “making this leap that for her must be into a kind of abyss. She can no longer live out her parents’ fantasies, and she settles for the very untender, harsh, probably psychotic Henry Porter rather than for living as a vestal virgin, a role Lena seems headed for” (96). Whether or not Porter is as Demetrakopoulos describes him is debatable. It seems apparent from the text that he chooses her over the mission of the race-avenging secret society the Seven Days (from which his psychotic episodes originate) and that he does love her in his own unrefined way. Perhaps living as a working class couple will not be “a kind of abyss” for her. However, her willingness to place her entire future in the will of a man speaks little of her claim to any type of self-actualization, though it speaks volumes about her strength to escape an abusive situation.

Before she makes her final escape though, Milkman reports her behavior to their father and she, a forty-four year old woman, is forbidden to see Porter. It is Lena who addresses the difference that sex has made in their upbringing when she reads Milkman’s list of sex discrimination crimes, those crimes allowed him as a rite of passage in the realm of society’s norms and those he acquires as he grows (with the guidance of his father) from a boy to a man in a man-driven world:

“Our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you. When you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you; and when you got grown enough to know the difference between a woman and a two-toned Ford, everything in this house stopped for you. You have yet to wash your underwear, wipe the ring from your tub [...]. And to this

day, you have never asked one of us if we were tired [...]. You've never picked up anything heavier than your own feet, or solved a problem harder than fourth-grade arithmetic. Where do you get the right to decide our lives? I'll tell you where. From that hog's gut that hangs down between your legs." (*Song of Solomon* 216-217)

Lena is the only woman in her household who finds the courage to stand up face to face to any one of the men in their house. However, Corinthians does find the courage to run away from that house. Lena's only escape is found in a bottomless glass of sherry.

These daughters' lives are definitely determined by Ruth's disposition and her standing within her marriage to Macon. This marital relationship is what causes the family discord, which oppresses Ruth's mothering of her children. Ruth and Macon have a loveless, cruel, male-dominated marriage that warps their daughters' futures and their son's disposition. Not only does Macon sabotage Ruth's relationship with her daughters by submitting the three women to years of tyrannical emotional and verbal abuse, but he also usurps Ruth's relationship with her only son, her youngest child. When Milkman is still in his early teens, he begins to work with his father; and "Macon was delighted. His son belonged to him now and not to Ruth" (*Song of Solomon* 63). Once she no longer has any tangible connection with her son, she is only left with the late-hour conversations she has with her father at his grave and the self-destructive "power" to make Macon angry enough to strike her when she wants him to do so. When Milkman is twenty-two, his father's incestuous tale about Ruth and her own father (73) and his own memories of being breastfed when he was "old enough to talk, stand up, and wear knickers" (78) further alienate him from his mother. He considers her "a silly, selfish, queer, faintly

obscene woman” (123). Even after Ruth tells her own story, Milkman only adds his father (along with her) to his list of abnormal family members; and when he needs a mother’s guidance, it is his Aunt Pilate to whom he goes.

Ruth tells her side of the story to Milkman in order to preserve her relationship with him. Her attachment to him is very important to her; unlike her daughters, he is her “passion” (*Song of Solomon* 131). He is the living manifestation of her greatest show of strength, “her single triumph” (133). Mothering in the midst of oppressive circumstances, especially her marriage to Macon, Ruth relies on certain coping strategies to combat those circumstances. After Macon has initially stopped coming to her bed, Ruth is determined to bring him back to her and conceive a son who will bind them to each other. She is strong enough to solicit Pilate’s help in her project. Although Ruth Dead considers her son Milkman to be her “one aggressive act brought to royal completion,” it is actually Pilate’s black magic that returns Macon to Ruth’s bed for the conception and that protects Ruth’s womb from Macon’s abortive schemes (131). Pilate even continues to watch over Milkman as a baby until her brother banishes her from his home forever. It is for Milkman’s life again that she performs another aggressive act. She confronts Hagar in order to save Milkman from Hagar’s monthly attacks (136-8). When she becomes confrontational the next time, it is because Hagar dies trying to make Milkman love her again. Ruth demands money from Macon for Hagar’s funeral. I see this as a small gesture in return for Pilate’s long-time help and a minimal apology for her son’s part in Hagar’s tragic death (320).

Ruth realizes that she is indebted to Pilate, but she has no idea how much Pilate is a present part of her son’s life. After Macon usurps Ruth’s place in Milkman’s life, it is

the attraction to his Aunt Pilate and the freedom of her home that saves Milkman from the “dead” day-to-day existence of his father’s business and from the his father’s ruthless philosophies about life and money. Pilate becomes Milkman’s surrogate mother when he loses his tangible relationship with Ruth. Her surrogacy eventually transforms him into a man connected to his rich heritage and compassionate about life. Milkman serves as a point of union for Ruth and Pilate. Their mothering of him (more so for Pilate than Ruth) leads to eventual self-fulfillment for him, unlike the mothering they provide for their daughters and Pilate’s granddaughter.

Milkman comes to expect (though he never appreciates) Ruth’s “confirmed, eternal love of him, love that he didn’t even have to earn or deserve” (*Song of Solomon* 79). However, from the age of twelve, he begins to depend on “his visits to the wine house, an extension of the love he had come to expect from his mother. Not that Pilate or Reba felt that possessive love for him that his mother did, but they had accepted him without question and with all the ease in the world. They took him seriously too” (79). Her opposing force transforms the desire to just “own things” that his father instills in his psyche (*Song of Solomon* 55), something that Ruth could never have done since she is also rooted in the commodification that surrounds their “Dead” world. Although Ruth has spent decades of her life praying for her son, it is Pilate’s influence that most affects his life and she is the one woman whom he “knew he loved” (34). Despite the fact that Milkman seems so cruel to most of the women in his life, his journey transforms even that aspect of his existence. In Morrison’s opinion, Milkman’s journey is a success because he “is willing to die at the end, and the person he is willing to die for is a woman,” Pilate (McKay, “Interview” 419). Milkman is obviously the prime candidate to

be taught and nurtured by Pilate. He is even able to give back to Pilate what she has given to him: a connection to the past, a connection to her mother.

It is this same role of spiritual mother/guide that Pilate attempts to fulfill in Hagar's life. However, Hagar's weaknesses negate the strength she needs to benefit from Pilate's spiritual guidance. She is too different from Pilate to make that spiritual connection like Milkman does during his journey South. It is ironic, though, that the person who seems most to blame for Hagar's fate, Milkman Dead, is a living testament to the positive results of Pilate's mothering. However, he had not yet learned the lessons of life which Pilate passes on to him when he treats Hagar so horribly. In fact in Morrison's opinion, his guilt-ridden response to Hagar's death is considered to be the best proof that Milkman is evolving as a human being. Similar to the other mothers discussed in this chapter, Ruth's support network includes the women in her household. In addition, she forms an alliance with her sister-in-law that binds them for life. Milkman is their common bond. In contrast to the way they mother their daughters, mothering Milkman is a successful passion for both these women.

Pilate fills a void for Milkman and attempts to be the same type of guiding force of mothering for Reba and Hagar as well, just as Gram fills the motherless void that Josephine creates for Corinne. Pilate's task is simple and always honorable. Unlike the powerful Pilate and the dominant Gram, Corinne, Ruth and Reba attempt to guide their children but are hindered by weaknesses they can never quite conquer. And, in spite of Pilate supernatural strength, she cannot save Hagar. These mothers' stories show how rearing children can be affected by negative daughterhoods, socioeconomic philosophies, social isolation, and family discord. They mother in spite of these encumbrances by

relying on coping strategies to ease the burdens of their responsibilities and hoping that those coping strategies can also mend their mothering mistakes as well.

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### Chapter 3

#### **Mothering Understood in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Christina García's *Dreaming in Cuban***

Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Christina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* are texts that seem literally and culturally worlds apart in their subject matter since they present portraits of mothers and daughters from Chinese and Cuban heritage cultures, yet they speak volumes in their connections since they reveal the experiences of “hyphenated”<sup>1</sup> women. These women are considered hyphenated both culturally and figuratively: culturally, in that most of them are either Chinese(-)American or Cuban(-)American women, and figuratively, in that they all struggle with the war of living between homelands, fighting to integrate themselves in an emotionally healthy way. In these works, the present in the United States is constantly being shaped by the old and new worlds of their cultural homelands (China and Cuba), including the deadly and disheartening aspects of war itself.

In this chapter, illness and death are catalysts that lead to confrontations between mothers and daughters and then to some understanding of the mother's struggle in rearing her children. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Winnie Louie and Pearl Brandt are forced into sharing their secrets and emotions due to the threats of Helen Kwong and her daughter Mary, who are friends of the Louie family. Helen threatens to reveal that Pearl has multiple sclerosis and the truth about Pearl's paternity. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, her sister Felicia's untimely death motivates Lourdes del Pino to pack up her daughter Pilar, return to her native Cuba, and come face-to-face with her estranged mother Celia after so many years. The mother-daughter relationships discussed in this chapter reach a greater level

of success than those examined in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, “Mothering Understood in Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife* and Christina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*,” I argue that these novels show how oppressive circumstances, such as the mothers’ childhoods, abusive behavior, father-daughter bonds, and cultural barriers, can create the need for inner strength, secret sharing, therapeutic story-telling, and support networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. Although the mother characters in this chapter mother under some of the same oppressive circumstances as those in Chapters 1 and 2, the outcomes are more positive, but certainly not completely successful. For instance, the circumstances of abusive behavior in Chapter 1 and the mother’s negative childhood experience in Chapters 1 and 2 are also examined in Chapter 3.

However, almost all of the daughters are able to find a certain understanding of their mother’s rearing of her children. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, even when the daughter is not able to totally forgive her mother for her mothering mistakes, she is still left with a way to understand the circumstances under which the mothering takes place by evaluating her mother’s past. In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, mother and daughter actually find common ground after they break down barriers and the mother tells her own story. Possible reasons for these more successful relationships may be the more intense connections between granddaughters and the grandmothers (even though the grandmother has serious problems in the relationship with her own daughter), a more genuine interest in mothers and daughters communicating some understanding of the past; and a real effort to explain the mother’s motives and actions through secret sharing and storytelling.

The oppressive circumstances under which these mother characters rear their children include the mother's negative childhood experience, which is significantly marked by her being abandoned by her own mother and the repercussions that this has on her emotional state throughout her life. The act of abandonment is even carried over to the next generations in *Dreaming in Cuban* due to the mental illness that is caused by the act itself. Some circumstances involve other forms of emotional, sexual, and physical abuse that the mother experiences primarily due to her husband and/or his family. Other oppressive circumstances involve the father-daughter bond and communication barriers. The father-daughter bond becomes an oppressive circumstance in instances where the daughter prefers the father to the mother because tensions exist in the mother-daughter relationship. Communication barriers may include language, cultural, sociopolitical, and/or assimilative differences.

The issue of communication barriers in parent-child relationships is probably not rare in any society. However, it has a higher level of importance when discussed in connection with immigrant mothers and their American (U.S.) daughters. The question of hyphenation does, consequently, remain very intricately connected to the issue of assimilation, a highly debated topic in most ethnic immigrant communities in the United States, especially for those whose native language is other than English. Conservative Hispanic (her chosen term) leader Linda Chavez<sup>2</sup> dispels the "dirty word" status of assimilation in *Out of the Barrio* by describing assimilation as having been "far more gentle a process, by which people from outside the community gradually became part of the community itself. Some groups were accepted more reluctantly than others" (161). Chavez also admits that loss is a part of the process however, but considers the benefits

worth the losses. For Tan's and García's characters, this issue is much more complicated than Chavez suggests, especially for its women and within their relationships as mothers and daughters. Of course mother-daughter relationships, by nature and circumstances, are usually the subject of emotional spirals with high and low points. Adrienne Rich writes: "Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are there for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (226). Rich's scenario is nowhere more evident than in these texts by Tan and García. In fact, the issues of ethnicity and assimilation make for further complication of the relationships themselves. It is crucially important to understand mothering as a complex job on which certain circumstances may have detrimental effects. Tan's and García's mothers deal with prevailing circumstances which may cause either permanent or long-lasting breakdowns in communication efforts between mothers and daughters, without effective coping strategies to balance the burden of rearing their daughters.

The mothers, at some points in the works, acknowledge that the deficiency in communication which they experience with their daughters does not only hinge upon their daughters' inabilities to understand them, or unwillingness to listen to them. Their own silences and secrets weigh heavily on these communication gaps. The non-communication between the mothers and their daughters in *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *Dreaming in Cuban* is grounded in several issues. Socio-political disagreement, secret pasts, withheld information, assimilated distance, cultural dislocation, and language differences are evident in both novels. The mothers and daughters in these novels do not

speak the same language literally and/or emotionally; this accounts for the absence of productive communication between them. The words of Mary S. Vasquez characterize this situation: “Language functions in the novel[s] as a measuring device gauging both affinity and distance” between mothers and daughters, and “foreignness [in communication] becomes a metaphor for separation and estrangement” (23). When mothers and daughters do not speak the same language, there exists no connection through words or emotions. These issues affect both mother and daughter whether the initial victim of the circumstance itself is the mother or the daughter. Other obviously important relationships, which exist in these texts, either as results of or conditions for the broken bond between mother and daughter, are the father-daughter and mother-son bonds.

In *Dance Between Two Cultures*, William Luis pinpoints that the “disdain for the mother [which] leads to [the daughter’s] concern for the father” is expressed in generational patterns in *Dreaming in Cuban* (225). An extreme opposition initially exists between Celia del Pino, the matriarch, and her daughters Lourdes and Felicia, as it does with Lourdes and her daughter Pilar Puente and Felicia and her twin daughters, Luz and Milagro Villaverde. Although the manifestation of this opposition is not examined with multi-generational proof in Tan’s *Kitchen God’s Wife*, the non-communication between Winnie Louie and her daughter Pearl Brandt continues to exist even after Pearl’s strong bond with her father Jimmy is interrupted by her own resentment over his long illness and eventual death. So, in both works, there exists the open communication between the parent and child of the opposite sex in the midst of the communicative opposition within the same sex parent-child bonds.

The portrayal of the del Pino women characters and their tumultuous mother-daughter relationships is a perfectly meaningful characterization of Christina García's ability to see larger sociopolitical contexts of being Cuban/Cuban-American and to comprehend how historical events affect individuals and families (Payant 164).

According to Katherine Payant, "García's interest in the political is rooted in the personal cost of events in Cuba after 1959, especially to women and their families. Ultimately, one cannot separate the political from the personal in [this] novel for they weave in and out of each other" (165). This is true, because Celia and Lourdes are both victims of political agendas and past accusations. Felicia fits into this category as well. Their relationships remain disconnected for years because of their differing opinions about Cuban politics. As a direct or indirect response to the deepening of the estrangement in the mother-daughter relationship, each woman's political agenda (religious involvement for Felicia) grows more radical over time.

Such a course of digression in the mother-daughter relationship can create the need for coping strategies for the mother character as a way to lessen the burdens of rearing her daughter and as a way of repairing the relationship or living with the breakdown of the relationship with her adult daughter. An examination of the mothers in this chapter shows how certain coping strategies may be beneficial for alleviating the oppressive nature of the circumstances under which they mother. One strategy examined is the mother's inner strength, her sheer determination to overcome complicated circumstances. Other strategies are secret sharing, therapeutic storytelling, and support networks. Each of the mothers is able to rely on a network of people in order to progress as a person and as a mother. In the other chapters of this study, these networks are mostly

women-centered and involve family members. In this chapter, some of those networks of support involve community members who associate with the mothers via organized groups. Some of the mothers and daughters discussed in this chapter are able to find common ground or at least move toward a better understanding of each other because they decide to break down the communication barriers that plague their relationships by revealing secrets and telling the stories of the experiences that affect their mothering. In this instance, storytelling becomes a therapeutic means for healing the mother-daughter rift.

Both Tan and García weave stories of herself, her mother, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, and friends. They share h[er]stories by allowing mothers to tell their own stories or allowing others to tell the stories about their pasts and present(s), utilizing different modes of revelation, such as an afternoon of oral revelation with Tan's Winnie Louie and in epistolary fashion with the chronicled love letters of Celia del Pino and the historical diary of "narrator" Pilar Puente in García's work. These authors allow their texts to become mediums for the "voices in the gaps" of women's stories and silences. However, one must not forget that these voices in the gaps are also ethnic, immigrant voices, as well as women's voices.

Not only are daughters telling their stories and their mothers' stories in the texts, but mothers are telling their own stories, enabling the texts themselves to incorporate different versions of the same events and circumstances. Within the process of the telling of stories, mothers and daughters begin to understand each other whether there is common ground found or not. Rocio G. Davis writes:

Emphasis on relationships leads to a reevaluation of personal and communal tragedies that oblige the daughters to look back to the mothers, whose images and personalities are often inseparable from community history and values. These texts often involve a return to the maternal, which leads to the appreciation of community history and forging of communal bonds with, first, the immediate family and then the larger gender and cultural group. (60)

Basically, both versions are necessary for revealing the complete story, including the painful secrets, whether the pain is alleviated or just changes its context. Both mothers and daughters need to tell their versions and listen to the others' versions in order to have all of the information necessary to arrange their own stories in complete form. Nancy Chodorow states: "In any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does" ("Family" 44). Women (in these texts and in general) need each other in order to know themselves completely.

On the other hand, these women's stories in these texts are relative not only concerning the identity of the storyteller, but also according to the geographical setting from which and about which they are told. The fact that the past is revealed from a present perspective after the narrator has lived for many years in a new country involves the dilemmas created by both time and place differences. In a passage that applies equally to Garcia's Cuban-American text displacement involving Cuba, Yuan Yuan states the following about the stories revealed in Tan's text: "China becomes a semiotic site where culture and identity are fought over, negotiated, displaced, and transformed, [...] a hermeneutic space for articulating identity and difference, a process that governs

the cultural and historical reconstitution of the subjects” (153). This fact may cause some question about the accuracy of the mother’s remembering in the talk-story. Perhaps the memories are more horrible than the actual events. Perhaps they are not, but the sharing of these memories leads to communicating or negotiating a certain understanding of one’s mothering.

In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, the issue of childhood experience having an effect on mothering is approached directly by the mother character. Winnie Louie<sup>3</sup> reasons that her shortcomings as a mother and wife are direct results of her not having had a mother to teach her how to handle these responsibilities, so she listened to whatever advice (which was usually terrible) that was offered her. Although the evidence of abandonment is not tri-generational as in *Dreaming in Cuban*, what Winnie experiences in *The Kitchen God’s Wife* is definitely just as traumatic. As Winnie reveals her past life to her daughter Pearl, she reveals to her the beginning of her loneliness in China, her mother’s abandoning her: “She left me before she could tell me why she was leaving. I think she wanted to explain, but at the last moment, she could not. And so even to this day, I still feel I am waiting for her to come back and tell me why it was this way. I was only six years old when she disappeared” (Tan 88). Winnie was taken into the home of her father’s brother as “leftovers from [her] mother’s disgrace” (112). Winnie recalls her own family gossiping about the shame of her mother’s disappearance and her own attraction to their stories: “For many years, my mother was the source of funny and bad stories, terrible secrets and romantic tales. I heard what they said. I felt so bad to hear them. And yet I could not stop myself from listening. I wanted to know how it could be that my mother left me, never telling me why” (100). Eventually, Winnie would understand that her mother could never

deal with the shame of being a “double-second” wife (107), a woman selected for her beauty and her body and who replaces the dead “second” wife. Many years later, being the wife in a horrific marriage herself, Winnie is hopeful that her “mother’s life was now filled with joy!” (340). She hoped this for her mother and for her own future.

In addition to having been abandoned by her mother, Winnie did not see her father again until she had a marriage offer, twelve long years later. She found out after her marriage that her father and his family had known that her husband Wen Fu’s, “family character was not so good” and that in their eyes she must have still been her mother’s leftovers: “So by allowing me to marry into the family, he was saying I was not so good either” (Tan 150). Winnie spent her adult life equating her inability to protect her children Yiku and Danru from a tyrannical father and to protect herself from the rape, which produced her daughter Pearl, by that same man with being left behind by her mother at the age of six. In addition, the fact that Danru dies after she sends him away in order to protect him from Wen Fu only compounds the painful emotions that she associates with abandonment itself.

Not only does the issue of abandonment shape mothering, but the scarred memories of physical, psychological, verbal, and sexual abuse also negatively characterize the ways mothers relate to their children, especially their daughters. Winnie remembers the twelve years she lived with her uncle after her mother leaves her behind: “I had to act like a guest, never asking for things, waiting instead for someone to remember what I needed” (Tan 111). She leaves that pain behind only to discover the worst of situations within marriage. It is the abuse from her first husband (and initially from her mother-in-law) that causes Winnie to guard Pearl’s early womanhood so

fiercely: “When I was young, I had a good heart too. I did not know how to look at a person like Wen Fu and think to myself, This man can cause me lots of trouble. This man can take my innocence away. This man will be the reason why I will always have to tell my daughter, Be careful, be careful” (111). In the words of Pico Iyer, Winnie’s tale is filled with “horrors pitiless enough to mount a powerful indictment against a world in which women were taught that love means always having to say you’re sorry. In traditional China, the old widow recalls, ‘a woman had no right to be angry’” (67). In addition to hiding and dealing with her own tragic experiences, she fights relentlessly to make sure that Pearl does not take on the abusive traits of her biological father. Her efforts to do so fuel Pearl’s belief that her mother does not really like her at all.

The storminess and chaos of Winnie’s marriage to Wen Fu is parallel to the war in China at that time. When Wen Fu enters the air force (using his dead brother’s name and credentials due to his own inefficiencies) and moves Winnie away to a military base, the extreme sexual abuse begins in their marriage. As the Japanese invasion of China becomes more extreme and the war takes them from base to base, their marriage goes from phase to phase of sexual, physical, psychological, and verbal abuse. When the war ends and they return to Shanghai, Winnie’s plans to end her marriage take concrete shape and her personal revolution to free Danru and herself from this marriage (personal war) begins. In fact, she secures the aid of freedom fighters, such as feminist workers like her cousin Peanut, in her escape from Wen Fu. Like the Japanese, who lied when they promised that their takeover would be organized and peaceful and then raped, robbed, and murdered unsuspecting Chinese people; Wen Fu’s marriage proposal for Winnie was conceived out of greedy lies and resulted in a marriage that consisted of all forms of

abuse. Additionally, similar to the ruin and disease that characterized the war's aftermath, Winnie's mind is festering with horrors she can never forget. To escape such a marriage was no small feat for a woman who had been conditioned "to accept [her] life without complaint" (Tan 298). However, the greatest price she pays due to her marriage and the war is the loss of her two baby daughters and of her son Danru. Wen Fu's tyranny forces her to send Danru away to safety, and the epidemic of disease left after the war claims him in that safe place (370). The deaths of her first three children shape the fierce and complicated way that she rears her daughter; she knows the loss that the wrong marriage match can cause a woman, and she refuses to let her daughter Pearl be victimized in the same manner as she was.

In an effort to explain why she is the kind of mother she is, Winnie (between tears) reveals her most horrific secrets as she tells her story. Winnie recalls an occasion when Wen Fu publicly embarrasses her after a dinner, in their home. After being slapped, made to kneel, and forced to beg, Winnie thinks, "I remember this: All those men, Hulan—nobody tried to stop him. They watched and did nothing [...]. And as I bowed and begged, cried and knocked my head on the floor, I was thinking, Why doesn't anyone help me? Why do they stand there, as if I were truly wrong?" (Tan 252-3).

Winnie remembers the abuse she suffered the night she met and danced with Jimmy Louie (who would be her second husband) and embarrassed Wen Fu:

That night, with a gun to my head, he raped me, telling me I had lost the privileges of a wife and now had only the duties of a whore. He made me do one terrible thing after another. He made me murmur thanks to him. He made me beg

for more of his punishment. I did all these things until I was senseless, laughing and crying, all feeling in my body gone. (309)

Winnie's recollection of her own abuse is only compounded by her remembrances of Wen Fu's other victims, those of whom she is aware anyway.

Wen Fu even abuses and rapes other women while married to Winnie (Tan 259-261). He threatens to gamble her body away to other men, and even brings other women to their bed and makes her watch their sexual acts (321). Wen Fu abuses Yiku, their baby daughter, in order to make Winnie suffer more, and he abuses Yiku to the point that she "los[es] her mind" (263). In fact, it is his abusiveness and neglect that leads to Yiku's death. Almost fifty years later, Winnie still recalls Wen Fu screaming at her: " 'What kind of mother are you!'" (266). Not only does Wen Fu blame her, but Winnie blames herself for Yiku's death. It is this knowledge that drives Winnie to protect her future children, aborting all fetuses (except one) after Danru is born.

After having lost her first two infant daughters, the first to a still birth and the second to her husband Wen Fu's abusive handling of their household, Winnie is very reluctant to welcome another child into a life as dangerously chaotic as her own. Winnie recalls the following from the time of Danru's birth: "[...] right away I loved Danru, even though I tried very hard not to. It is that feeling of protecting someone so trusting, and getting back a little of your own innocence" (Tan 268). As a result of the closeness very early in his relationship with his mother, Danru learns to negotiate his own way in Wen Fu's household. His coping with the situation at such an early age is proof of the bond with his mother and some minute understanding of the confines in which he and his mother exist and must survive, a fact that is most likely a source of pride for his mother

on one level, but one of shame on another. Winnie relays the following, “Danru was so good, so smart. Maybe every mother claims this about her baby. But imagine this: When Danru was not even one year old, I could ask him, ‘Where’s Mama?’ And he would point to me and smile. ‘Where’s Danru?’ And he would pat his stomach and smile. ‘Where’s Baba?’ And he would point to Wen Fu, but he would not smile” (281-2).

According to Margery Wolf in “Chinese Women: Old Skills in a New Context,” such a bond between mother and son is also grounded in Chinese history and women’s social existence. In a feudal Chinese society, such as the one in which Winnie existed in the 1930s and 1940s, the fact that “a woman is dependent upon the largesse of her husband’s family for her daily [food and shelter], but through her sons she has at least use-rights to their share of the family estate” crucially affects the relationships that mothers formed with their sons (Wolf 168). In addition, the traditional emotional separation between the father and his son when the son is young only aids in establishing the foundation for an enduring mother-son relationship. An example of such a relationship is the one between the tyrannically abusive Wen-Fu and his mother. Winnie admits, “This mother who spoiled [Wen Fu]—she was the one who taught me how to be dutiful to a terrible person. [...] To protect my husband so he would protect me. To fear him and think this was respect. To make him a proper hot soup, which was ready to serve only when I had scalded my little finger testing it” (Tan 168).

Not only does Winnie deal with her abuse at the hands of family and Wen Fu, but she also realizes that she is also a victim of abusive feudalistic culture. Winnie, like her mother, her cousin, her aunts, and other Chinese women, is negotiated into marriage by her father and her husband’s family; and then exists in a society in which a woman’s

worth is measured by who her father, husband, or son might be (Tan 142). Winnie remembers how her mother was regarded after she chose to ignore the Chinese feudalistic rules for women and leave her marriage as a double-second wife for a man she truly loves. Funeral banners are hung and a gravesite is mentioned as if she actually dies (99). Her mother's private education consisting of Western thought and the actual audacity to think for herself were blamed as the initiatory culprits in her disdain for the Chinese idea of a woman's place in society (103-104). Regardless of Winnie's knowledge of her mother's mistreatment, she finds much difficulty in unlearning the feudalistic ways. She finds it hard to stop underestimating her position as a woman.

For example, the following are Winnie's thoughts after hearing Wen Fu compare her sexual inadequacies to the other women with whom he has had sexual encounters: "I was not angry. I did not know I was supposed to be angry. This was China. A woman had no right to be angry. But I was unhappy, knowing my husband was still dissatisfied with me and that I would have to go through more suffering to show him I was a good wife" (Tan 170). Winnie often finds herself blaming her mother-in-law for the trouble in her life during her first marriage, because she rears such a son: "And perhaps this was wrong of me, to blame another woman for my own miseries. But that was how I was raised—never to criticize men or the society they ruled, or Confucius, that awful man who made that society. I could blame only other women who were more afraid than I" (257). As a Chinese woman in the United States, Winnie celebrates the freedom to instruct her daughter in another mode of thinking all together; but her secret thoughts of failure as a mother keep her from communicating well with her daughter for such a long time.

That breakdown in Winnie's relationship with Pearl encourages Pearl's attachment to her father, but the weight of their father-daughter bond also leads to the further deterioration of their mother-daughter bond. Pearl treasures and depends on her closeness with her father. In the following passage, she reminisces about the end of that closeness with her father, the only parent with whom she had forged a bond:

I did not want to mourn the man in the casket, this sick person who had been thin and listless.... He was so unlike what my father had once been: charming and lively, strong, kind, always generous with his laughter, the one who knew exactly what to do when things went wrong. And in my father's eyes, I had been perfect, his "perfect Pearl," and not the irritation I always seemed to be with my mother. (Tan 45)

It is evident from Pearl's memories that her difficulty with her mother is based on what she sees as a mutual dislike or distaste between the two of them. Her belief about their mutual dislike is predicated on the communication barriers that exist in their relationship.

One issue that is associated with their communication breakdown is the cultural difference between an immigrant mother and her American daughter. According to Wendy Ho, Amy Tan's mothers and daughters (as well as those in works by other Chinese-American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Fae Myenne Ng) work through their difficulties in multi-conflicted environments. They are "situated at domestic-familial sites, which are complicated by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social-economic status" (Ho 35). The stories provide "opportunities to analyze the ways Chinese American mothers and daughters construct and reconstruct their understandings of the conflicted self in relation to multiple homeplaces and borderlands" (Ho 36). One

of the most significant contributors to the conflicted mother-daughter relationships in Tan's and various other texts is the assimilation of the daughters into United States society, a situation initially desired by the mothers and later damned by them. This analysis is best articulated by Lindo Jong when commenting on her daughter Waverly in Tan's *Joy Luck Club*: " 'It is my fault she is this way—selfish. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these things do not mix?'" (289). In addition to the complications of assimilation are the silences and secrets held by the mothers in these "talk-stories"; the novels are labeled with this term because the works unveil the mothers' secret pasts, which serve to bring the mothers closer to their daughters in the midst of some common understanding as women. M. Marie Booth Foster reminds us, in "Voice, Mind, Self," that these mothers are also dealing with their own dual existences as hyphenated women, "who are struggling to fashion a voice for themselves in a culture where women are conditioned to be silent" (209-10).

Pearl's thoughts about the dysfunctional mode of her communication with her mother open the novel: "Whenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we were already in the middle of an argument" (Tan 11). It is as if Winnie always expects dissention from Pearl, so she lays on the guilt trips before Pearl can ever refuse her requests. Pearl thinks, "Whenever I'm with my mother, I feel as though I have to spend the whole time avoiding land mines" (16). Pearl has no real idea that her mother feels the same way when communicating with her daughter, as well. Winnie is constantly struggling with her own fears of being considered "a bad mother." She has never truly escaped Wen Fu's cruel accusations against her concerning the death of her

second daughter. Watching her own daughter embarrass Winnie, Pearl contemplates: “I think about a child’s capacity to hurt her mother in ways she cannot ever imagine. [...] I see my mother sitting one table away, and I feel as lonely as I imagine her to be. I think of the enormous distance that separates us and makes us unable to share the most important matters of our life. How did this happen?” (34). Comparable to Winnie, Pearl desires some solutions for repairing what they have lost along the way in their fragmented relationship as mother and daughter, as women. In order to begin to repair this gap, Winnie must confront her fears associated with the abandonment during her early childhood and the abuse of her first husband, and then she must realize that these issues have affected her acts as wife and mother throughout her life.

In order to deal with the oppressiveness of such knowledge, Winnie relies on coping strategies that help her work towards improving her chances to mother her daughter effectively when she is a child and to repair her relationship with Pearl as an adult. One thing on which Winnie is able to rely despite the challenges of her past is her inner strength. She is definitely a survivor; Winnie’s endurance is unquestionable. Despite her past circumstances, she becomes a successful business owner of a neighborhood florist shop where she develops original designs. Pearl respects her mother’s courage and strength although she has doubted the extent of her love in the past. Winnie earns this respect; she is strong enough to come to America while speaking no English, to support her family with a dying husband, to start her own business with her best friend Helen, and to reveal the secrets of her past life to her daughter. In fact, her strength encourages Pearl to finally share the secret of her debilitating disease and to have hope about her situation for the first time ever.

Until forced to talk about her past, Winnie seems unable to forge this connection with her daughter Pearl for the first forty or more years of her daughter's life. This information, Winnie shares with her daughter after finally being forced to tell her life story, "from her more prosperous early childhood on an island near Shanghai in the 1920s to her disastrous Second World War marriage to Wen Fu, an abusive, womanizing fortune hunter, and on to meeting the man who would become her second husband" (Young 47). Before Winnie begins to break her silence and reveal her secrets, Pearl's description of their relationship is "a tale of sweet-and-sour tensions, haunted by her nagging mother—and by her nagging sense that her mother and she are speaking different languages" (Iyer 67). This is a fact that is recognized by both mother and daughter. Winnie, unlike the del Pino women, is finally able to claim some real common ground with Pearl, but it is only possible after she has truly faced the secrets from her past in China.

These are not secrets to her best friend and business partner, Helen. Helen schemes to get Winnie and Pearl to tell their secrets as a way to better their mother-daughter relationship and to thank Winnie for all her years of true friendship. While still a young bride, Winnie forms an alliance with Helen that has lasted for more than four decades. Along with Helen's Auntie Du, Winnie has felt some form of support from this women-centered network. They are able to transport that alliance to the United States. The only other time she feels such a close friendship is with her cousin Peanut who helps her escape her abusive marriage and leave China. They form bonds with Winnie that she never forgets and even give her the treasured relationship she eventually has with her daughter.

Unlike Winnie Louie, Celia del Pino, the matriarch in *Dreaming in Cuban*, absolutely knows the source of the distance that lies between Lourdes and her. Celia writes on August 11, 1953, when Lourdes is seventeen years old: “That girl is a stranger to me. When I approach her, she turns numb, as if she wanted to be dead in my presence. I see how different Lourdes is with her father, so alive and gay, and it hurts me, but I don’t know what to do. She still punishes me for the early years” (García 163). On an all-important personal level, Lourdes cannot forgive Celia for rejecting her when she is born, regardless of the fact that Celia’s rejection is steeped in mental illness brought on by Jorge. Similar to Winnie, Celia’s mothering is deeply affected by her own childhood experience.

Celia must deal with her own emotions associated with her being abandoned as a small child, emotions that hinder her mothering of her daughters, emotions unknown to her daughters. García reveals Celia’s memories of being abandoned in the following passage:

When Celia’s parents divorced, they dispersed their children among relatives throughout the island. Celia’s destination was Havana, with her Great-Aunt Alicia, known for her cooking and her iconoclasm. Celia was alone only this once: when she was four, and her mother put her on the daybreak train bound for the capital. On the long train ride from the countryside, Celia lost her mother’s face, the lies that had complicated her mouth. (92)

Although Great-Aunt Alicia cares well for Celia in her attempt to replace Celia’s parents, her best attempts to do so cannot completely fill the void left by her parents’ abandoning her. In fact, as Celia grows older, she equates any abandoning of family with disloyalty

or treason. In the following passage, Celia comments, to her granddaughter Pilar, on the separation of her family which results from Lourdes' leaving decades earlier and her fresh attempt to aid Ivanito in his defection: " 'We have no loyalty to our origins,' Abuela tells me wearily. 'Families used to stay in one village reliving the same disillusion. They buried their dead side by side'" (García 240). Here, Celia does not allow for the separation of family for any reason, even to go in search of a non-oppressive life, which is Lourdes' reason for fleeing Cuban soil. Viewing Celia in this light might make it difficult for one to understand how she could possibly be a party to abandoning her own daughters. However, Celia does abandon her oldest daughter, Lourdes, shortly after she is born; but there are extenuating circumstances.

Lourdes' choice, as a child and as an adult, to have no intimate relationship with her mother hinges upon the following passage: "In her final dialogue with her husband, before he took her to the asylum, Celia talked about how the baby had no shadow, how the earth in its hunger had consumed it. She held their child by one leg, handed her to Jorge, and said, 'I will not remember her name'" (García 43). Although Lourdes becomes well aware of the fact that her mother uttered these words during the height of a mental breakdown, admittedly brought to fruition due to her own husband's plan to break her spirit because of her lingering feelings for her ex-lover, Lourdes is still unable to separate the hurt she feels because of her mother's act of abandonment from the knowledge that her mother's choice was involuntary. Celia is aware from the time that Lourdes is a small child that Lourdes rejects her because of this act.

On the other hand, Felicia, who is quite close to her mother well into late adolescence, does not feel abandoned by Celia until she is a woman herself. Felicia's

emotions are also colored by the fact that she never has the closeness with her father that Lourdes has with him and because she inherits something devastating from her mother: a proneness to mental illness. Payant effectively describes Felicia as “naturally flamboyant and temperamental like Celia, and feeling rejected by her father’s devotion to Lourdes” (168). Like Celia, she chooses to enter a disastrous marriage and spirals into mental and physical decline, which causes the neglect and suffering of her children (Payant 168). Also focusing on this connection between mother and daughter, Vasquez writes: “Both women are abandoned and wounded by their Hotel Inglaterra lovers, the aggression born for Celia of absence, and for Felicia of an all-too-real and brutal, if occasional, presence” (25). Unlike Lourdes, Felicia feels abandoned by Celia mostly due to her mother’s unyielding dedication to El Líder: “How her mother worships him! She keeps a framed photograph of him by her bed, where her husband’s picture used to be” (García 110). In a frenzy of madness while confined in a boot camp for her unpatriotic behavior of being an unfit mother, Felicia (while trying to gauge the magical attraction that her mother has for El Líder) masturbates to the thought of the revolutionary leader performing oral sex on her. In her fantasy, she equates his sexual power with his political power. Her fantasy is taken to the extreme as she attempts to imagine the extent of his power, so strong that it could take her mother away from her. Believing that Celia abandons her for El Líder is so unbearable for Felicia that it destroys the relationship she has with her mother.

Consequently, Felicia, like Celia, is deemed unfit to mother due to her mental disabilities. Felicia feels that she has abandoned her children, also. Due to her mental and physical illnesses, she must let her children go. Ivanito, Celia’s son, is sent to boarding school after the “summer of coconuts” in which Felicia “nearly killed herself and her

son” (García 106). It is thought best that Ivanito be integrated into the proper existence of boys his own age, instead of being his mother’s constant companion. In a scene reminiscent of Celia’s mother putting her on the train to Havana, Felicia reluctantly sends her son away to school: “ ‘Don’t you love me anymore?’ Ivanito called to her from the bus window with eyes that strafed her with grief” (107). It is a scene that is also reflective of Felicia’s inability to ever adjust to their separation. Ivanito is all the family that Felicia believes she really has left, since her twin daughters have long since abandoned their household in search for more stability within Celia’s home. In fact, Ivanito is eventually able to adjust to the separation. That is until he experiences the ultimate separation from Felicia. Ivanito recalls his feelings of loneliness after his mother’s death. It is his father’s gift of a radio, which becomes his comfort when he is most alone (191). However, it is the radio, which sparks (at least in Celia’s opinion) Ivanito’s own act of abandonment: defection to the United States via the aid of Lourdes (and, eventually, Pilar).

The del Pino women’s roles as victims of oppressive forces are directly tied to mothering. Vasquez composes the following truthful indictments:

Celia is a failed and even lethal mother. The child of a cold mother herself, she has passed this legacy to Lourdes, who, not surprisingly, passes it in turn to her Pilar. To her other daughter, Felicia, Celia bequeaths her poetry, her love of language, her sensuality, her ever-hovering madness; Felicia, whose name belies her perpetual unhappiness, leads a tormented life and meets an early demise. (25)

Celia’s position as victim generates her becoming a victimizer of her own children. Celia cannot aid her children in finding resolutions for their problems, in part, because her parenting, with the aid of her husband Jorge, initiates their problems.

Another prevalent circumstance that negatively affects the lives and mothering of these women is the other abusive behavior of which they are also victims. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Jorge is the indirect cause of Celia's abuse. At the beginning of their marriage, Jorge leaves Celia to live with his mother and sister during his business travels. Of course, it is decades later that he admits to knowing the truly abusive nature of her living situation: "After we were married, I left her with my mother and my sister. I knew what it would do to her. A part of me wanted to punish her. For the Spaniard [whom she still loved]. I tried to kill her, Lourdes. I wanted to break her, may God forgive me" (García 195). In this admission to Lourdes, he claims his own part in Celia's rejection of Lourdes and in the onset of Celia's bouts with mental illness. Similar to Winnie's first days of marriage, Celia's include memories of gross mistreatment by her mother-in-law, a woman who acted, more than anything else, out of her extreme possessiveness of her son. García writes: "Celia wanted to tell Jorge how his mother and his sister, Ofelia, scorned her, how they ate together in the evenings without inviting her. They left her scraps to eat, worse than what they fed the dogs in the street" (40). Although this abuse is not physically violent, the blows of loneliness and scorn leave unhealed scars that affect her children, by way of her episodes of manic depression and her withdrawals from parenting responsibilities.

Felicia, like Winnie, is physically abused by her husband Hugo. Hugo feels trapped into marriage by Felicia's first pregnancy, and he comes and goes throughout the years of their marriage. However, the abuse begins on their wedding night. García chronicles his visits: "Hugo Villaverde had returned on several occasions. Once, to bring silk scarves and apologies from China. Another time, to blind Felicia for a week with a

blow to her eyes. Yet another, to sire Ivanito and leave his syphilis behind” (47). As a result of these abusive years and her express desire to protect her children from this type of home life, “she decided to murder her husband” while pregnant with Ivanito (81-82). Felicia’s sets Hugo on fire, which leaves the burned and scarred flesh on his hands and face. In turn, her daughters hate her for disfiguring their father and for driving him away. Her daughters charge, convict, and punish her for this crime against their father, and she pays for it repeatedly with their silence toward her.

Lourdes’s abuse, though not committed by her husband, greatly affects her relationship with Pilar, similar to Celia and Lourdes’s relationship. Shortly before Lourdes leaves Cuba with her family and during the time the Puente estate is being seized by the revolutionary government, she is raped by a revolutionary soldier at her home (García 71). This not only shapes her hatred for Cuba, but it underlies the verbally and physically abusive nature with which she deals with her daughter’s sexuality. Lourdes physically assaults Pilar when she discovers that her thirteen-year-old daughter enjoys the water in the shower pelting her hips and thighs too much (27), and years later, she verbally abuses her with phone calls at all hours when she believes that Pilar has a promiscuous sex life while away at college (168-169). Payant effectively characterizes Lourdes as “a survivor and hard worker, [...] who despite her apparent adjustment to immigration, has not acknowledged the trauma of her rape and departure” (168). Lourdes buys into the unbalanced societal restrictions on women’s sexuality and is imposing them on her own daughter (168). Her equating of sexual expression outside of marriage with a woman being a “slut” is driven by the repulsive memories of her rape.

The only person to whom Lourdes feels completely connected is her father, both when he is alive and after he is dead. Their relationship is yet another negative circumstance under which Celia attempts to rear her daughter. Luis believes, as I do, that the relationship forged between Jorge and Lourdes is “based on revenge, a desire to hurt and defy the mother for the pain they have experienced” (García 225). In agreement with his theory are the following examples: Lourdes’s motive is associated with her knowledge that her mother abandons her at birth, and Jorge’s motive to punish the mother of his children is based on Celia’s inability to love him completely, a love obscured by the memory of her first lover and then by her political loyalty to El Líder. In response, Celia clings to their only son Javier, who resents his father at an early age due to Jorge’s harsh and relentless demands on his son to be a responsible man before he even reaches puberty; and Lourdes and Jorge cling to each other as kindred spirits who are most connected by their failed relationships with Celia. The rift between Celia and Lourdes is intensified by Jorge’s desire to continue to punish Celia for her lack of love for him. He admits that he keeps Lourdes close to him, even taking her on trips in order to claim her and deny her mother any real relationship with Lourdes (Payant 167).

The relationship between Jorge and Lourdes becomes one that takes on its own distinct importance, which affects everyone in the family, leaving Felicia and Javier jealous on some level. It is a bond that is not broken by Lourdes and her in-laws’ defection from Cuba to the United States, nor by Jorge’s death after he has joined them in New York many years later. Even more extensive than the continued communication between *Song of Solomon*’s Pilate and Ruth Dead and their deceased fathers in Chapter 2 are the walking-and-talking sessions that Lourdes continues to have months after Jorge’s

death. In fact, it is her dead father's guidance, which sends Lourdes back to Cuba to settle all family affairs. Jorge returns to Lourdes in order to guide her on a personal journey of self-realization about such things as her fragmented relationship with Celia, her torrential relationship with her own daughter Pilar, her drive and success as a business woman, her social and political involvement in the community, and her strained ties with her Cuban homeland. García writes: " 'Lourdes, I'm back,' Jorge del Pino greets his daughter forty days after she buried him with his Panama hat, his cigars, and a bouquet of violets in a cemetery on the border of Brooklyn and Queens. His words are warm and close as a breath" (64). It is this return that Lourdes needs at this time in her life. She needs an "afterward" to the anxious waiting sessions she performed when her father returned home from business trips when she was a child in Cuba and the joint obsession for baseball that she and her father had when he came to live in New York after becoming ill (García 68). Her father is the perfect, the only, guide for Lourdes; for as she discovers later, he is the only one who knows her secrets, even "about the soldier" who rapes her before she leaves Cuba (196). Lourdes's "parental affinity" is definitely for her father (Vasquez 22).

The significance of her relationship with her own father is lost to her when she deals with the isolation that she feels in response to Pilar's relationship with Rufino. Pilar obviously favors her father Rufino over her mother. Vasquez correctly assesses: "Situated halfway between the dreamers—Celia, Pilar's father, her Aunt Felicia, her cousin Ivanito—and the proponents of order and practicality, Pilar has her parental link with her father Rufino" (24). It is obvious to Lourdes that Pilar prefers Rufino. As a result, Lourdes longs for her son who died as a result of premature birth: "Lourdes would have

talked to her son the way Rufino talks to Pilar, for companionship. Lourdes suffers with this knowledge” (Garcia 129). Consequently, Lourdes and the other mothers have no illusions of connectivity to their daughters. However, the realization of the truth does not result in the discontinuation of their agonizing over their mother-daughter relationships or lack thereof.

Communication issues intensely plague the mother-daughter relationships in the del Pino family. The already existing gulf of silence between Celia and Lourdes is fueled by the revolutionary politics concerning Cuba itself. Celia’s life devotion to the Cuban revolution and Lourdes’s devotion to anti-Cuban politics can only intensify what is already a strained mother-daughter relationship from Lourdes’s infancy. Pilar recalls: “[...] when my mother told her we were leaving the country. Abuéla Celia called her a traitor to the revolution” (García 26). These words are the fire, which ignites Lourdes’s desire to assimilate completely into the capitalistic culture of the United States and to become one of the most volatile anti-Castro revolutionaries of the time. Lourdes is determined to make her roots in Brooklyn, and she is genuinely sure that she has done just that (Vasquez 22). Even after Lourdes’s return to Cuba following an eighteen-year absence, she still struggles to find a connection with her mother: “She is a complete stranger to me, Lourdes thinks. Papi was wrong. Some things can never change” (García 223). Similar to her sister, Felicia is separated from Celia by Cuban politics and by the condition that they most have in common, mental illness. However, Felicia’s pain is dealt with on a different front since she once shared a very close relationship with Celia. García writes: “Felicia misses those peaceful nights with her mother, when the sea had

metered their intertwined thoughts. Now they fight constantly, especially about El Líder. How her mother worships him!” (110).

An example of Celia’s worship of him is evident in the plagued relationship between Celia and Lourdes, especially manifested in their political differences. Perhaps the greatest manifestation of her rift with her mother is Lourdes’s rejection of what her mother loves deeply—Cuba: “Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention” (García 73). This difference she shares with Celia is only strengthened by her father’s agreement with her on the issue. In fact, “it was he who encouraged Lourdes to join the auxiliary police so she’d be ready to fight the Communists when the time came” (132). Vasquez accurately estimates the effects of political difference on the del Pino family in the following evaluation: “Affinities acknowledged and unseen, fissures alternately and even simultaneously spoken and silent, bind the novel’s characters together and split them apart. Cuba is both the sum and the part of the characters’ unions and Sunderings, and sometimes the cause of their rendings” (26). The effects of political difference on the family can only be categorized as high stakes for this family, and it is all centered around “the Cuba they yearn to recover or battle to forget” (Vasquez 26). Their physical and emotional proximities to Cuba define their relationships.

Lourdes embraces, to the dismay of Pilar who seeks to preserve her Cuban-ness, total assimilation in both her personal, professional, and communal lives: “She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her” (García 73). A thirteen-year-old Pilar

comments on Lourdes' political stance: "My mother says that Abuéla Celia's had plenty of chances to leave Cuba but that she's stubborn and got her head turned around by El Líder. Mom says "Communist" the way some people say "cancer," low and fierce" (26). Of course Pilar cannot understand her mother's attitude toward their homeland, because she does not yet know Lourdes' story. Pilar's position is very different from her mother's. According to Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Katherine B. Payant, "that generation of Cuban-Americans [like Pilar] who were children at the time of the migration, but grew into adults in the United States, feel fully comfortable in neither culture but are able to circulate effectively in both. Unlike their parents, who will never be North Americans, they will never be Cubans" (Firmat 5, Payant 163). García, who came to the United States from Cuba with her exiled parents at the age of two, describes her own early life as "bifurcated. Living her public life in a Brooklyn neighborhood populated by white ethnics, her Cuban background did not seem that relevant to her, but at home she felt Cuban because her mother, who recognized the connection between language and culture, insisted on Spanish" (Payant 163). With age and maturity, her Cuban identity became very significant to her. García sketches her own experience with her intricate portrait of Pilar and Pilar's eventual pull toward both Cuba and New York.

Firmat and Payant's definition of Lourdes's position is of one who will never truly be North American. This would obviously then have to cancel out Lourdes's belief that she has completely become North American. However, Lourdes's feelings about being Cuban in the United States are ambivalent at best. One might consider her need to have her name on the door of her bakery in order to represent her Cuban-ness amongst other Spanish-speaking business owners who are non-Cuban as an example of that

ambivalence (García 170). Vasquez, with whom I agree, comments on this ambivalent nature:

Lourdes has no patience with abstraction, yet for her Cuba has become one. She feels no patience for the infuriating indifference she observes in her mother, in Felicia, and in her daughter Pilar; yet she feigns precisely that toward Cuba. Her vocal patriotism she reserves for the United States; of Cuba she speaks with derision, when she will speak of it at all. (22-23)

To add to the ambivalence of Lourdes's situation is the difficulty of living with the label placed on Cuban immigrants by their homeland. Weiss writes: "Castro's vilification of the Cubans who fled the revolution adds to the hardship of their exile. First-generation Americans, they live cut off from a homeland their parents cannot forgive and their new country forbids them to visit" (67). This situation, in Lourdes's case, begets "a ferocious anti-communist who sells apple pie to Americans" (67). Unlike her mother's dilemma, there is nothing ambivalent about Pilar's need to connect with her homeland. According to Vasquez, Pilar has a "yearning for connection, a longing for her roots and legacy. Pilar feels a dominant pull not toward the surrounding majority culture but to her ancestral home, Cuba" (24). Pilar desperately wants to reconnect with the Cuba to which her *Abuela Celia* is so dedicated; the revolution is *Celia's* life.

*Celia* thinks: "Her daughters cannot understand her commitment to *El Líder*. Lourdes sends her snapshots of pastries from her bakery in Brooklyn. Each glistening *éclair* is a grenade aimed at *Celia's* political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof of Lourdes's success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba" (García 117). *Celia* and Lourdes's relationship personifies the "complete change of mentality

between Cubans living on the island and abroad,” which is what García refers to in her last section of the book, “Languages Lost” (Duany 178). What is lost between this mother and daughter is more than the idioms of Spanish (García 221). They have lost all communication as Cubans, as women, as family; and it is never fully reconstructed, no matter how much they evolve as individuals and do have some understanding of the other woman’s position.

As seen with the first generation of the del Pino family, the second generation of parent-child communicative difficulties exists as well. Javier does not have the opportunity to know his daughter long at all, because Irinita is taken by her mother, who abandons Javier for another man. Felicia is virtually hated by her twin daughters, who find her intolerably insane: “This was just like her. Pretty words. Meaningless words that didn’t nourish us, that didn’t comfort us, that kept us prisoners in her alphabet world” (García 121). Here, Luz rationalizes the impenetrable fortress that she and her sister forge against their mother’s influence in their lives. They blame Felicia for their father’s disfigurement and his leaving. However, they are unaware of Hugo’s abusiveness toward their mother even before they were born. Ivanito, Felicia and Hugo’s only son, clings to his mother, too young to know her insane tactics for what they are. He loves his mother too much to abandon her, even when he realizes as a very young child that something is not quite right in their household. Comparable to the short relationship of Winnie and Danru, Ivanito’s relationship with his mother is cut short by her death. As for Lourdes’s relationship with Pilar, it is a struggle like Felicia’s is with the twins; but it is a pure and mutual battle of wills.

Felicia accepts early on that her daughters feel only condemnation for her, but Lourdes battles for some type of relationship with Pilar. Theirs is a relationship that somewhat tilts and teeters on the irrationality and violence of Lourdes's responses to her daughter's behavior. Pilar seems to be constantly and calmly aware of the fact that she has a "fucking crazy mother" (García 64). In fact, what drives Lourdes so crazy is the undeniable connection that Pilar has with Celia. (Luz and Milagro also cling to Celia, if only as a safe haven at times.) Lourdes admits: "Pilar is like her grandmother, disdainful of rules, of religion, of everything meaningful. Neither of them shows respect for anyone, least of all themselves. Pilar is irresponsible, self-centered, a bad seed. How could this have happened?" (168). In fact, Lourdes believes that Pilar has inherited something pathological from Celia which always makes Pilar go too far, taking everything she does to the farthest extent (172). Vasquez accurately notes: "Pilar's relationship with her mother is deeply conflicted, her rebelliousness a manifestation of her longing, her resentment of [being cut off] from her Cuba. Both Pilar and her mother rage and rant in paired but solitary angers" (24). However, Pilar's senses of artistry and independence are inherited from Lourdes, as well as from Celia. Pilar even realizes, as a young woman who returns to Cuba with her mother, that regardless of her truly spiritual connection to Celia, New York is "where [she] belong[s]—not instead of here, but more than here" (García 236). It is the place that her mother has given her that Pilar really calls home and with which she finds her greatest sense of belonging.

Troubled by the disconnection from her first language and her Cuban roots, Pilar, like most teenagers and young adults, searches for her true identity and attempts to reclaim what she believes she has been denied by her removal from her native Cuban

soil. Her search is complicated by her Cuban-American hyphenated existence (Payant 169-170). Much like García who creates this character, Pilar is concerned about knowing the truth about Cuba for herself. Her own convictions about her identity cause her to scorn her mother's harsh anti-Castro/anti-Cuban political views (Payant 170). This, of course, only heightens the combustible relationship that already exists for the mother and daughter pair. As hopeless as Lourdes is about reaching and connecting with Pilar, she never gives up. Lourdes, just like Tan's mothers, "find[s] ways—through language, before language, and beyond language—to pass on [her] hopes, creative spirit, culture, and history to [her] daughter" (Ho 38).

Lourdes and the other del Pino mothers desire to convey the best parts of themselves to their daughters. The coping strategies on which they rely to ease the hardships under which they mother enable them to make some peace with their daughters, except for Felicia and her twins. Lourdes hopes to impress her values upon her daughter by her strong example and work ethic. Her will to achieve success and make a great life for Pilar is evident in her accomplishments. Lourdes owns two bakeries and designs her own pastries. Although she finds no connection with her daughters, Felicia finds her creative outlet in the spiritual realm as a Santeria high priestess, an occupation through which she finds some spiritual peace before her death (Payant 168). These women are strong enough to achieve their goals despite the pasts that haunt them and affect their mothering.

Celia (formerly an accomplished pianist) is a civilian judge in her community and works tirelessly for the revolution. Celia reflects on the strong independence she has found in her mature years: "It is her third year as a civilian judge. Celia is pleased.

What she decides makes a difference in others' lives, and she feels part of a great historical unfolding. What would have been expected of her twenty years ago? To sway endlessly on her wicker swing, old before her time? To baby-sit her grand-children and wait for death?" (García 111). Her commitment to the Cuban revolution has changed her life from dependence to independence.

Lourdes is willing to deal with Celia's commitment for the first time, now that she knows her mother's story through Jorge's spiritual return. Some of Lourdes's wounds from their relationship are healed when she returns to Cuba. She performs some acts that she would have considered impossible before her return, such as bathing and dressing Celia, discovering her recent mastectomy, witnessing her mother's continuous suffering over Felicia's death, and visiting the family ranch, the site of her rape and her unborn son's death (García 171). However, she is still never able to reach significant common ground with her mother. The wounds are too deep for total healing to take place. However, her return, enhanced by Pilar's desire for roots and connection with the mythical powers of Celia's Cuba, do bring some level of healing to the del Pino women, especially for Lourdes and Pilar (Payant 169).

Consequently, both Lourdes and Felicia know exactly how their mother feels about their failed relationships. Unlike Pearl, who finds common ground with Winnie, the del Pino women never experience any lasting togetherness. Both Felicia and Celia are dead by the close of the work, never having reconciled with each other, nor do Celia and Lourdes. However, Lourdes and Felicia know Celia's pain because they experience the same distance with their own daughters. Fittingly, Felicia, for the last few moments of her life, is able to experience the magic of those special, solitary poetic nights that she

and Celia used to share so many years before: “Celia lay [...] beside her daughter and held her, rocking and rocking her in the blue gypsy dusk until she died” (García 190). Lourdes, at least, is able to find some understanding about her mother’s motives and actions through her father’s storytelling; and she can make peace enough to return to her mother’s house.

Another coping strategy for these mothers has been the support that they receive from the various networks of which they are apart. It is not ironic that they find comfort in some of the same organizations that cause problems in their mother-daughter relationships. When one’s beliefs cause problems, then one most likely wants to be with fellow believers. Celia finds comfort and reassurance with her revolutionary sisters and brothers. Lourdes finds the ultimate support from her father, but she can also depend on the anti-communists with whom she vents her frustrations; and Felicia finds peace for her weary mind within the religion she first comes to know through her best friend, Herminia Delgado. It is also Herminia who can depend on Felicia: “I never doubted Felicia’s love. Or her loyalty” (García 184). Herminia tells Felicia’s tragic tale to Pilar. Besides her mother, Herminia is the only person who knows her story.

Like Felicia’s story, each woman’s story can lead to an understanding of her mothering. Each mother presented in this chapter attempts to find some determining peace about who she is as a woman and how that has shaped her relationship with her children, especially with her adult daughter. For as full a recovery as they can possibly expect, they must return (physically and/or spiritually) to the sites where they felt most victimized. These sites provide the semiotic structures for their tales of the past (Yuan 151). This is how their stories are revealed. This is why they can make the effort to

answer their own questions about who they are. This is when their relationships with their daughters can begin to work toward common ground, or at least a mutually resigned understanding of their relationships with each other and their emotions and acts as mothers and daughters. In the mindful words of Pico Iyer, “In the end, the point is forgiveness, and the way in which understanding the miseries of others makes it harder to be hard on them” (67). By truly understanding the struggles of mothering, the act of forgiveness can be perceived and performed by daughters.

## Chapter 4

### **Mothering as Transition in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones***

The fictional immigrant mothers discussed in this chapter come from impoverished backgrounds, but they are portrayed as having fewer emotional problems than the other mother characters in the previous chapters. The examples in this chapter show mothers who are more positive characters than those previously discussed. They are by no means perfect mothers. For example, Smith's Katie Nolan openly nurtures her son more than her daughter, and Marshall's Silla Boyce uses *any* means necessary to achieve her economic goals. The examples in this chapter also present mothers who do not have nurturing natures and the conflict that it causes for the mother-daughter relationships.

In Chapter 4, "Mothering as Transition in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," I argue that oppressive circumstances, such as marital stress, socioeconomic issues, nurturance issues, and mother-daughter conflicts, create the need for inner strength, economic security, and women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. I analyze examples of mothering in stormy, but productive mother-daughter relationships. By "mothering as transition," I refer to the *Bildungsroman* experience of the daughter character in each work and how the work shows the positive development of the mother-daughter relationship through the stages of the daughter's maturation from adolescence to her late teens. During that period, mother and daughter do not always agree. I refer to each mother-daughter relationship as a battle of wills that develops into a mutual respect for each woman's strength. Throughout the progression of the developmental stages, the

mother-daughter relationship makes great gains in mutual understanding, respect, and love.

In this final chapter, each mother-daughter pair comes to a mutually successful understanding of their relationship, as in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, except that the daughters reach this point as very young women in the examples in Betty Smith's and Paule Marshall's novels. Several issues make these mother-daughter relationships more successful than those examples found in the previous chapters: 1) the mother characters discussed are extremely strong, ambitious, intelligent, hardworking, money-conscious women, 2) the daughter characters discussed are also strong, ambitious, intelligent, and hardworking, 3) the mother characters recognize their daughters as younger replicas of themselves, and 4) networks of othermothers are very effective in guiding the daughter to an understanding of her mother. The examples of successful mother-daughter relationships discussed in this chapter show how the right coping strategies can alleviate the negative circumstances under which mothering can take place.

However, this relative success does come about as the result of female conflict throughout the adolescence and early womanhood of the daughter protagonists (Francie Nolan and Selina Boyce) in these two *Bildungsromane* and in spite of socioeconomic, educational, and single-parent hardships for the mothers. Their mothering is constantly affected by the strained connections with their willful daughters, the dissipating relationships with their unsupportive husbands, and the unyielding dominance of their own personalities; in spite of these complications, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*'s Silla Boyce and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*'s Katie Nolan successfully mother their daughters into women whom they respect and who mirror them, into introspective, outspoken,

intelligent, socially conscious women, thereby breaking with the commonly accepted notion that overly strong and/or overly protective mothers rear weak, dependent daughters.

In addition to their mothering stories are the many other comparable aspects of these works. The great similarities between *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Brown Girl, Brownstones* make for an almost perfect comparative study. Both novels are set during economically depressive war times: WWI for Smith's work<sup>1</sup> and WWII for Marshall's work. In *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*, Michael Szalay provides background on the timing of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*:

Choosing pre-Depression hardship over the more proximate variety, the novel covers the years between 1902 and 1919 despite the fact that it was published in 1943. Smith generates heady nostalgia for simpler times, and turns back to an era when, ostensibly, poverty was the result of bad luck (if not more dire morals, shortcomings) and families took care of themselves regardless. (185)

According to Vivyan Adair, the timing of the work makes for a thematic story of “dignity and simplicity” in which the family “honorably and steadfastly fight against the destructive forces of urban poverty” (119). As for *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the novel covers the time span from 1939 to the early 1950’s, encompassing all of World War II (which does not negatively affect the primary family of the novel since their only son died in early childhood, but does positively affect Silla’s workplace earning ability) and chronicling the success of the Barbadian-American community in Brooklyn. By the close of the novel, in the early 1950’s, the wealthiest members of the group are moving to more upscale neighborhoods, and their children are leaving for colleges far from home.

These works focus on the traditional, nuclear family, in which the mother is the dominant parent. However, both daughter protagonists are seen as Daddy's girls; they are attracted to the gaiety and freedom of their fathers but possess the strength of their mothers. These characters become strong women who desire a more liberal life than their mothers possess, because they admire the unrestricted lives their fathers (men) seem to have. However, there is no mistaking the relentless connection between Katie Rommely Nolan and Silla Boyce and their daughters despite the turmoil of their relationships. The mother-daughter relationships in these works reach successful outcomes, and that success is due, in no small part, to the mother's ability to overcome oppressive circumstances under which she mothers her children.

One of those oppressive circumstances is the stressful situation that marriage creates for the mothers. In these examples of mothering, marital stress involves the different philosophies of the spouses on issues such as alcoholism and philandering, which are also connected to socioeconomic issues, another example of oppressive circumstances. Both families have immigrant status: Katie Rommely Nolan's parents are Austrian, and her in-laws are Irish immigrants in Smith's novel, and Silla Boyce and her husband are Barbadian immigrants in Marshall's novel. The Nolan family deals with poverty, hunger, unemployment, education, and single parenting (due to the father's death). The Marshall family deals with social climbing, land ownership, and single parenting (also due to the father's death).

The mother also deals with her own nurturance issues and mother-daughter conflicts that affect her ability to successfully mother. Each protagonist daughter longs for an emotional attachment that neither mother has the willingness and/or the time to

fulfill, since she is so busy with her mothering tasks. As Collins writes, "For far too many [...] mothers, the demands of providing for children are so demanding that affection often must wait until the basic needs of physical survival are satisfied" ("The Meaning of Motherhood" 55). This lack of affection from their mothers fuels the daughters' preferences for their fathers, men who are inherently weak when compared to their mothers, but who apparently have more freedom than the mothers, due to the mothers' roles as primary caretakers of the children.

In both works, the mother-daughter relationships are unmistakably strong and combustible, but are finally composed of mutual respect and admiration. These mothers contend with the daughters' choice of their fathers, in spite of the fact that both men, for the most part, are eventually regarded as disappointments by their families and by the community. Although the mothers recognize and admire the strength in their daughters, they are compelled to be protectors and instructors, especially in educating their smart daughters. Education becomes an issue of both agreement and conflict in these two mother-daughter relationships. As Blanche H. Gelfant notes: "Desire for an education may force the heroine into open conflict with her mother, whose strength she finds inspiring but overwhelming. If she is to become her own self, she must escape the bindingly intimate relationship" (276). This is especially true for Francie, who must strive to educate herself. Regardless of their situations, Katie and Silla eventually work, in the midst of battles of will, toward successful relationships with their daydreaming, artistic, and educated daughters.

In an effort to combat oppressive circumstances, Katie and Silla rely on effective coping strategies to help them manage their mothering responsibilities. Each woman

relies on her inner strength to help her achieve her goals. Katie and Silla are not without emotion, but they take no time to become overly emotional about their problems. They utilize their strong wills to move on in spite of any encumbrances that may hinder their mothering. The strength of each of these mothers does not go unnoticed, either. The daughters recognize the physical and mental strength of the mothers, and they excuse the weakness of their fathers, because their fathers nurture them while their mothers do not. The daughters not only admire the strength of their mothers, but they also respect their ambition and outspokenness. Not only are the mothers driven by their aspirations to educate their daughters, but they are also driven to protect their daughters from whatever threatens their well being. The mothers also understand that if their daughters are seen as badly reared by societal standards, it will be the mother who is blamed, not their fun-loving, carefree fathers. Brigid McConville writes, "Any woman who fails to live up to the impossible ideal of motherhood is likely to be publicly scourged for her shocking inadequacy. Mother-blaming is part and parcel of society's widespread denigration and undervaluing of women [...]" (98, 99). Both Katie and Silla are quite concerned about the public's opinion of their children as reflections on themselves.

In addition to showing a great amount of strength, each mother works toward having economic security for her family and eliminating the financial oppressions that affect their mothering. Financial oppression means totally different things for each of these mothers. For Katie, it refers to money for food and clothing. For Silla, it refers to charging higher rent and purchasing the brownstone. Similar to their dominant personalities, their ambitious drives are tremendous. And in this area, they outrank their

spouses again. They attempt to achieve their goals with their outside employment and the help they struggle to obtain from their husbands.

The last coping strategy to be discussed in this chapter is women-centered support networks. Each mother has her own group of women comrades in whom she confides her intimate thoughts and with whom she shares responsibilities. For Silla, they are her friends from the community, and for Katie, they are the Rommely women, her sisters and her mother. In addition, each daughter has a network of women who aid her in maturing properly. They also aid the mother (in Silla's situation, it is against her will) in rearing her daughter. Because of the strained relationships that Katie and Silla have with their daughters, other women play great roles in their daughters' lives, and the importance of othermothers in the lives of the daughters becomes apparent. As Collins suggests, "Othermothers often play central roles in defusing the emotional intensity of relationships between bloodmothers and their daughters and in helping daughters understand [...] motherhood" ("The Meaning of Motherhood" 56). These women, these othermothers, help Selina and Francie reach adulthood. For Francie, they are her aunts and grandmother, and for Selina, they are three women whom her mother despises. They aid Silla and Katie by befriending, educating, nurturing, guiding, and supporting their daughters. They also play a great part in helping the daughters understand their mothers' motives and actions. They can relate to the mother as a woman and explain her struggles to the daughter. The daughters can identify with their mothers after they have had womanly experiences themselves.

In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Katie Rommely's life is plagued by marital stress. Her husband Johnny Nolan is an occasionally employed alcoholic. Unable to cope with

any of life's complications, his constant running away from responsibility causes his family continuous problems, especially financial ones. Johnny Nolan finds work here and there as a singing waiter and brings home his meager wages after squandering his tips, while Katie cleans rooming houses in order to provide shelter for the family and fights to save money to buy land.

The money saved to buy land always has to be retrieved due to Johnny's lack of financial contribution to the family. As characterized by Michael Szalay in *New Deal Modernism*, Johnny Nolan fits perfectly into the category of the "vanishing American father" (162), an "increasingly important mass of men who were sentimentalized and no longer able to act on their own behalf, [and] instead were sustained by self-sacrificing women" like Katie Nolan (Hoye 243). Smith captures the consensus of the community with its characterization of the Nolans in the following passage:

Everyone said it was a pity that a slight pretty woman like Katie Nolan had to go out scrubbing floors. But what else could she do considering the husband she had, they said. They admitted that, no matter which way you looked at it, Johnny Nolan was a handsome lovable fellow far superior to any man on the block. But he was a drunk. That's what they said and it was true. (14)

In fact, Johnny, in a drunken state, is quite candid with his daughter about his own failings. Johnny tells Francie: " 'I drink because I don't stand a chance and I know it. I drink because I got responsibilities that I can't handle [...]. I am not a happy man. I got a wife and children and I don't happen to be a hard-working man. I never wanted a family [...]. What does a man like me want a family for?'" (Smith 34). As Szalay writes: "Francie grows up knowing not simply that her father is a failure as a breadwinner, but

that, more hurtfully, he never wanted to provide for a family in the first place” (188). In fact, Johnny’s string of failures begins with the birth of his first child, Francie. The reality of actually having to take care of someone who, unlike Katie, could not take care of herself, was too much for him to handle. His drunken all-nighter leads to his losing the last secure employment he will ever have.

Unlike the upwardly mobile Barbadian community in Marshall’s novel, Smith’s Irish and Austrian-rooted characters frequently address the problems of joblessness and hunger. Bonnie K. Scott historicizes the Nolan family’s situation: “The Nolans, through no real fault of their own other than their patriarch’s weak and artistic temperament, live in the midst of a ‘stinking’ and ‘chaotic’ city” (119). She adds: “Johnny Nolan, whose folks had come from Ireland ‘the year the potatoes failed,’ has other traits that could be considered Irish—a beautiful tenor voice, a tendency to dream, a weakness for alcohol, and an inability to support his family” (Scott 89). In the midst of such oppressive circumstances, Katie’s stinging pride remains unwavering.

However, Katie’s self-sacrificing, strong attitude, topped off by her sinful pride, is sometimes too much for the reader and her children to understand. Katie is an independent woman for whom the thought of receiving charity is just unthinkable. Her pride is evident in these words: “‘When the time comes [...] that we have to take charity baskets, I’ll plug up the doors and windows and wait until the children are sound asleep and then turn on every gas jet in the house’” (Smith 267). This stance, although honorable in some aspects, would be difficult for a hungry child to comprehend. Katie is just as proud about not fitting in with her neighbors, most of whom she looks down upon. Smith writes: “The Nolans were individualists. They conformed to nothing except what

was essential to their being able to live in their world. They followed their own standards of living. They were part of no set social group”(143). However, Katie does not want her neighbors looking down on her family.

Katie’s hard stance on not taking charity is only an example of her unyieldingly strong, and sometimes harsh, personality. Her refusal to show an emotional attachment for her children, especially her daughter, is another example of her hard exterior. It is also the quality that most causes Francie to form an attachment to her easy-going, sentimental father. He is nurturing, but he is also in great need of being nurtured himself. Regardless of his faults, he is a kind, sweet man. Francie loves him dearly, like everyone does: "Yes, everyone loved Johnny Nolan. He was a great singer of sweet songs. His wife had not turned bitter against him and his children did not know that they were supposed to be ashamed of him" (Smith 33). Francie’s favored role in Johnny's life is easily acquired, but it is Katie with whom Francie longs to have closeness in any possible way. Smith writes: “Francie felt the way her mother thought about her. She grew an answering hardness against her mother and this hardness, paradoxically enough, brought them a little closer together because it made them more alike” (88). Katie seems drawn to Francie’s toughness, a quality that she also possesses. She is able to identify with her more because of their commonality. Francie is always drawn to Katie's strength. Francie always knows that “Mama is somebody” (317).

Katie’s inability to provide nurturance causes Francie to question her own feelings about her mother. Smith writes: "Francie knew that mama was a good woman. She *knew*. And papa said so. Then why did she like her father better than her mother? Why did she? Papa was no good. He said so himself. But she liked papa better" (34).

Katie's distance from Francie causes Francie to create a strong relationship with her father, which is only interrupted by his bouts with alcoholism: "Francie dreaded the drinking periods--not on moral grounds but because papa wasn't a man she knew then. He wouldn't talk to anybody. He looked at her with the eyes of a stranger. When mama spoke to him, he turned his head away from her" (Smith 166). During these periods, Katie's disappointment causes Francie to become her father's protector and comforter. Such occurrences seem to drive mother and daughter farther apart.

Francie does not have the luxury of being her mother's favorite child. She feels that her life is a constant struggle to earn Katie's love. For Francie, her relationship with her father is made stronger by her mother's obvious preference for Francie's brother Neeley. Her relationship with Johnny grows from this realization. When she believes that she cannot be Neeley's rival for Katie's strong love, Francie settles for what seems to be the role her mother has already granted her: "'Maybe,' thought Francie, 'she doesn't love me as much as she loves Neeley. But she needs me more than she needs him and I guess being needed is almost as good as being loved. Maybe better'" (Smith 294). She settles for any connection that she can possibly have with Katie. Francie's feelings about Katie's regard for her are not at all far-fetched. Smith writes: "Without devious reasoning or complicated emotional processes, the boy became Katie's whole world. Johnny took second place and Francie went to the back of her mother's heart" (87). Katie, similar to so many mothers, focuses on her son more than her daughter with the following beliefs in mind: the daughter is strong enough to survive like her mother, but the son is at-risk and needs her extra attention. However, Katie does rely on Francie as the more responsible child, the one she needs, the one on whom she depends. Now, she

takes on the role of being needed with her father and her mother. This is acceptable since she already maintains a special relationship with her father. However, it does not last as long as she needs it to last.

Finally, it is death that renders Francie a lonely little girl, who has to confront her relationship with Katie, who is now a single mother: "'Your father is dead,' [Katie] told them. 'You're not to cry for him,' ordered mama. 'He's out of it now and maybe he's luckier than we are'" (248). After Johnny's death leaves the pregnant Katie the official head of the household, Katie prays: "'Dear God, give me two months [...]. When I'm boss of my own mind and my own body, I don't need to ask You for help'" (Smith 267). Accepting the fact that she is now the only parent to her children, she tells them, "'From now on, I am your mother and your father'" (263). Szalay correctly asserts: "In fact, the tyranny of Katie's body, as she will later reason, is partly responsible for Johnny's death" (187). After learning about the new baby, Johnny knows that he must become more financially productive for his family and dies attempting to detoxify himself while staying away from home. After losing her father, Francie loses a part of herself, the closest relationship she has at the time.

It is not until Katie needs her most of all that she gets that feeling of closeness to someone again. When Katie is suffering with labor pains, she confesses important things to Francie, "I've always been meaning to read your A compositions but I never had the time[...]. 'But then Neeley needs more encouragement. You can go on with what you have inside you, *like I can*. But he needs so much from outside'" (Smith 298; emphasis added). Katie admits that she believes Francie can get along fine without as much

nurturance as Neeley. Because Katie believes that Francie is as strong as she is, she chooses to give Neeley more of her attention.

As a response to the absence of affection in their relationship, the conflicts between Katie and Francie are almost inevitable. Although Katie justifies her differentiation in the treatment of her children by citing Neeley's weaknesses, the damage is still done to her relationship with her daughter. For all of her dependence on Francie's strength, that damage cannot be erased without effort. The difference in the way Katie treats Francie and Neeley finally erupts into a verbal battle when Katie decides that only one of them will return for high school right away. Scott makes the following historical observation: "Some of Smith's heroines have prospects of breaking out of the monotonous cycles that entrap Irish-American families and women," such as marrying and mothering in poverty. "Immigrants depend on education to advance their children, but the struggle to complete an education is more difficult for tenement girls than for their male counterparts" (91). In Francie's case, though, it is Katie who is the biggest obstacle in the way of Francie's education when she sends Francie (instead of the willing Neeley) out to work after graduating from eighth grade, in order for Neeley to complete high school. Of course, she justifies this act with her belief that Francie will make a way to educate herself no matter what happens.

Francie confronts Katie after she decides that Neeley must return to high school first:

"I can only see that you favor Neeley more than me. You fix everything for him and tell me that I can find a way myself. Some day I'll fool you, Mama. I'll do what I think is right for me and it might not be right in your way."

“I’m not worrying, because I know that I can trust my daughter.” Katie spoke with such simple dignity that Francie was ashamed of herself. [...]But in their secret hearts, each knew that it wasn't all right and would never be all right between them again. (Smith 340-1)

Perhaps for the first time, Francie not only wants to have a close relationship with Katie, but also realizes that she may have to defy and leave her in order to obtain the educational goals that she has set for herself. This is definitely a display of the strength that she has inherited from at least two generations of Rommely women. In this scene, Katie is astonished by Francie’s defense but recognizes the truth in Francie's declaration. She is awesomely surprised by Francie's strength. Katie’s admires her for her strength. Francie's strength is also characterized by another character in Smith's novel. Henny, Francie’s terminally ill neighbor, tells her, "“You won't die, Francie. You were born to lick this rotten life”" (38). These are words that definitely characterize the lives that this mother and daughter have and continue to lead. Katie admires her daughter’s strength as an extension of her own, but she still struggles to comprehend the absence of closeness in their relationship.

Earlier in the novel, Katie thinks about the lack of understanding between her and Francie and admits her fears to herself, and she admits her very different feelings for Neeley, who (in an instance of gender-role reversal) Katie believes is the child who will never leave her:

“Francie is smart,” she thought. “She must go to High School and beyond and maybe beyond that. She's a learner and she'll be somebody someday. But when she gets educated, she will grow away from me. Why, she's growing away from

me now. She does not love me the way the boy loves me. I feel her turn away from me. She does not understand me. All she understands is that I don't understand her. [...] She'll find out that I don't love her as much as I love the boy. [...] Sometimes I think she knows that now. Already she is growing away from me; she will fight to get away soon. [...] But Neeley will never leave me, that is why I love him best." (Smith 181-2)

In this explanation, it becomes clear that Katie's dotting on Neeley is about cultivating a closeness that she believes will last longer than a close relationship with Francie will.

It is not until Francie is seventeen and nearly a woman that Francie begins to feel closer to Katie. When she needs some womanly direction, Katie instinctively steps in to aid her. In Katie and Francie's situation, Francie has always understood her relationship with her mother, but her relationships with men seem to bring Katie and Francie closer as Katie helps Francie deal with matters of the heart. Katie's dealings with Francie on sexual subjects is open and honest: "When Francie[...]started to change into a woman, she went to [her] mama about her sexual curiosity. And Katie told her simply and plainly all that she herself knew [...]. No one had ever told her about the things she told her daughter" (Smith 219). When Francie asks Katie's advice about dealing with Ben Blake, Francie's first boyfriend, Katie responds, "I hate all those flirty-birty games that women make up. Life's too short. If you ever find a man you love, don't waste time hanging your head and simpering" (392). After Francie's heart is broken by her would-be lover, Lee Rhynor, she admits to Katie her desire to have gone to bed with Lee. Katie responds, "As a mother, I say it would have been a terrible thing for a girl to sleep with a man she had known less than forty-eight hours. But as a woman [...], I will tell you the truth as a

woman. It would have been a very beautiful thing. Because there is only once that you love that way" (407). Here, Katie is able to separate being a mother with being a woman. In fact, it is Katie who protects Francie (with a gun) when a man attempts to rape her when she is fourteen years old; this is a role traditionally characterized as male, yet Katie is the recognized protector of the home front in this family.

It is ironic though that Francie's first real identification with her mother is when she is a woman herself and it comes shortly before Francie will leave Katie behind to go to college. Both women will embark on a new life: Francie as college student, and Katie as a politician's wife, and the past (Johnny, hunger, and run-down flats) will be left behind. Both women will leave each other with a mutual pact of love, respect, and understanding. Katie realizes that she has overcome many complications in order to get her children to this point of having better lives.

The coping strategies on which she has relied have been effective. Katie relies on her inner strength and ambitious drive to combat her marital stress and socioeconomic conditions. She maintains her family in spite of the obstacles in their lives. It will be easy for her to make the transition to McShane's home because she has been constantly cognizant of the ways of the upper class in her capacity as an office worker during election times. Early on, Francie learns that her mother is smart when it comes to issues considered "male" such as politics and the exploitation of the poor. As a young girl, Francie listens to Katie and Johnny on politics: "Katie broke in, "They want to keep tabs on who's voting and how. They know when each man's due at the polls and God help him if he doesn't show up to vote for Mattie, [the political machine]" (Smith 165). Johnny is basically silenced by Katie's insightful revelations and responds lamely to her

statements: "Women don't know anything about politics," (165). Johnny's remark only certifies that he has nothing with which to combat her comment. Besides, he already knows that Katie is a smart woman.

As another coping strategy, Katie surrounds herself with women just like her and women she can trust, also. Katie's female circle is made up of her sisters and her mother. Francie, like her mother, distrusts outside women. After Francie witnesses the jealous neighborhood women stone proud Joanna and her illegitimate child for publicly walking the street, "she hated women. She feared them for their devious ways, she mistrusted their instincts. She began to hate them for this disloyalty and their cruelty to each other [...]. Men were different. They might hate each other but they stuck together against the world and against any woman who would ensnare one of them" (Smith 209). Francie writes in her journal, "As long as I live, I will never have a woman for a friend. I will never trust any woman again, except maybe mama and sometimes Aunt Evy and Aunt Sissy" (209). This is a sentiment that characterizes the way Katie aligns her own dealings with women; she deals only with Mary, Evy, and Sissy Rommely.

Francie's aunts, Sissy and Evy, and her Granma Rommely serve as her othermothers and Katie welcomes their involvement in Francie's life (excluding a short banishment for Sissy). Francie's talent for writing is encouraged by Evy, the great storyteller. Francie's passion for life is cultivated by Sissy, the aunt who has an excitingly sensuous life and a yearning for pleasures of all kinds. Francie's religious beliefs are guided by Granma Rommely, who encourages Francie to have a direct line of prayer with God throughout her life and who gives her mother the Bible which Francie and Neeley read from during their young lives. Smith writes, "Those were the Rommely

women: Mary, the mother, Evy, Sissy, and Katie, her daughters and Francie, who would grow up to be a Rommely woman even though her name was Nolan. They were all slender, frail creatures with wondering eyes and soft fluttery voices. But they were made out of thin invisible steel" (64). Contrary to Francie, the only women made of steel in Selina's family are her and her mother.

In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Silla's marital stress involves several aspects that affect her ability to mother her children. Selina's comradeship with Deighton is one. She prefers her father's companionship to that of her mother, and Silla seems to be actually jealous of their relationship. Selina is torn between her fondness for her father and her awe of her mother. Selina's preference for Deighton, in some ways, fuels an emotional rivalry in *Brown Girl* for Deighton's attention. However, in the end, Selina finds her mother the stronger parent and the one to whom she is truly magnetized. Along with Selina, the reader sees that Silla (totally comparable to Katie Nolan) is a strong, ethnic, working woman, who does not fit the societal definition of a perfect mother, whose primary occupation is motherhood itself, but Silla's strength makes her admirable.

Silla's marriage, though, eventually has adverse effects on the socioeconomic stability of her family and on her relationship with Selina. Silla and Deighton Boyce have put in almost twenty years of hard work by the time the novel opens in 1939. Having left the great poverty and overcrowding of Barbados to become factory workers and domestic servants in the United States, their Barbadian community is beginning to live a decently comfortable, middle-class existence in Brooklyn. For Silla, who was given no education and worked in the cane fields as a child, buying the brownstone is the only suitable option for the family. For Deighton, who was well educated and spoiled as the only son

of an unrealistic mother, Silla's ambition is not his ambition. His former island home is a place to which he longs to return, but only in grand fashion. This point of ambitious disagreement becomes ominous for Silla's hold on her family and for their marriage.

Barbara Christian correctly assesses:

*Brown Girl, Brownstones* emphasizes how the black community, its customs and mores, affects the process of the black woman's exploration of self. But Marshall's novel also stresses the importance of culture and language as contexts for understanding *society's* definitions of man and woman. She veers sharply away from much of the preceding literature, which emphasized advancement for black women in terms of white American values. She portrays the Barbadian-American community both as a rock her characters can stand on, and as the obstacle against which they must struggle in order to understand and develop their own individuality. ("Trajectories" 240)

When no common ground can be reached in her struggling relationship with Deighton, the ethnic community becomes Silla's "saving grace." She knows that she can depend on their support as long as she acts within their system of beliefs, especially their economic beliefs.

Silla's ability to provide her children with a home of their own is hindered by the stressful situation that her husband Deighton causes for their family. Similar to Katie's marital problem, Silla's problem with Deighton is also financial. However, Deighton is not unemployed by any means. Mary Helen Washington points out: "These transplanted Barbadians are an employed, literate, ambitious, property-owning, upwardly mobile, tough community of first-generation immigrants. Not one person in this novel is

unemployed" ("Afterword" 312). Silla does not like the financial decisions that Deighton makes at all. He works at the mattress factory steadily but squanders much of his money on his mistress and on his wardrobe and cologne, while Silla works as a domestic in the homes of rich whites (and later in a machine factory) and struggles to save money in order to buy the brownstone in which they live. Silla describes Deighton as " 'one man [who] don know his own mind. He's always looking for something big and praying hard not to find it'" (Marshall 22). Barbara Christian writes the following about the Boyce's marriage and the external forces by which it is negatively affected: "Marshall shows that racist and sexist ideology are intertwined, for Silla's and Deighton Boyce's internalization of the American definition of a woman and man runs counter to their own beings and to their situation as black people in American society, and precipitates the tragedy that their relationship becomes" ("Trajectories" 239). The American ideal of economic upward mobility is to what Silla clings, but Deighton does not. Because of this conflict, Silla ignores his beliefs and desires and denies him the right to make any decisions regarding their family's financial state. She eliminates his position as a marriage partner and as a parent. Her treatment towards him results in a more intense conflict between Silla and Selina.

What initiates the tragedy that their relationship becomes is their battle over Deighton's land. He inherits land from a relative in Barbados and wants to keep it. Silla schemes to sell his property and use the money to buy the brownstone. Deighton's retaliation is never forgotten. Different from Johnny, Deighton is totally disregarded by the community because of his actions. Selina closely witnesses the community's rejection of her father. After Deighton squanders the money from Silla's sale of his land, he is

literally excommunicated from the Barbadian community. As he attempts to join his family at Gatha Steed's daughter's wedding, "[Their] eyes condemned him and their voices rushed full tilt at him, scourging him and finally driving him from their presence with their song, 'Small Island, go back where you really com from!'" (Marshall 150). He is considered a hindrance to his family's financial progress, so the community supports Silla, regardless of the fact that she steals Deighton's land. Marshall scholar, Joyce Pettis, accurately comments on Deighton's expulsion: "The New York Barbadian community, united in its absorption in the American dream, symbolically rejects Deighton as does the capitalist system" (228). Silla becomes a perfect symbol of "the destructive might of the West over [the] noncompetitive geographical entity," which Deighton's Barbadian ideals represent (Pettis 228). The Barbadian community acts like a gang of communal judges, and they convict and sentence Deighton for his actions.

Their battle goes from community involvement to Selina's involvement. The land battle, which would seem to destroy the family, actually reshapes the family. Selina and her sister are literally dragged into the middle of this battle between marriage partners. Here, the issue of the mother-daughter conflict and how it shapes the relationship of Silla and Selina is important. Concerning Selina's struggle, Carole Boyce Davies writes in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*<sup>2</sup>:

The heritage/ancestry relationship is at the center of struggle in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). The conflict of the girl, Selina, arises from continual tension between her mother's rigidity and serious immersion into the American enterprise model and her father's emotionalism and casualness to work

in the capitalist machineries; between the conflicting worlds of Afro-Caribbean society in New York and her separate American experience.” (117)

Selina finds difficulty in understanding Silla’s relentless attitude toward Deighton’s idea about keeping his inherited land in Barbados. Selina becomes a part of something she does not understand, but her relationships with both parents pull her into their war.

In addition to highlighting Silla’s deviously engineered schemes to gain control of and sale Deighton’s island land as one who is not entitled to access of it, the land issue in *Brown Girl* brings out the most important topic of discussion in the work: the battle of strong wills between Silla and Selina. While Selina is still a pre-teenager, Silla has several confrontations with her. After Deighton takes revenge on Silla by squandering the money from her devious sale of his land, it is Selina who remains to comfort Silla: "Obscurely [Selina] knew that this was her place, that for some reason she would always remain behind with the mother [...]. For there was a part of her that always wanted the mother to win, that loved her dark strength and the tenacious lift of her body" (Marshall 132-3). Silla seeks revenge against Deighton through deportation, because she is finally outraged by his desertion of the family to live and work with Father Devine’s religious sect. It is Silla's involvement in the deportation of Deighton, after he leaves the family home to join Father’s Peace Movement, that drives Selina to attack Silla verbally and physically. Silla receives the chants of "Hitler!" from Selina and the blows from Selina's small fists upon her shoulders. After Selina tires from the attack, "[Silla] stared down, with a strange awe and respect, at the limp figure huddled against her [...]. She smoothed [Selina's] snarled hair. Each caress declared that she was touching something which was finally hers alone" (184, 185). Silla is finally able to claim what she believes is

rightfully hers: Selina; Selina is finally released from her dilemma of having to choose between her parents. Selina's divided loyalties and inner struggle about her likeness with "the mother" echo Ina's and Deighton's proclamations. Earlier in the work, Deighton admonishes Selina after she beats Ina: "'As for you, you does make me shame sometime- -always fighting like some boar-cat. You's yuh mother child, in truth!'" (91). Ina also compares the two: "'You're alike, you know that! The same'" (184).

Before the land issue brings the mother and daughter together for the first time, Selina has been Deighton's favorite, a fact that Silla connects to the death of their son. She feels that Deighton has usurped her position with the child who is most like her in order to fill the missing void left from his son's death. However, it is also the death of Deighton Boyce in *Brown Girl* that brings about the increased importance of the relationship between Silla and Selina. However, unlike Katie's, Silla's love is not difficult for Selina to claim. It is Silla who wants desperately to usurp Deighton's place in Selina's affections. Silla articulates her jealousy to Selina much later in the work: "'[...]you never had no uses for me, but did think the sun rose and set 'pon yuh father alone'" (Marshall 305). Even Ina, Silla's oldest daughter, is jealous of Selina's relationship with their father. Ina feels that her own closeness with Deighton has been usurped by her younger sibling. She does not understand Deighton's distance from her. Deighton was uncomfortable around his oldest daughter as she grew older: "[...]there was something else in her that puzzled him. In those eyes that were so quick to widen with hurt, in the submissive drop of her head he could trace his mother. She had passed on that look through him to Ina to remind him of what he had done to her" (26). Deighton is unable to deal with the pain of abandoning his own dedicated mother, that

pain he sees mirrored in Ina's eyes. It is Selina who accepts him in his completely carefree state. Just as Katie does, Silla knows that Selina prefers Deighton to her because "her father carried those gay days in his irresponsible smile, while the mother's formidable aspect was the culmination of all that she had suffered" (46). That suffering is an aspect of Silla's day-to-day existence that Selina eventually comes to understand as she becomes a woman herself.

Silla, from her first appearance in the work is described, according to Deborah Schneider, as "a character of forbidding aspect. It is impossible to imagine her lounging; she represents work, self-denial, the rejection of pleasure in any form" (59). Marshall introduces the reader to Silla in the unforgettable prose exhibited in the following passage:

Silla Boyce brought the theme of winter into the park with her dark dress amid the summer green and the bright-figured house-dresses of the women lounging on the benches there. Not only that, every line of her strong-made body seemed to reprimand the women for their idleness and the park for its senseless summer display. Her lips, set in a permanent protest against life, implied that there was no time for gaiety. And the park, the women, the sun even gave way to her dark force; the flushed summer colors ran together and faded as she passed. (16)

Silla's dark countenance and harsh personality would be enough to send any person, especially a child, running in the other direction. Gloria Wade-Gayles evaluates Silla's character in light of the standard fictional portrayal of the Black mother: "Mothers in Black women's fiction are strong and devoted, like Silla Boyce, but, again like Silla Boyce, they are rarely affectionate. The exigencies of racism and poverty in white

America are sometimes so devastating that the mothers have neither the time nor patience for affection” (10). This lack of affection, of course, is a determining factor in Selina’s preference, as well as Francie’s, for her jovial, affectionate father over her mother. However, as Wade-Gayles also states: “The mother-daughter conflict, though fierce, does not threaten the mother-daughter bond between Silla and Selina. There is never a time in the novel when Selina is not her mother’s child” (10). Their bond is maintained by a mutual respect for each other’s strong will.

Silla’s identification with Selina is verbalized early in the novel. However, Silla struggles to understand the daughter with whom she identifies: “But look at my crosses, [Silla] whispered. Look how I has gone and brought something into this world to whip me” (Marshall 47). Silla sees and admires the strength in Selina from the beginning. Silla informs Selina when she is still quite young: “What you need Ina for any more? You’s more woman now than she’ll ever be, soul. G’long” (53). After Selina shows up at Silla’s factory job to confront her about the land disagreement, Silla believes she understands Selina’s nature: “a force-ripe woman! You’s too own-way. You’s too womanish! Yuh’s like my mother. A woman that did think the world put here for she”(102). Silla’s assessment of Selina’s behavior is recognition of the challenge that Selina’s strength presents for Silla’s mothering. However, Silla is still in charge of this force-ripe woman.

Silla’s strong will, ambition, and unaffectionate manner are also manifested in the way she mothers. This is seen mostly in Silla’s rearing of both her daughters. She is constantly seen as the overbearing mother because of her relentless need not to be embarrassed by her daughters in the community. As Rosalie Riegle Troester writes:

Black mothers, particularly those with strong ties to their community, sometimes build high banks around their young daughters, isolating them from the dangers of the larger world until they are old enough and strong enough to function as autonomous women. Often these dikes are religious, but sometimes they are built with education, family, or the restrictions of a close-knit homogeneous community. Even when relieved by eddies of tenderness, this isolation causes the currents between Black mothers and daughters to run deep and the relationship to be fraught with an emotional intensity often missing from the lives of women with more freedom. (163)

This characterization definitely pinpoints Silla's attitude towards her daughters when they are adolescents, and it carries over into their older years. In the following, Silla responds to Deighton's plea for more freedom for young Selina: "Not two foot without Ina. Who know what to happen to she out there and she like a tearcat. You does think she's a boy always filling her head with foolishness and her guts with Hooton'" (Marshall 24). Silla is mindful of the difference in degrees of freedom for men and women in society, and does not want Deighton's liberal attitude to derail Selina's growth as a young woman. She is constantly watchful of any misdeeds with the opposite sex, also. Schneider insightfully writes: "Just as she is connected with machines [on which she eventually works], Silla represents the antithesis of nature and of sexuality. The tropics signify to her merely the back-breaking labor she is glad to have escaped from, and she impresses on her daughters the need for sexual abstinence until they are suitably married" (60). She does not want any mistakes to deter the bright futures that she has planned for her daughters. Silla threatens Ina: "But limme tell you, soul, if I ever see you with any boy I

gon break your neck out in the streets 'cause I not tolerating no concubines and I ain supporting no wild-dog puppies [...]." (Marshall 42).

Because of Silla's harsh attitude toward sexual issues, Selina is forced to investigate things on her own. She learns about menstruation from her friend Beryl and about sexuality from Suggie Sweet, her mother's sexually liberated tenant. These are things she should learn from her mother. At the age of eighteen, she begins her sexual relationship with Clive in secrecy. Clive replaces the missing link Selina has felt since her father's deportation and death: "[Selina] and Clive were joined, just as she and her father had been, in an intimate circle, with the world driven off" (Marshall 242). Selina's participation in such a relationship (with an unemployed, unmotivated, artistic, older man) defies Silla on all fronts, but she takes the risk because her individualism is important to her. To go up against Silla is futile, but Selina never stops battling with her until the end of the text. Of course, Selina's maturity level determines the futility of her resistance. As she grows into a woman, the level of the futility of her resistance wanes considerably.

By the end of Marshall's novel, Selina's rivalry with her mother has taken new shape. Selina recognizes her own emotional and personal identification with Silla as a result of a long struggle during her growth into womanhood. Mary Helen Washington pinpoints: "The relationship between Silla and Selina Boyce is so full of mystery, passion, and conflict that it may well be the most complex treatment of the mother-daughter bond in contemporary American literature" ("Afterword" 157). This complexity appears during each stage of their mother-daughter relationship.

As Selina grows into a young woman and enters college, she still makes choices that conflict with what Silla believes is important in life. For Silla and Selina, it is always complicated. Silla cannot understand Selina's desire to dance on stage, even though she herself loved to dance in the island pastures as a young girl; but she can identify with the racially degrading comments of which Selina is the victim at the cast party after Selina's unforgettable performance. As a result of Selina's racially-charged encounter with the white mother of her fellow dancer, in which Selina is degradingly asked to say something in that "delightful West Indian accent for us" (Marshall 293), Selina could finally understand her mother's struggle to own the brownstone, to have financial prosperity, to be a member of the Association. Selina understood that "[Silla was] the collective voice of all the [Barbadian] women, the vehicle through which their former suffering found utterance" (45). It is essentially the understanding of racism, sexism, and immigrant status that aids in this moment of comradeship between Silla and Selina.

It is this positive communication concerning a negative experience that also frames Selina's separation from Silla. When she learns of Selina's plans to leave home, Silla reveals her own feelings of abandonment and loneliness:

Silla—her body thrust forward as though it, as well as her mind, sought to understand this—stared at Selina's set face. Then, groping past her, Silla found a chair, and sat numb, silent, the life shattered in her eyes and the hanging coats gathered behind her like sympathetic spectators. Finally she said, 'Going 'way. [Ina] call sheself getting married and the other going 'way. Gone so! They ain got no more uses for me and they gone. Oh God, is this what you does get for the nine

months and the pain and the long years putting bread in their mouth...?’

(Marshall 306)

Selina makes the case of connection for the two women, mother and daughter, and their needs to strike out on their own, Silla’s in 1920 and Selina’s thirty years later. Finally, Silla gives Selina her benediction: " G'long! You was always too much woman for me anyway, soul. And my own mother did say two head-bulls can't reign in a flock. G'long!" (307). She identifies with Selina's need to be free and to make her own way as she did when she talked her own mother into borrowing the money for her passage and left the island for "this *man's* country" (307; emphasis added).

This mutual understanding is hard won for the two women. Silla is able to take comfort in the fact that she has been successful in her mothering responsibilities. Her mothering efforts are now manifested in a responsible and independent young woman. This successful outcome is predicated on the coping strategies used in the mothering process. Silla’s super inner strength has been a coping strategy on which she could always rely. Instead of having a completely negative effect on her mothering, its effect on her relationship with Selina has been quite positive, since it is a quality that draws Selina to her with a sense of awe. In addition, it is a quality that is replicated in Selina. It does not take long for both mother and daughter to realize that either.

Silla’s strong personality is also connected to an overly ambitious drive that makes her stop at nothing to achieve her goals. Although this eventually leads to the destruction of her marriage and to Deighton’s tragic death, it results in her goals coming to fruition. Selina does attend college, and Silla does purchase the brownstone. Also, Deighton’s absence initiates the eventual positive relationship that Silla has with Selina.

But, Silla's economic drive is something that is cultivated over time. Silla uses her domestic job as an educational experience, despite her underpaid, diminutive status. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, "Mothers who are domestic workers [...] are exposed to all the intimate details of the lives of their white employers. Working for whites offers [them] a view from the inside and exposes them to ideas and resources that might aid in their children's upward mobility" (*Black Feminist Thought* 124). This is true in Silla's case. Silla despises the treatment that she endures in this occupation, but she learns the ways that upper class Whites acquire the more desirable things in life. She uses what she learns to improve the economic stability of her family. She teaches her daughters to strive for an upwardly mobile existence.

Another coping strategy that has a great impact on Silla's mothering success is the women-centered support networks with which she has connections. Although Selina does not initially have her nurturance needs (of intimate verbalizations and physical contact) fulfilled by her mother, she does witness her mother's place in her communal female circle. Marshall writes, "[Selina] could never think of the mother alone. It was always the mother and the others, for they were alike--those watchful, wrathful women whose eyes seared and searched and laid bare, whose tongues lashed the world in unremitting distrust" (10-11). Silla's network of women supporters is one of which she emerges as the leader, because she has, according to Barbara Christian, "a language to convey her fighting spirit, the knowledge of the intricacies of womanhood, and the struggle necessary to define oneself" (*Black Feminist Criticism* 226). As a result of this, the reader becomes privy to her various societal views: from her liberal opinions on birth control and religion to her conservative opinions on child-rearing, colonization, and

finances. She is in her element when she is surrounded by her sister-friends, and they provide each other with the strong voices they need to survive the daily challenges of being women and mothers. Christian correctly observes the following: "Silla is not an internal being. She fights, supported by her women friends who use their own language to penetrate illusion and verbally construct their own definitions in order to wage their battle. As a result, Selina, Silla's daughter, will, by the end of the novel, have some basis for the journey to self-knowledge upon which she embarks" (239). Silla is so dominant in this setting that it is years before Selina can "conceive of her mother as an individual" (Kubitschek 72). Marshall's portrayal of the women's circle of support takes on great significance, since the women in Silla's intimate circle struggle with many issues. Silla's place in this group is what cultivates her spirit as a woman. However, these are not the same women who directly aid in Selina's successful maturation process. Those women basically aid Silla's mothering against Silla's will.

Selina's othermothers are not her relatives, nor are they from her mother's circle of female comrades. In fact, Silla resents the place that Selina's three othermothers have in her life. Silla questions Selina's interest in the three women she has befriended: "But girl, what you does find in sitting up here with this rank, half-dead old woman, nuh? Or with that whore next door? Why you would rather visit Thompson with that smelly life-sore on her leg than Beryl and them so? Why?" (Marshall 202). Selina needs these women in her life just like she needs Silla. Miss Mary has the time that Silla cannot provide. Throughout her adolescence, Selina depends on her visits with the elderly, old white former maid in the once elegant brownstone where she is now only a boarder since Silla owns the house. Selina loves the stories Miss Mary tells of her past life, and she is

appalled at her mother's hatred for the poor, old woman. Not until Selina experiences degradation by a white woman will she begin to understand her mother's reaction to Miss Mary (Schultz 77). Suggie ("that whore next door") is Selina's link to the mystery of sexuality and sensuality. Davies situates the importance of such a character as Suggie in the following: "Selina's understanding of culture is shaped by the many conversations of the Caribbean working women in her mother's kitchen, the 'nation language' from which she learns rhythm and poetry and friendships with other Caribbean women like Suggie, who luxuriates in sensuality and her body" (117). It is from Suggie that Selina's learns some of her first lessons about intimacy. Finally and even more importantly, Miss Thompson is Selina's "confessor" and the person who encourages Selina to understand Silla. From Miss Thompson, Selina learns about the importance of sharing your life with others, the true importance of home, and the lasting effects of oppressive circumstances.

These women are what Silla cannot be for Selina. As Rosalie Riegle Troester writes, "[...]it is the women who mold her personality--her mother most of all, but also the three othermothers who give Selina unconditional love at a time when her mother sees affection as distracting" (165). Refusing to recognize how they aid her in rearing Selina, Silla is jealous of their importance in Selina's life and she drives them away when possible. She evicts Suggie, brings about an early death for Miss Mary, and is probably very pleased with Miss Thompson's decision to return to the South. Silla, at no point recognizes their aid in mothering Selina. In fact, her opposition to Selina's connections with these women is similar to the same attitude she has about Selina's emotional connection to Deighton. She is jealous of anyone who takes Selina's attention away from her.

Nevertheless, by the end of the work, Silla reaps the benefits of the help these women have given Selina. Comparable to Katie, Silla is proud of the young woman who stands before her, reminding her of herself. Just as Francie is ready to rely on her own independence for departure, Selina is prepared to do the same. They acknowledge that their mothers have given them not only the know-how they need to survive on their own, but have also encouraged the strength that they will need as well. Although Silla and Katie are not mothers entirely composed of positive parts, their strength and good intentions are positive for their daughters' upbringing in many ways. The hard task of mothering is something that Silla Boyce and Katie Nolan take on as another serious job for which they must perform to the utmost of their abilities and with more strength than they do anything else in their lives, except survive. They successfully perform this task despite the oppressive circumstances under which they mother, which make the hardest job ever even more difficult.

## Conclusion: Mothering in Retrospect

In Chapter 1, “Mothering as Dilemma in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” I argue that these novels demonstrate how oppressive circumstances, such as social discrimination, the mothers’ childhoods, marital/love relationships, and abusive behaviors, can create the need for inner strength, mothering mentors, surrogate mothers, escape methods, and women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. In addition, I argue that the examples in these novels show that when those circumstances are too overwhelming, the coping strategies may be rendered ineffective and result in failed mother-daughter relationships. Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* are works that show how women’s lives can be oppressed by circumstances both beyond and within their control. Both novels tell fictional stories that examine women’s lives in the midst of emotional pain and confusion. Examples in these novels show women whose relationships with their daughters are gravely affected by the dilemmas in which the mothers find themselves.

By dilemma, I mean a situation that involves a choice between equal but unsatisfactory alternatives. For Anney Boatwright Waddell in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the dilemma is the choice between her oldest daughter and Anney’s husband, with neither of these alternatives being satisfactory since choosing one of them means she definitely cannot have the other in her life. In *Beloved*, Sethe Garner Suggs’ dilemma comes long before her children can understand the consequences of her choice. She must choose between living with her children under slavery or killing them and herself. Her choice of

the latter alternative does not work out according to her hasty plan, and she spends much of her life paying for the botched outcome.

Allison's novel presents the possible success of a lesbian-mothering situation, and Morrison's text boasts of the initial successes of a mother-grandmother-headed household until it is disrupted by the impenetrable past. As for the abuse issues in the texts, I cannot deny the fact that both mothers would be charged and most likely prosecuted for their mothering crimes if their cases were brought before a district attorney today. Sethe would be charged with capital murder, citing the heinous nature of her act, but would most likely be spared incarceration on the plea of diminished capacity, citing the extreme circumstances of the possibility that her children will be enslaved. Anney would be charged with child endangerment in the least and maybe even with the more serious crime of accessory to felony child abuse since she knowingly keeps her child in an abusive situation. In some states, she could further be charged with "misprison of felony" since she witnesses Glen's raping Bone and does not report his crime, even runs off with him so that he will not have to face any possible fall-out from the horrible act. Despite these mothers' shortcomings, their daughter characters (Denver and Bone) are able to reach some understanding of their mothers whether they forgive their mothering acts or not. However, the mothers are unable to forgive themselves. In the examples presented in this chapter, daughters are able to reach this understanding with the aid of othermothers in the community, thereby presenting the importance of othermothers for daughters who experience problematic relationships with their biological mothers. Lastly, Sethe's and Anney's negative childhood experiences directly affect the way that they mother their own children. Sethe, who has no relationship with her biological mother,

overprotects her children, even unto death; Anney, who has a mother who is less than nurturing and favors her male children, neglects her daughter in order to find the love she has not had growing up. She takes it any way she can get it, even from a child rapist.

In Chapter 1 of this study, it is Raylene, Bone's lesbian aunt, who provides the positive, nurturing, safe household in which Bone lives after her traditional parenting situation (which houses a physically and sexually abusive step-father) almost kills her in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Vincent King writes:

Bone spends chapters nine through sixteen 'looking for something special,' 'something magical,' stories which can transform her and her world. Yet she does not find that magic in gospel music, in the mean-hearted tales she shares with Shannon Pearl, in her violent sexual fantasies, or even in her reading. It is Bone's Aunt Raylene who finally offers her that elusive magic. (134)

Raylene has a reputation for being fierce, independent, and protective. Although the family speaks of her past and present life-style choices in whispers, she is the most caring and nurturing parent that Bone has ever had. Even though she is not physically present to stop Daddy Glen's final and most brutal attack on Bone, Bone (as a result of the positive influence that Raylene has had on her life) attempts to defend herself for the first time. King writes: "Not quite thirteen years old, Bone is still no match for her stepfather. Raylene, however, is there to pick up the pieces and becomes Bone's surrogate mother" after Anney chooses Daddy Glen over Bone. "Raylene's greatest contribution to Bone, though, is that she teaches her how to create a different kind of story, one based on something more than hate" (134). In this case, the alternative family make-up is the best.

Similar to Anney, Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, also lives with the day-to-day guilt of having sacrificed her daughter's life due to a man. However, there is no sexual connection between Sethe and this man. She attempts to kill her four children (only the oldest daughter dies) to keep them away from the Sweet Home plantation slave master, Schoolteacher. She makes the agonizingly difficult choice to relinquish her position as mother and performs the passionately murderous crime of infanticide in what she believes will be her last truly pure act of protective mothering. She (re)acts in the same mode as many slave mothers did.

Unlike Anney, Sethe is punished by the daughter she kills, when she returns in deadly ghost form. She is saved by her daughter, Denver, the one Sethe is not able to kill and whom she subsequently nurtures and shelters. At the close of the novel, the reader finds that Sethe is neither affirmed nor negated as a mother, that her act is neither fully endorsed nor completely rejected by the community in the novel. The same community that rejects the prideful demeanor that Sethe wears after she has killed her daughter is the same community that chooses to rescue her from what they believe is the monster her historical act has created. The women who come to Sethe's aid identify with Sethe's position as a mother, even when they refuse to link themselves to her desperate and deadly mothering act.

In Chapter 2, "Mothering as Difficulty in Dorothy West's *The Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," I argue that these novels show how oppressive circumstances, such as childhood experiences, socioeconomic philosophies, social isolation, and family discord, can create the need for inner strength, mothering assumption, mothering mentors, surrogate mothers, and/or women-centered networks as

coping strategies for the mothers. By mothering assumption, I refer to the taking over of or laying claim to the mothering responsibilities of a child. Examples in this chapter show at least two women (grandmothers) who assume the mothering responsibilities of rearing their granddaughters, because their daughters are portrayed as being incapable of fulfilling those mothering responsibilities alone or at all.

In this chapter, the works end with the relationships being somewhat more successful than those in Chapter 1. Although some of the mothering relationships end tragically, there remains a mutual love relationship that is also manifested by their physical togetherness. For example in one of the relationships in *The Wedding*, the mother and her daughters do not respect each other's choices and philosophical beliefs, but they do preserve their mother-daughter relationships and remain connected physically and emotionally. However, some of the oppressive circumstances that affect mothering lead to the dissatisfaction and depression of the daughters and some semblance of the mother-daughter relationship remains, in some instances, until death parts it. Although the relationships examined in this chapter do not show how effective coping strategies can be most successful for mothers who must combat oppressive circumstances, they do seem more successful than those relationships I examine in Chapter 1. Their greater success seems to be predicated on, but not limited to, several aspects: 1) the management of different oppressive circumstances, 2) the absence of physical child abuse, and 3) the perspectives of older adult daughters. However, these relationships are by no means as successful as they could be.

Further in Chapter 2, I examine issues such as self-worth, parental usurpation, social discrimination, and color discrimination as they become daily parts of the

characters' lives and issues, which negatively affect their relationships. These issues also are examined for their importance for future generations of the family portrayed in the novel, as well. The mothers, in Dorothy West's *The Wedding* are totally driven by race and class when rearing their daughters. In examining such characters, West also forces the community to examine itself. Boyd and Fitzgerald write: West "peered into our experiences, complexities and inner forces to uncover that shared core that allows us to identify ourselves as whole. Our vision is clearer because of [her] insight and determination; we are taller because we have been hoisted onto the shoulders of such a critical and imaginative giant" (30). Her work, then, can take on a broader social meaning, as she probably hoped it would.

In her critique of this fringe of society, "West suggests that the black bourgeois class must behave responsibly in the acquisition of power by not re-inscribing the dangerous hierarchies of race, class, and gender" (Jones, *Rereading* 145). She is able to demonstrate the dreadful consequences of neglecting her charge to act responsibly with discriminatory power when she introduces the breakdowns in the mother-daughter relationships in the novel. In further assessment concerning the family that West critiques in this work, Jones writes:

West both constructs and deconstructs race and class in America through her depictions of family genealogies in the Coles line through both Corinne and Clark. These narrative digressions, contained within the middle of the novel, serve as a means of linking the working-class and the middle-class strains in the family history. By presenting heritage as a blend, West exposes elitism and color

preferences among the Coles family as self-hatred and self-denial, the consequences of which will become spiritual emptiness. (Jones, *Rereading* 141)

West's women pass these debilitating preferences on to their daughters and granddaughters as if handing down family heirlooms or bequeathing money. Like the Coles family in *The Wedding*, the Macon Dead household, in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, is driven by the accumulation of wealth and maintaining higher social status in the community as well. Dysfunction reigns supreme in their household, also.

For all their material and monetary gains and their traditional, nuclear family structure, Macon and Ruth Dead's family is unable to forge positive, lasting relationships with one another, nor are they able to keep from hurting each other continuously. Valerie Smith, in "Toni Morrison's Narratives of Community," writes: "the Macon Deads exemplify the patriarchal, nuclear family that has traditionally been a stable and critical feature of Western civilization. The misery of their daily lives demonstrates how few guarantees that domestic configuration actually carries" (136-137). Such a patriarchal structure also renders Ruth's power as mother in this household null and void. In addition, she learns womanly subordination as a daughter, which makes it impossible to assert any continuous position of power for her children. She is not only unable to protect her children from the fatherly monster in her home, but she is also the primary target of his abusive disposition. Ruth Dead's inability to intervene in the emotionally disabling upbringing that her husband inflicts on their children drives her daughters into seclusion and her son into the arms of Aunt Pilate, who mothers him instead.

In Pilate's home, he has the opportunity to experience family ties that do not bind him by enmeshment, oppression, and expectation. In the following passage, Valerie Smith compares the Dead households:

While the Macon Deads' vision of the world is linear, rigid, and exclusionary, Pilate sees the world in a cyclical, expansive, non-Western manner. Because personal relationships are more important to her than material acquisitions, she supports others with her emotional generosity. The Macon Dead household may be barren and lifeless, but Pilate's house bursts with energy, sensuality, and affection. ("Narratives" 141)

Pilate, because of her chosen personal disposition, which is in direct opposition to the greediness of Macon and the timidity of Ruth, is able to mother Milkman with the piloting and nurturing he so desperately craves. This eventually leads to his respect for women and humanity in general, qualities that he had never had before nor considered important before.

On the other hand, the women in Pilate's energy-filled household do not have such a successful outcome. Reba and Hagar, the granddaughter whom Pilate raises as a daughter, are not replicas of their strong, independent, free, and spirited predecessor. Because Pilate cherishes her own freedom of individual thought and independence from societal standards, she allows Reba and Hagar to develop independently in her shadow. This choice produces "doormat women," who demand no respect from men, who depend on Pilate for survival, and who, like Hager, die from the rejection of others. Her position as mother would seem to be an example to follow, but the passivity of her mothering

leaves her with mere shadows of women in her house. They are not women who can learn by example, but must be instructed in how to survive in the outside world.

In Chapter 3, “Mothering Understood in Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife* and Christina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*,” I argue that these novels show how oppressive circumstances, such as the mothers’ childhoods, abusive behavior, father-daughter bonds, and cultural barriers, can create the need for inner strength, secret sharing, therapeutic story-telling, and support networks as coping strategies for the mother characters.

Although the mother characters in this chapter mother under some of the same oppressive circumstances as those in Chapters 1 and 2, the outcomes are more positive, but certainly not completely successful. For instance, the circumstances of abusive behavior in Chapter 1 and the mother’s negative childhood experience in Chapters 1 and 2 are also examined in Chapter 3.

However, almost all of the daughters are able to find a certain understanding of their mother’s rearing of her children. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, even when the daughter is not able to totally forgive her mother for her mothering mistakes, she is still left with a way to understand the circumstances under which the mothering takes place, by evaluating her mother’s past. In *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, mother and daughter actually find common ground after they break down barriers and the mother tells her own story. Possible reasons for these more successful relationships may be: 1) the more intense connections between granddaughters and the grandmothers (even though the grandmother has serious problems in the relationship with her own daughter), 2) a more genuine interest in mothers and daughters communicating some understanding of the

past, and 3) a real effort to explain the mother's motives and actions through secret sharing and storytelling.

As a result of the cultural and emotional circumstances in the examples presented in this chapter, a seemingly insurmountable communication problem is created. However, the move to reveal important secrets of the past seems to be presented as a way to find some common ground in the examples of mother-daughter relationships analyzed in this chapter. The different social and political agendas seem to be more complicated than the cultural and emotional areas of concern. For the characters, those agendas are never up for debate. In Celia's case, the fact that her mental instability seems to be inherited by her daughter is a problem of great distress for the mother who bequeaths the condition. However, the greatest effect of the mother's instability is her period of rejection towards her first child; in the example in this chapter, this is never overcome or forgiven by the oldest daughter, even after she understands her mother's dilemma.

Because these Chinese-American and Cuban-American mothers of independent means have attempted to rear daughters who are beneficiaries of American educational, social, and economic prosperity, they have incidentally created women to whom they cannot relate and with whom they have very little in common. In fact, in Christina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the mother, Celia, and daughters (Lourdes and Felicia) add political disagreement to the emotional hardships that already mar their mother-daughter relationship. Mirroring the tension of the mother-daughter relationships in *Dreaming in Cuban*, the relationship that I examine in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* is plagued by the secrets that both Winnie Louie and her daughter Pearl Brandt continue to keep

from one another, important secrets of debilitating illness, physical and sexual abuse, and dead children.

Once these memories are revealed, Winnie and Pearl can find common ground and repair the loss of closeness in their relationship. The distance that plagues their relationship dissipates with each detail that Winnie reveals about the life she has kept secret from her daughter. Winnie's revelations inspire Pearl to divulge the secret of her illness as well. For the first time, mother and daughter have the relationship they have both longed for so desperately. In addition, Pearl has the reassurance that her mother does love her and a true understanding of the reason her mother has always watched her behavior so doggedly.

In Chapter 4, "Mothering as Transition in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," I argue that oppressive circumstances, such as marital stress, socioeconomic issues, nurturance issues, and mother-daughter conflicts, create the need for inner strength, economic security, and women-centered networks as coping strategies for the mother characters. I analyze examples of mothering in stormy, but productive mother-daughter relationships. By "mothering as transition," I refer to the *Bildungsroman* experience of the daughter character in each work and how the work shows the positive development of the mother-daughter relationship through the stages of the daughter's maturation from adolescence to her late teens. During that period, mother and daughter do not always agree. Actually, I refer to their relationships as a battle of wills that develops into a mutual respect for each woman's strength. Throughout the progression of the stages in these examples, the

mother-daughter relationship makes great gains in mutual understanding, respect, and love.

In this final chapter, each mother-daughter pair comes to a mutually successful understanding of their relationship, as in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, except that the daughters reach this point as very young women in the examples in Betty Smith's and Paule Marshall's novels. Several issues make the mother-daughter relationships discussed in this chapter more successful than those examples found in the previous chapters: 1) the mother characters discussed are extremely strong, ambitious, intelligent, hardworking, money-conscious women, 2) the daughter characters discussed are also strong, ambitious, intelligent, and hardworking, 3) the mother characters recognize their daughters as younger replicas of themselves, and 4) networks of othermothers are very effective in guiding the daughter to an understanding of her mother. The examples of successful mother-daughter relationships discussed in this chapter show how the right coping strategies can lessen the effectiveness of the negative circumstances under which mothering can take place.

In this chapter, the mothers' stories both begin in urban poverty, though the Boyce family quickly rises from that state in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. These mothering stories are saturated with issues of negative ethnic, socioeconomic and familial circumstances. Marshall's novel also makes bold statements about the Black mother that contradicts stereotypical images of her as the mammy, whore, and the super-strong Black mother when she portrays Silla Boyce as more than a one-dimensional character. Christian writes:

Few early Afro-American women's novels focused on the black woman's role as mother, because of the negative stereotype of the black woman as mammy that pervaded American society. But instead of de-emphasizing the black woman's role as mother, Marshall probes the complexity. She portrays Silla Boyce as an embittered woman caught between her own personality and desires, and the life imposed on her as a mother who must destroy her unorthodox husband in order to have a stable family (as symbolized by the brownstone). (Christian, "Trajectories" 239)

Marshall explores the experiences, desires, disappointments, and choices of Silla Boyce as a complicated mother who is determined, forceful, and dedicated. Marshall creates a character who, despite her lack of nurturing ability, loves her daughters fiercely and she makes decisions that she hopes will guarantee them a positive future. However, her unrelenting demand for the respect of her position as their mother clouds the true motives behind her mothering acts. Marshall shows an example of an African-American mother who is as complex in her thoughts and actions as any other mother character might be.

In comparison, Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* attacks the issues of immigrant status, wartime economics, and the plight of a single, widowed, working mother. Also comparable in characterization, Katie Nolan is a hard-working, determined, and sometimes distant mother, especially with her daughter Francie. Vivyan Adair comments on this family structure of poor, yet dignified characters with its mother head:

We read these characters as good, honest, stabilizing forces because they valiantly and vigilantly manipulate their urban environment by monitoring and controlling their emotions and behaviors. Mrs. Nolan and her "worthy" culture have an

arsenal at their disposal that focuses on the concept of shame as a controlling and a curtailing emotion. In general, the Nolans take pride in the fact that they never forget “their proper place” in society and shame is the force that patrols their borders. (120-121)

Like Selina’s, Francie’s maturation process involves a growing independence from her mother. These young women are the replicas of their strong mothers. They learn to be independent thinkers and separate individuals from the mothers with whom they have struggled for so long to find common ground. For both coming-of-age protagonists, leaving their mothers after growing up in the urban landscape is more difficult than they believed it would be and more fulfilling than they could have ever dreamed. Both women depart with their mother’s admirable, yet reluctant blessings and respect. These fictional mothers have been successful in their pursuits to rear women who can navigate the rough waters of a male-dominated society.

If mothers could somehow, after the formative years of rearing the child have ended, go back and repair the parenting blunders and duplicate the successes without limitation; then all mothers would probably be considered good, fruitful mothers, at least “good enough” mothers. Then, if mothers, who are already marginalized by gender in our United States society, could eliminate the stigmas that accompany being a female parent, the playing field would finally be more level for them as parents. However, mothers do not get to mother in retrospect, because the job of mothering is so intricately important since it shapes human lives. The majority of mothers do not usually have the opportunity and/or the means to theorize about the circumstances under which parenting becomes problematic, fruitful, trying, successful, or failed. Mothers do not usually have

the opportunity to critically examine how race, social status, community support, the past, and male partners affect mothering, especially the mothering of daughters since the same-sex identification issue seems so important in the majority of parenting situations. However, mothers may be able to rely on effective coping strategies in order to enhance their jobs of rearing children.

From this point in the literary assessment of mothering in fictional works, scholars could definitely explore the same issues and questions in almost any other combination of works with variations among authors, works, ethnicities, and time frames. For example, this study does not examine any works written by Native Americans nor does it examine any works written by men. The possibilities to extend this research are endless, yet the need to continue to do so is absolutely mandatory. As the positions of women in the United States and other countries improve, remain, or decline in different areas, the voices of all women everywhere must be raised in order to imagine positive outcomes for women, and especially for mothers since they have the important occupation of rearing other women.

## Notes

### Introduction

1 Caillouet, Hazel R. Reames. *Among Women: Toni Morrison's Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters* (Discusses Morrison's first five novels in relation to short fiction by Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers and to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*). 1997. Chess, Sonia Mary. *Daughter from Another Shore: Maternal Influences in Selected Fiction of Chinese-American Daughters of Immigrant Mothers*. 1996. Ghosh, Nabanita. *The Unbreakable Bond: Absent/Present Mothers and Daughters in the Fiction of Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Amy Tan, and Daphne Merkin*. 2000. Smurthwaite, Lori F. 'Why doesn't anybody tell them their own mothers had stories?': *Representations of Mother/Daughter Relationships in Contemporary American Fiction* (Kaye Gibbons, Sandra Scofield, Amy Tan). 1998. Woo, Eunjoo. *Cultural Conditioning and Mother/Daughter conflicts in the Development of Identity and Voice: The Autobiographical Fiction of Dorothy Allison, Wan-So Pak, and Maxine Hong Kingston*. 2001.

2 The "second sex" is a phrase taken from H.M. Parshley's 1952 translation of Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 work, *The Second Sex*.

### Chapter One

1 "In January 1846, a pregnant Margaret Garner, her husband, their four children, and her husband's parents crossed the frozen Ohio River in a daring attempt to gain their freedom. They had joined nine other fugitives from Kentucky. The Garners made their way to the home of a relative, an ex-slave. Before plans to move to a safer location could be effected, their hiding place was surrounded by slaveholders, U.S. Marshals, and a large posse. When it was clear that the family would be taken, Margaret took a butcher's knife and slit the throat of her baby girl. She struck the two boys with a shovel but was restrained before she could do further harm to her children and herself" (Fultz 32).

2 "One school of thought assumes that Beloved is Sethe's dead child come to avenge itself on its mother, the child's murderer. The strong history of the baby ghost in the house, coupled with the strange appearance of a young lady, Beloved, makes the characters in the text and the reading public believe that the 'crawling-already baby' has returned in human form. Another school of thought assumes that Beloved is no kin to Sethe. This second reading seeks to defend itself against the more popular reading. The probable story, this latter school believes, is that Beloved is a captive from Africa who escapes from the hands of her sexually abusive captor, a white man, and she now 'mistakes' Sethe for her real mother who committed suicide by jumping into the sea from the slave ship's deck" (Osagie 425).

3 This information is taken from Winnicott's *The Family and Individual Development* (1965), of which the central topic "is the family and the development of social groups out of this first natural group" (Winnicott vii). Other works by Winnicott

are *The Child and the Family*, *The Child and the Outside World*, and *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment*.

## Chapter Two

1 See Gates (82), Clark (47), and Jones, “Reclaiming...” (156).

2 “West was born into the black bourgeoisie and has lived much of her life on Martha’s Vineyard, where *The Wedding* largely takes place. Although the novel reaches back five generations to the antebellum South and the Coles family’s interracial beginnings, the present is 1953, Oak Bluffs, a section of the island for wealthy vacationing blacks called The Oval in this text. West’s language and situations are constructed with an uneven mix of early twentieth-century concerns about passing, miscegenation, and the color line among blacks (Chesnutt’s ‘blue vein’ society is referred to more than once) with some speech more contemporary to the book’s 1995 publication date and accounts of physical brutality (Lute’s attacks on women) often left out of early twentieth-century African American fiction in the interests of decorum and ‘uplifting the race.’ West writes a novel of the genteel tradition with its concerns over shades of skin and acceptance of the long-standing stereotypes that accompany these, yet she publishes such a book in 1995 to general popular acclaim, somewhat due to her age and status as the last living and publishing author of the Harlem Renaissance. And she is a good storyteller with an opus spanning seventy years of African American fiction.” So popular was the novel that television mogul Oprah Winfrey produced the made-for-television movie version, which aired in the spring of 1998 and starred Hollywood’s top African American leading lady of film, Halle Berry. (Rayson 32)

3 “Her name, Pilate (Pilot), symbolizes her guidance” for other characters in the work, especially Milkman [(Ramey 104) (Bruck 293) (*Morrison 19*, 286) (Rubenstein 148)]. Her name also has more ominous Biblical references: Dixon: “Pilate’s name suggests the judgment of Christ and its attendant relinquishing or responsibility. But Morrison has depicted a positive, full, aggressively alive character who recalls the name’s near homonym, pilot: one who guides flight, directs it, takes charge” (29). However, she does not lead unless asked to do so. Allen: “Pilate takes on Christ-like attributes and, within the suggested meaning of the flying motif, may be viewed as a pilot” (31). Pilate’s healing, compassion, and wine-making certainly reflect Christ-like attributes. Fabre: “This woman with no navel has to be taken seriously. She also has literally to invent herself. Her many gifts as natural healer, skilled wine maker, singer, conjure woman and soothsayer, truth-giver, bear witness to the extent of the legacy of black womankind” (110). Fabre even refers to her as “messiah”: “Pilate has inherited the gift to fly—which, according to certain legends, was only given to those who knew the secret word. The absence of a navel isolates her, ensuring both fear and respect, but it also brings her close to the flying ancestor. It set her free from conventional relationships, free to define the values according to which she will live, to design a life of her own, and to interpret on her own terms and unequivocally the particular legacy of her people. It also designates her as a mythical outsider, a sort of messiah. It is through her that the oracle will speak” (110).

4 See Morrison, Toni (150-151); Ramey (104); Samuels and Hudson-Weems (76).

5 In “Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison’s Fiction,” Cynthia Davis criticizes Morrison’s depiction of Pilate Dead as such an indomitable force of womanhood who still “cannot pass on” her values to her daughter and granddaughter (340-1).

### Chapter Three

1 M. Marie Booth Foster refers to Chinese(-)American women in Amy Tan’s novels as “hyphenated” women, those living between cultures, in her essay “Voice, Mind, Self: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife*.”

2 Linda Chavez was Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate from Maryland in 1986; and editor of the award-winning magazine of the American Federation of Teachers, *American Educator*.

3 Winnie Louie and Helen Kwong both take on Americanized names when leaving China for the United States. Winnie is Jiang Weili and Helen is Hulan, formerly. However, the names Winnie and Helen are actually given by Jimmy Louie at their first meeting, long before either woman would actually need to use her new name.

### Chapter Four

1 In *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*, Michael Szalay supplies the following background information on the author: “Betty Smith was more than simply a progressive-minded reformer, and she was more than simply a New Deal liberal; she was a ‘client’ of the government throughout the thirties. Employed first by the Civil Works Administration in the early thirties, Smith was an ardent participant in the WPA’s Federal Theater Project from 1935 to 1937. If Smith was little like Katie Nolan, her first husband shared even less with Johnny Nolan. Smith’s once-liberal ex-husband George H.E. Smith had undergone a political conversion by the time his estranged wife wrote her first novel. Betty Smith was living hand to mouth in garrets finishing this novel in early 1943 as her husband set up the Republican Policy Committee in the U.S. Senate with Robert E. Taft” (186).

2 This text explores a complex and fascinating set of interrelated issues, establishing the significance of such wide-ranging subjects as:

1. re-mapping, re-naming and cultural crossings
2. migration and the re-negotiation of identities
3. the discourse of uprising and constructions of Empire
4. African women’s writing and resistance to domination
5. creativity, theorizing and critical rationality
6. gender, language and the politics of location. (*i*)

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## Vita

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