



T.C.

**ÇANAKKALE ONSEKİZ MART ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ**

BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI

**TRACING THE REPRESENTATIONS AND DISCOURSES OF
MOTHERHOOD AND MOTHER/DAUGHTER DYAD IN
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH WOMEN'S POETRY: WARSAN
SHIRE, JACKIE KAY AND ANN GRAY**

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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DR. ÖĞR. ÜYESİ ÖZLEM TÜRE ABACI

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ETİK BEYAN

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü Tez Yazım Kuralları' na uygun olarak hazırladığım bu tez çalışmasında; tez içinde sunduğum verileri, bilgileri ve dokümanları akademik ve etik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, tüm bilgi, belge, değerlendirme ve sonuçları bilimsel etik ve ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, tez çalışmasında yararlandığım eserlerin tümüne uygun atıfta bulunarak kaynak gösterdiğimi, kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir değişiklik yapmadığımı, bu tezde sunduğum çalışmanın özgün olduğunu, bildirir, aksi bir durumda aleyhime doğabilecek tüm hak kayıplarını kabullendiğimi taahhüt ve beyan ederim.

I hereby declare that all information in this master's thesis "Tracing the Representations and Discourses of Motherhood and Mother/Daughter Dyad in Contemporary British Women's Poetry: Warsan Shire, Jackie Kay and Ann Gray" has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Selenay YILDIRIM

14/06/2024

TEŞEKKÜR

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ÖZET

ÇAĞDAŞ BRİTANYALI KADIN ŞİİRİNDE ANNELİK VE ANNE/KIZ İLİŞKİSİ BETİMLEMELERİ: WARSAN SHIRE, JACKIE KAY VE ANN GRAY

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Bu tez annelik vasfının kadın kimliğine karşı idealize edilmesi, ‘gerçek’ anne kimliği, öz/üvey anne ikilemi ve anne-evlat rollerinin sorgulanması bağlamında Britanyalı çağdaş kadın şairlerin üç farklı şiir koleksiyonundaki annelik söylemleri ve anne-kız ilişkilerini incelemektedir. Warsan Shire’nin *Blessed the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022) isimli eseri, Jackie Kay’ın *The Adoption Papers* (1991) koleksiyonu ve Ann Gray’ın *I wish I Had More Mothers* (2018) kitabı kadınların kişisel tecrübelerini farklı şiirsel ses ve biçimler üzerinden yansıtarak geleneksel erkek egemen edebiyata ve annelik söylemlerine karşı çıkmakta ve bunları yeniden şekillendirmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Adrienne Rich’in *Kadından Doğma: Bir Deneyim ve Kurum Olarak Annelik* adlı eserinden ve alandaki diğer çağdaş tartışmalardan yola çıkarak, tezdeki her bir bölüm annelik kavramı, anne kimliği ve anne-kız ilişkisi konularını seçilmiş şiirlerdeki tematik ve yapısal çeşitlikler bağlamında tartışmıştır. Bu tez, yakın okuma tekniğini kullanarak, idealize edilmiş annelik tanımı, öz/üvey annelik kavramları üzerinden ‘gerçek’ anne kimliği tartışmaları ve anne-çocuk ilişkisindeki bakım etiği konularına çok boyutlu bir yaklaşım sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. İncelenen şiir koleksiyonlarındaki şiirsel dilin ve yapının anneliğin tasviri hakkında çeşitli bakış açıları sunması, ataerkil annelik söylemini sorgulaması ve geleneksel annelik rollerini eleştirip yeniden şekillendirmesi tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çağdaş Britanyalı Kadın Şiiri, Annelik, Anne-Kız İlişkisi, Öz/Üvey Annelik, Bakım Etiği, Ataerkil Annelik.

ABSTRACT

TRACING THE REPRESENTATIONS AND DISCOURSES OF MOTHERHOOD AND MOTHER/DAUGHTER DYAD IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH WOMEN'S POETRY: WARSAN SHIRE, JACKIE KAY AND ANN GRAY

Selenay YILDIRIM

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University

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This thesis explores the discourses of motherhood and the mother-daughter relationship in the context of the idealisation of maternal womanhood, the notion of the ‘real’ identity of the mother, the dichotomy of birth and adoptive motherhood, and deconstruction of maternal-filial roles in the works of three contemporary British women poets: Warsan Shire’s *Blessed the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022), Jackie Kay’s *The Adoption Papers* (1991) and Ann Gray’s *I wish I Had More Mothers* (2018). These poetry collections reflect subjective experiences of women through distinct poetic voices and styles, challenging and reshaping the traditionally male-centred literature and analysis of motherhood discourse. Drawing on Adrienne Rich’s seminal work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, and contemporary debates in the field, each chapter discusses the concept of motherhood, maternal identity, and mother-daughter relationship, analysing both thematic and structural variations in the selected poetry collections. Through a close reading of selected poems, this study aims to provide a multidimensional approach to the institution of idealised motherhood, a discussion on the ‘real’ identity of mother regarding the dichotomy of birth and adoptive motherhood, and the ethics of care in maternal-filial relationship. It contends that the poetic diction and form employed in these poetry collections under scrutiny offer a range of perspectives on the depiction of motherhood, challenge patriarchal discourses on motherhood and provide insight into the re-formation and deconstruction of conventional maternal roles.

Keywords: Contemporary British Women's Poetry, Motherhood, Mother-Daughter Dyad, Birth/Adoptive Motherhood, Ethics of Care, Patriarchal Motherhood.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“All human life on the planet is born of woman.” (Rich, 1986: 11)

Adrienne Rich’s preliminary work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), introduces a profound examination into the biological and socio-cultural dimensions of motherhood, followed by a large body of work on the discourse of motherhood and maternal identity. Throughout history, the concept of motherhood is subjected to the injunctions of ideology, politics, or religion, which exert patriarchal pressure over women and perpetuate patriarchal norms (Rye et al., 2018: 4). Focusing on the lack of female voice in literary works, Josephine Donovan stresses that literary canons formed by men to represent ‘images of women’ present an alien narrative by illustrating women as ‘other’ (1983: 211). Narratives dominated by a patriarchal perspective perceive women as merely objects serving to the interest of men and (un)intentionally disregard their existence, individuality, and self (212). Since the voices of women are veiled by male depictions, women’s literature provides a ground for the experiences of silenced females rather than their ‘ideal’ paternalistic representations. In that context, Souffrant posits that contemporary women’s poetry on motherhood confronts normative predictions and assumptions by articulating the under-or-misrepresented aspects (2009: 26). For Souffrant, contemporary women writers have used the concept of motherhood to underline the difficulty in reflecting the multidimensional physical and emotional burdens of mothering (27). Among those male-dominated misrepresentations, as Larrier argues, female narratives struggle to unveil the multidimensional aspects of motherhood both with its pains and privileges because the description of motherhood is and has historically been romanticised by the male writers with their limited perspectives (2005: 198, 202-3). Challenging the stereotypical normative narrations, the woman as a writer emerges as an important figure whose perspective is not constrained by limitations of male-centred representations and who becomes the new creator of meaning (Showalter, 1979: 216). In other words, the female writers and poets’ depictions of motherhood and mothering give voice to the oppressed, silenced, and misrepresented aspects of women’s identity in literature (Rye et al., 2018: 4).

By examining motherhood as “the key institution for the self-conscious definition that patriarchy made of itself,” Duplessis tries to clarify the idea that discourse on motherhood is both formed and imposed as the control mechanism by the patriarchal

ideology (1978: 10). These control mechanisms lead to the physical, sexual and psychological female subjugations and the categorisation of women, upon whose bodies “culturally homogenizing and universalizing ideals and standards” are practised (Hansen, 1997: 17). Through classifying women based on their marital or maternal statuses, male hegemony protects and assures its masculine power by creating social distinction and enmity among women. Hereby, the patriarchy guarantees its ideological pressure, enforcement, and transgenerational cycle of oppression, which Bode names as a “transmission that connect (sic.) a daughter’s future with a mother’s past” (2010: 290). According to Bode, the total submission of women concerning their marital and maternal identities directly ruins daughters’ statuses in the same male-dominated system. Hence, the narratives of contemporary women writers and poets thus play a significant role in constructing a renewed approach to female experience rather than accepting male-designed methodologies (Showalter, 1979: 218). Furthermore, the works produced by female writers can be considered “revolutionary” in that they demand women’s rights not only for themselves, but also for their daughters (Rich, 1986: 246).

In this regard, the poets under scrutiny in this thesis, Warsan Shire, Jackie Kay and Ann Gray, mirror the experiences of daughters, virgins, wives, mothers, childless mothers, adoptive mothers, or infirm mothers in opposition to the “stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history” in their collections (Showalter, 1979: 216). Exploring different dimensions of representations of motherhood and mother-daughter relationship, each poetry collection and poems under consideration challenges traditional discourses surrounding the idealisation of maternity and attempts to express the complexity of what motherhood means, how and why it is formed, reformed, and imposed on females in the patriarchal system.

Warsan Shire, a Somali-British poet, was born to refugee parents in Kenya in 1988, and then she migrated to the United Kingdom with her family at a very early age. Her first poetry pamphlet, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, was published in 2011 by one of the small publishing houses in the UK, flipped eye. As the inaugural Young Poet Laureate for London (2013), she proved her success as a poet with the publication of two poetry collections in 2015: *Her Blue Body* and *Our Men Do Not Belong to Us*. Warsan Shire’s latest and first full-length poetry collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022), was nominated for a number of important poetry awards and has subsequently gained considerable recognition. Shire’s main focus in her writing is primarily based on her

autobiographical experiences of being raised as a daughter in a first-generation immigrant and Muslim household in the United Kingdom. In addition, Warsan Shire's poetry portrays the representations of the 'voiceless' otherised people, particularly refugees, immigrants, women, daughters, racial, religious, ethnic minorities. According to Leetsch, Shire's poetry offers multifaceted analyses of traditional Somali society and female traumas by emphasising physical, sexual, and psychological harassments caused by racial and patriarchal ideology and practises (2021: 240, 241). Analysing Shire's poetry collections, Leetsch claims that the female voices in her poems successfully create mutual and communal alliance and empathy among women (242).

Jackie Kay's personal experience of adoption by a white Scottish couple and then being raised in a class-conscious society in Glasgow in the 60s and 70s, resonate throughout her poetry. Moreover, she was exposed to progressive ideologies and activism from an early age due to her adoptive parents' political involvement. With her first poetry collection, *The Adoption Papers* (1991), Kay established a distinctive voice in contemporary British poetry and continued to write about the complexities of identity, sense of belonging, family roots and human predicament thereafter. From 2016 to 2021, Kay was appointed as the Makar, the Poet Laureate of Scotland, and is currently Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University. Williams states that central motifs of identification and in-betweenness are the main issues in Kay's poetry, reflecting her personal life story (2020: 431). Due to being non-white Scottish-Nigerian woman in white-hegemonic Scottish society, Kay's poetry also discloses the concerns of non-white mixed-race women's history (433). The multiplicity of voices and the sequential structure in the collection build a deep, close relation with the reader, illustrating the process of identity formation and providing alternative narratives for the marginalised voices of the society.

Born in 1948 in Cambridge, Ann Gray is the contemporary British writer of several poetry collections such as *Painting Skin* (1995), *The Man I Was Promised* (2004) and *At the Gate* (2008). With a body of work spanning over years, she was awarded several poetry prizes and established herself as a poet for her exploration of themes such as memory, identity, intersections of female identity and familial relationships. Ann Gray is now the poet in residence at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens and co-director of the Bodmin Moor Poetry Festival. Gray's latest poems published in the collection, *I wish I Had More Mothers* (2018), portray an introspective and lyrical approach to a mother-daughter relationship,

having autobiographical traces from Gray's life, alongside the themes of decline in health, mortality, growth, and intricacies of familial dynamics. Liz Berry notes that the pamphlet consists of touching poems, illustrating bidirectional theme of having/losing the mother diagnosed with dementia from a daughter's perspective in a very kind, lyrical manner.

The introduction of the thesis is followed by the theoretical framework based on motherhood as a conceptual tool in relation to discourses such as matriarchy, son-preference, three-stage of domination of women, blood/other mother dichotomy, adoption, otherisation of childless women, the burden of care of an aged or ill parent, and the identity shift in the mother-daughter relationship. The poetic analysis sections after the theoretical background involve a close reading of the poems through recent theoretical discussions in gender studies, as well as an eclectic and a comparative approach to the stylistic, thematic, and formal innovations in the works of individual poets. The analytical chapters are divided into three sections, focusing on (1) the glorification of motherhood as a woman's 'ideal' role along with the physical, sexual and psychological harassment of females in patriarchal societies, (2) the discussion on the 'real' identity of mother in relation with the biological/adoptive mother dichotomy, (3) and in the final part to consider the daughter's role as the carer of the family, the shift in identity roles of mother-daughter and its effects on their relationship. Regarding the thematic propositions discussed in the poems, the comparative analysis of the patriarchal imposition of motherhood in Shire's *Blessed the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022), the dichotomy of blood/other mother Kay's *The Adoption Papers* (1991), and the 'filial transition' in mother-daughter identity in Gray's *I Wish I Had More Mothers* (2018) disclose both conventional and unconventional depictions of motherhood and problematize the 'real' identity of mother.

The theoretical framework on motherhood studies depends largely on Adrienne Rich's arguments of motherhood and mother-daughter relationships from her book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, which plays an essential role in analysing the institution of motherhood, mother-child relationship, the taboo of childlessness, and the patriarchal discourses taking hold of female individuality under so-called male supremacy. Yet, this thesis has a more eclectic approach to the concept of motherhood and mother-daughter dyad and employs various concepts from these frameworks to create a balance between theory and poetic analysis. Depending mainly on Rich's discussions, it also employs concepts from recent scholarship revolving around

themes such as idealisation, social recognition and acceptance of women through motherhood, the birth-adoptive mother concepts and subversive mother-daughter relationship.

Chapter Two examines Warsan Shire's collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022) by a focus on the experiences of refugees and immigrants, Muslim and Black women, mothers, daughters, and teenage girls through autobiographical traces from Shire's life. The collection presents a female poetic persona who tries to find her 'escape' from the marginalization, oppression, norms and customs of the patrimony to her own self and womanhood. The collection deserves an analytical approach for representing motherhood and mother-daughter relationship in the crux of female subjugation, otherization, and objectification within the benchmarks of male-centred social structures. Focusing on how the mothers and daughters are acknowledged and positioned by the socio-cultural system, the collection conceptualises the domination over women, son-preference, male supremacy, expatriation from patriarchy and mother-daughter relationship affected by the imposed male dominance and shaped by tradition and religion through a poetic voice reflecting the experiences of adolescent girls and Muslim mothers.

Chapter Three focuses on Jackie Kay's seminal work, *The Adoption Papers* (1991), revolving around the argument over the identity of mother through the representation of biological and adoptive motherhood. Corresponding to Kay's personal experiences as an adoptive child, the poetry collection is narrated by the birth mother, adoptive mother and daughter in intersecting parts, displaying their experiences, feelings and perspectives about the discourse of adoption. While the patriarchal and conventional society dignifies motherhood and degrades the (in)voluntarily childless woman, Jackie Kay's collection enables a questioning of the normative importance of blood tie and biological relatedness in contrast to the emotional mother-child affinity through social mothering. The analysis of the poems will centre around how Kay problematizes the dichotomy of birth and adoptive motherhood by discussing the so-called esteem and decency of the birthmother and the condemnation and defectiveness of the adoptive mother. The biological mother's choice of abandoning the baby after birth and the adoptive mother's celebration and joy of motherhood are juxtaposed to explore if the blood tie still prevails in establishing an intimate mutual mother-child attachment and to understand if the child-mother connection is recuperated after a process of loss (baby abandonment).

Chapter Four analyses *I wish I Had More Mothers* (2018) by Ann Gray in the scope of the ebbs and flows in the mother-daughter relationship following the deconstruction of conventional mother identity and common mother daughter relationship built on the carer/cared dichotomy due to a chronic illness – dementia. The stratification of the mother as the carer in the family shifts due to the mother's physical and mental decline, where the daughter has to take the caregiver position, questioning the conventional presumptions of motherhood. Throughout the caregiving process, the carer daughter reaches maturity in appreciating the mother figure as an independent subject without her 'mother' identity. The collection also unveils the shifts in identity roles, responsibilities, socio-cultural normative prescriptions of both mother and daughter regarding the carer/cared binary opposition, the physical and emotional burden of care and woman's socially accepted role as the primary carer of the family.

The thesis offers an insight into the representations of motherhood in contemporary British women's poetry by questioning its cultural construction in contemporary societies and discussing the concepts of idealisation of motherhood, matriarchy, domination of women under patriarchy, genetic connection, adoption, and mother-daughter relationship in the works of three female poets. The major importance of this thesis is its aim of searching through recent scholarship in motherhood studies and examining contemporary representations of motherhood, matriarchy/patriarchy dichotomy, adoption discourse mother-daughter dyad, and totalising and essentialist belief that mothers are the primary caregivers in families. Another contribution of the thesis is its effort to bring together distinctive female voices from contemporary British poetry to explore how women's poetry challenges the normative descriptions of motherhood and maternal identity through a comparative and analytical lens.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study examines the institution of idealised motherhood and challenging representations of the mother-daughter relationship in contemporary poetic discourse, with the aim of exploring multifaceted engagements with these themes and formal devices. In this respect, the theoretical and conceptual framework provides a significant body of work for the thesis to consider the social and cultural discourse surrounding motherhood studies, maternal identity and the perpetuation of female subjugation through maternity. Patriarchal myths and perceptions shaped by tradition, culture, or religion influence the political spectrum of women's identity, constraining their roles to wifedom or motherhood. In "Female Sexual Slavery: Understanding the International Dimensions of Women's Oppression," Kathleen Barry discusses that patriarchal family structure "render women and children property of the male head of household. [...] Every culture maintains values and practices which reinforce ... male domination and protect men's free exercise of power in the home" (1981: 48). In the male-centred social structures, the social acceptance and recognition of women are limited to her obedience, capacity of childbearing and mothering abilities. Since the patriarchy glorifies the identity of motherhood and its practises that suppress women's individuality and agency, women are subjected to categorisation and marginalisation based on marital status, virginity, quantity or gender of children, and mothering ability.

Based on Adrienne Rich's arguments in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, this theoretical framework of the study is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the glorification of motherhood as an ideal aspect of womanhood and disapproval of (in)voluntarily childless women with an exploration of the concepts of Rich's "institutional motherhood," Jasodhara Bagchi's "son-preference" and Elaine T. Hansen's "patriarchal-self-sacrificial mother." Besides, the outcomes of the patriarchal impositions on motherhood and mother-daughter dyad will be conceptualised through Marianne Hirsch's "double self" and "deathbed" metaphors and Judith Gardiner's "dying mothers" argument. In the second part, the main discussion will focus on the 'real' identity of the mother in relation to the biological/adoptive mother dichotomy exploring Maura Kelly's "voluntarily, involuntarily and temporarily childless," "blood/othermother" by Patricia Hill Collins, "social, gestational and biological motherhood" by Helena Ragoné, and the "mock mother"

by Magdalene Redekop. The last section will undertake a gender-based analysis of the daughter's role as the primary caregiver, exploring shifts in identity and roles within the mother-daughter dynamic and its effects on the relationship through the "filial crisis, transition, and maturity" by Maggie L. Cecchin and JoAnn Perry's arguments.

2.1. Maternal Womanhood as Women's Social Role and Identity

The socially and religiously sanctioned options for the acceptance of women within the patriarchal social structures are either through marriage and childbearing or the state of being single and virgin. Female sexual intimacy before matrimony and out-of-wedlock pregnancy are, therefore, neither approved nor qualified ways for having a child. The unmarried woman with a baby could not even be accepted or given a social status within the society owing to the fact that she is condemned for extramarital sexual encounters and pregnancy. In *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (2007), Margaret U. Walker states that "true womanhood characterized chastity, modesty, delicacy, frailty, and spirituality as 'women's' true or proper nature" (168). Through the idealised 'proper' woman stereotype, sexual independence or intimacy before marriage is not accredited, particularly to a woman, but "sexual morality [especially female virginity] is aimed exclusively at women, who are always blamed for any lapse" (Hirsi Ali, 2008: 39). In the male-designed social system, women confront patriarchal perceptions of maternal figure and 'ideal' woman-wife-mother archetype that dominates woman's sexuality and induces woman's otherness, which is dominated and manipulated in the system (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 105).

Considering the patriarchal ideologies, the marital state, sexuality and virginity of a woman are other criteria for her social approval. The conventional ideals of womanhood and motherhood are largely defined by discourses around women's chastity, performance in the domestic space or caregiving abilities. As Kathleen Barry underlines, female sexuality is constrained and controlled by a set of moral rules and value judgments:

woman's or girl's value is her virginity before marriage and fidelity afterward. Virginity is ostensibly what is purchased by the family of a husband with dowry or is sold by the family of the bride-to-be; it is preserved and protected by the girl's family through genital mutilation or veiling and seclusion. These practices serve to separate women from their bodies as well as from the world. (1981: 49-50)

Social pressure and stigmatisation based on women's bodies and sexuality serve to reinforce and perpetuate the conventional belief that their abstinence is linked to family honour. Moreover, as Rich argues, the "identification of women primarily as 'sexual beings whose responsibility is the sexual service of men'" causes the alienation from the self and body (Barry, 1979: 121 as cited in Rich, 1980: 644). Jasodhara Bagchi further discusses a "three-stage model of socially accepted domination of women under patriarchy" in which women are expected to submit to paternal rule before marriage, to accept their husbands' control in matrimony and son's authority as they age (2017: xxiii). In other words, male control is positioned at the centre of her personal life, concealing or suppressing her individuality, sexuality and independence. Selma Sevenhuijsen, echoing Bagchi, comments on the othering and objectification of women through her argument about the "non-citizenship of women" who could not officially be recognised as a subject having an agency, but controlled under male supremacy (1992: 168). As a result of this power relationship, women are physically controlled and sexually and psychologically exploited.

The emphasis on female abstinence and control on female sexuality re-establish the masculine oppression over women's bodies as men's sexuality is seen as an "empowering action of symbolic and physical importance," where the masculinity and his identity as the "competent sexual actor" is verified (Holland et al., 2000: 230). Moreover, in relation to Barry's "sexual domination perspective," Rich discusses that female sexual abuse is perceived as normal and women's bodies are objectified to the extent, they serve the male gaze and desire (1980: 644). In comparison with the morally and sexually controlled female body, the dichotomies of being a married or divorced woman or a woman with or without children define a woman's position in patriarchal cultures. The basic premise of the inferiority of divorced woman is attached to the belief that the divorced women are unconventional, divergent from the society, or less decent (Arditti and Nancy, 2005: 148). The divorced woman with/out child is also stigmatised for her failure in pursuing a successful marriage since marriage is seen as the moral standard. Alongside Bagchi's "three-stage model of domination of women under patriarchy," the oppression of woman could be traced in the multifaceted discourses around matrimony and motherhood (Ganong and Marilyn, 1995: 496). The utmost importance attached to the sanctity of marriage induces the classification of woman based on her marital status and capacity of wifeness in addition to her motherhood. Including the marital classification, women feel compelled to endure the hardships or sacrifice their individuality to attain the status of 'ideal' woman and to retain

the custody of their children. As Sevenhuijsen stresses, “[a]n unmarried mother could have a legal family tie with her child but only if she had established a legal ‘recognition’” (1992: 168), constraining women’s inclusion in the decision-making processes outside of the marital context. Therefore, women are presented with the dilemma of prioritizing their marital life and caregiving responsibilities over their authenticity, individuality, intellectual or personal growth.

The idealised maternal womanhood and the categorisation of women into ‘mothers’ and ‘non-mothers’ are closely linked with the discourses and practices of motherhood in most societies. Elaine Tuttle Hansen discusses the ‘good mother’ stereotype along with the discussion of ‘self-sacrificial’ and ‘patriarchal motherhood’ underlining that a ‘good mother,’ who (un)willingly disowns her desire or sacrifices something she has for the good of another, is an example for the construction of patriarchal ‘wisdom’ to have control over women (1997: 23-24). The idealised good woman is a self-sacrificing ‘mother’ along with a number of personality traits such as being “supremely virtuous, pious, tender, and understanding” and “an example of virtue and faith” (Bloch, 1978: 100, 106). Besides, Josephine Donovan argues that the stereotypical depictions of women in literature “define the woman insofar as she relates to, serves, or thwarts the interest of men” (1989: 213). Disregarding the subjectivity of women, the ‘good/ideal’ woman image shaped by the patriarchal ideologies and perceptions institutionalise female ideals and imprison women between the wife-status and maternal womanhood, turning escape from home or divorce into a taboo—a symbol of female insufficiency.

The concept of maternal womanhood and its related functions place significant pressure on women to be fertile, to ensure the continuity of male lineage, particularly by bearing a son. The sons, seen as the natural inheritors of family legacy, might open the way for social acceptance for mothers in strictly male-dominated families. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich points out that the father demands sons because a son is seen as the father’s “second birth,” an extension of patriarchal figure in the family (227). The overvaluation of boy-child and female infanticide lead to a “wish for boys rather than face the prospect of nine months of pregnancy whose outcome would be treated as a waste product. [...] a mother may instinctively place more value – let us say more hope – on a son” (195). The ‘good/ideal’ women are mothers, particularly mothers of

sons, who succeed in bearing a boy-child owing to the fact that the acceptance and insertion of woman in the role of mother evolves into the childbearing of sons rather than daughters.

In *Interrogating Motherhood* (2017) by Jasodhara Bagchi, the mother's preference of son over daughters and marginalisation of the daughter figure in patriarchal households is explored through the concept of "son-preference" defining a woman's value in the family based on "the expectation of perpetuating the patrilineal clan by producing a son" (xxiii). Similarly, Chielozone Eze argues that the relationship between 'son-preference' of mothers and their social appreciation within the patriarchal system is analogous to the male/female binary oppositions in the family unit: "[t]he more male heirs the more secure a woman is in her husband's home. [Sons are] the legitimate heirs to their fathers, any woman who does not give birth to a son is considered a guest in her own home" (2016: 58). In the context of male hegemony and "son-preference," the boy-child conventionally and socio-culturally secures the social visibility, status, and acceptance of the mother within society on the basis of her fertility capacity; hence, the mother (un)consciously desires to have sons rather than daughters so as not to be blamed for disability or inefficiency. Consequently, the 'son-preference' enables men to subdue women under the superiority of manhood and predominant patriarchal structures; thus, the praise of mother becomes mainly associated with her fertility, the competence of producing sons, if not, women are otherized, notwithstanding the capacity to produce female offspring.

While the male hegemony over the female body and sexuality legitimises the 'son-preference', the mother with a daughter is otherised. Mothers with only daughters are viewed as 'failures' at reproducing a male heir for the man's genealogy and lose their social visibility, respect, and inclusion. Regarding the arguments about 'son-preference' of mothers, Susie Kilshaw states that as social "value and security comes with being the mother of sons," women might feel a greater sense of responsibility to have male progeny over daughters (2020: 65, 64). The value judgments in male-dominated households devalue the presence of daughters and impose a similar fate in their prospective lives as their mothers. Contrary to the father-son relationship established on kinship permanence, the relationship between a mother and a daughter and their mutual identification are based on the acceptance of female inferiority and male supremacy. According to Marianne Hirsch, "mothers identify more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves, whereas they encourage boys to become separate and autonomous [...] [and] the mother projects

upon her daughter her own ambivalence about being female in patriarchal culture” (1981b: 206). Daughters as the same-sex counterparts of the mothers mirror the mother figure and become prone to bury their own identity and individuality.

Patricia Hill Collins (1994) discusses that daughters as the ‘apprentice’ of mothers “are told that their lives cannot be complete without a male partner, and that their educational and career aspirations must always be subordinated to their family obligations” (57). Owing to the male-designed ideologies of the maternal figure, mothers (un)consciously internalise ‘female inferiority’ and pass down the requirements and expectations of the patriarchal culture. In “Deconstructing virginity,” Holland et al. name this internalisation of so-called female inferiority and male supremacy as “male-in-the-head” noting that “the surveillance power of heterosexuality [...] make[s] masculinity powerful” (2000: 222). Considering the mother-daughter relationship shaped by a male-centred value system, Marianne Hirsch posits that “[e]go boundaries between mothers and daughters are more fluid, more undefined” through which the daughter loses her true identity that induces the problem of “double self” (1981b: 206). Daughters as the ‘apprentices’ of the patriarchal mothers become reliant on the presence of their mothers, yet they internally desire for liberation from patriarchal system so as to have subjectivity, independence and self-sufficiency. Hirsch theorises the flight of daughters both from the patriarchal mother and male-centred systems through conceptualising the “deathbed” image, which could be defined as “mother’s admonitions ... a fixed point which determines the heroine’s subsequent development” are metaphorically killed by the daughters themselves (1981a: 73). The daughters in the system try to escape from home and their patriarchal mothers who enforce maternal womanhood on them and transmit female inferiority from one generation to another. The figurative ‘death’ of those patriarchal mothers provides daughters to achieve their true self. Similarly, Judith Gardiner writes that the daughter’s “attempt to form a separate identity is also impeded because she must learn what having a female body means in her society ... [which] are considered appropriate for her and the social roles that she will be expected to fulfil” (1978: 148). Articulating Hirsch’s “double self,” Gardiner posits the notion of “dying mothers”, arguing that the son kills his father so as to succeed to gain power in the Oedipus myth; yet the daughter’s murder of the mother figure is merely for liberation from patriarchal social structure in the new woman’s myth, where “the reconciliations of the maternal deathbed scene allow them at least fleetingly to feel themselves and their mothers as interdependent, yet separate, persons” (1978: 146, 148). Building upon Marianne Hirsch and Judith

Gardiner's discussions on mutual identification and mother-daughter relationship as a maternal heritage confirm that daughters are not only held in contempt by patriarchy and its cultural practises, stressing feminine incapacity of genealogy continuity, but also by the 'patriarchal mother' who dictates the female inferiority, submission, objectification for the sake of male-designed expectations and satisfaction.

2.2. Questioning the Real Identity of Mother: The Biological/Adoptive Mother Dichotomy

Women's stigmatisation on the basis of their sexual and moral choices is extended to their reproductive potential and performance in caregiving. Along with the mother of daughters, the (in)voluntarily childless women are classified as incompetent and deviant, as they threaten the image of maternal femininity and accepted norms of motherhood. The married woman without a child is overlooked and blamed for infertility no matter if she fulfils social, cultural, and moral expectations. In the chapter "Motherhood and Daughterhood" in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich primarily comments on the term 'childless' underlining that "terms like 'unchilded,' 'childless,' or 'childfree'; we have no familiar, ready-made name for a woman who defines herself, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is self-identified, who has chosen herself" (1986: 249). All these terms used to describe the childless state of women in married life disregard female agency and control over their own bodies. Moreover, Rich argues the deleterious image of childless women in the male-centred system "as embodiments of the great threat to male hegemony: the woman who is not tied to the family, who is disloyal to the law of heterosexual pairing and bearing" (1986: 252). Similarly, Juliana M. Nfah-Abbenyi points out that women being voluntarily or involuntarily childless may not attain social status and acceptance and are deemed "inappropriate Others" (1997: 106). Such a choice results in discriminatory or exclusionary practices, which in turn perpetuate moral hierarchies among women regarding their social status and respect.

The patriarchal system shapes the masculine dominion over femininity by the objectification of the female body and the idealisation of motherhood as the ultimate goal of women in matrimony. The biological complications preventing reproduction or causing miscarriage result in psychological issues such as shame, guilt, or inadequacy whereas man is favoured and protected from all concerns. Adrienne Rich discusses that the "'childless woman' and the 'mother' are a false polarity, which has served the institutions both of

motherhood and heterosexuality” (1986: 250), yet the concept of childlessness is acknowledged as the social testimony imposing the idea that women’s self-realisation depends mainly on becoming a mother (Gerber-Epstein et al., 2008: 16). In “Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation,” Iris Marion Young further notes that pregnancy and childbearing could provide social appreciation and acceptance for women (1984: 52). Patricia DiQuinzio explores the ways in which women deconstruct the myth of maternal femininity and contemplate the potential implications of having or not having a child in *The Impossibility of Motherhood* (1999):

Some women do not want to be mothers and never do so; some women do not want to become mothers but nonetheless do; some women want to be mothers but are unable to do so for a variety of reasons; some women find great satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in mothering; some women become mothers in circumstances that prevent their experiencing such satisfaction in mothering; and some women regret having become mothers. (viii)

There are such diverse biological circumstances or personal reasons for (un)willing childlessness that the universalising patriarchal perception of it as female failure cannot be justified. Maura Kelly clearly elaborates on the concept of childlessness, the “voluntarily childless” people are substandard to the “temporarily childless” ones who have no child but could have one in the future and to the “involuntarily childless” that are incapable due to infertility problems (2009: 157). It can be stated from the discussion of Kelly that the (in)voluntary childlessness undoubtedly affects the inclusion of women and standardises the fertility as a social and religious criterion. Therefore, childlessness becomes “a social event as well as a biological one” which induces the stigmatisation of woman and loss of social status. (Layne, 2015: 76). Within the margins of patriarchal cultural imperatives, women might be self-critical of their infertility or miscarriage and experience alienation and a crisis of identity.

Considering the arguments of (in)voluntary and temporary childlessness, the patriarchal cultural imperatives impose biological motherhood as a part of women’s true identity. In contrast to the biological significance of maternity, adoption serves as a solution to the marginalised childless woman with the purpose of overcoming her prescribed incapacity. On the one hand, there are biological mothers who abandon children for social, economic, personal, or psychological issues; on the other hand, non-biological mothers adopt

children and try to practise mothering. From this dichotomy between the biological and non-biological mothers, the 'real' identity of the mother is doubted due to the fact that maternity cannot be restricted to pregnancy or childbearing, but mothering practises should also be considered outside of the genetic context.

The notion of the idealised maternal image tied to the biological motherhood defies the absolute approval of woman as a mother and 'proper mothering' as a social construct. In addition to the arguments about the social status of son-mothers and daughter-mothers, biological and non-biological motherhood puts the 'true' identity of the mother into question. According to Hansen, "[w]omen are pitted against each other in a competition for the scarce commodity that proves their fertility and, indirectly, their heterosexual activity and availability. The 'good' mother is positioned so that she stands in opposition to a quintessentially 'bad' mother" (1997: 23). The hierarchical categorisation of women as 'good' and 'bad' is called into question by Hansen, stating that "'mother's' position or identity depends on the presence of the child to whom the maternal figure gives birth, nurturance, protection, and so on" (19-20). In the same vein, Sara Ruddick expresses in the article "Maternal Thinking" that "mothers are usually socially rewarded for their work" (1980: 344). The maternal identity of a woman or the categorisation of as 'good' or 'bad' mothers are compounded with mothering practises. The 'good' mother, in that context, is not only the biological mother, but the mother who also practises maternal functions. Adrienne Rich criticises the 'bad' mother image in association with non-biological motherhood that "[m]any of great mothers have not been biological" (1986: 252). Despite the fact that biological maternity is overvalued as the 'true' source of woman's identity, maternity is a blending of biological fertility and mothering practises.

The ramifications of motherhood extend beyond pregnancy and childbirth and include the postpartum process such as breastfeeding, nurturing, physical and emotional care of the child, which "involves dynamic activity and always evolving relationships" between the mother and the child (Arendell, 2000: 1192). When mothering practises are included within the definition of 'ideal' motherhood, the concept and the 'real' identity of mother evolves from one-dimensional perception based on pregnancy/childbirth and biological link into a more compound and multi-layered understanding in relation with the argument of maternal bonding. The unmarried and divorced mothers could be constrained to leave the baby because of unemployment, absence of a partner, familial disapproval, or social

discrimination, predominantly so as to be welcomed both by the family and society, whereas the childless couples consider adoption for gaining social acceptance and status through the agency of motherhood. Barbara K. Rothman approaches the process of adoption from diverse angles, underlining both the negative and positive outcomes of the adoption process:

[f]or an infertile woman or couple, adoption is a route to parenthood. For a birth mother, adoption is a way to solve an unwanted pregnancy, or to provide care for a child she cannot raise herself. For a child, adoption is survival. It is parents, a family, a place in the world. (1989: 135-136)

The birth mother who is stigmatised for her out-of-wedlock pregnancy could regain her social status through ‘disposing’ of the child, and the involuntary childless woman can acquire social acceptance through adoption and fulfilling the role of surrogate motherhood. In that context, it can be concluded that women struggle throughout their lives to meet the expectations of the society, and having a child does not assure social visibility. Therefore, woman with a child should not constantly be interpreted as a ‘mother’ because the mother is not only the one who is the biological bearer of the child but also supposed to have a maternal bonding after birth, and when adoption becomes an option for biologically infertile couples, it creates “confusion about what constitutes real biological kinship, and has challenged fundamental cultural assumptions” (Miall and Karen, 2003: 8). The essential point to discuss the ‘real’ identity of mother, hence, is going beyond the biological implications of motherhood and discovering the performative practice of nurturing (Hirsch, 1981b: 220).

The adoption concept and the adoptive mother figure challenge the established norms, customs, or traditions reforming the elemental and general normative expectations and presumptions. Contrasting the conventional perspectives of the gender debate, Barbara K. Rothman draws attention to the emotional tie and affinity between the mother and the child stating that “[t]he maternal tie is based on the growing of children” (1989: 34). Along the same lines, Hansen emphasises Sara Ruddick’s redefinition of mothering that “to be a ‘mother’ is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one’s working life” (1997: 4). In other words, the ideal motherhood is not only related to the biological tie gained through pregnancy or childbirth, but a process of becoming and developing a sense of interdependence. For instance, the ‘adoptive mother’ secures her social position within the society through adoption, which enables her to practise motherhood underlining her mothering capacity. Patricia Hill Collins introduces the

concepts of ‘bloodmothers’ and ‘othermothers’ regarding childcare and motherhood in the chapter “Black Women and Motherhood” (2005: 149). The ‘othermother’ is described to be essential not only in “supporting children but also in helping bloodmothers who, for whatever reason, lack the preparation or desire for motherhood” (2005: 154). Under some circumstances when the bloodmother requires help for childcare or completely abandons the child, the ‘othermother’ assumes the role of a biological mother. Collins describes the children fostered by the ‘othermothers’ as follows:

Children orphaned by sale or death of their parents under slavery, children conceived through rape, children of young mothers, children born into extreme poverty or to alcoholic or drug-addicted mothers, or children who for other reasons cannot remain with their bloodmothers have all been supported by othermothers. (2005: 154)

Despite the fact that the ‘bloodmother’ has a blood tie with the child, the ‘othermother’ practises the maternal functions, and the mother-child relationship is developed outside the imposed biological necessities. Correspondingly, Helena Ragoné introduces the concepts of “social motherhood,” “gestational motherhood” and “biological motherhood” to underline the ever-shifting nature of maternal identity “combining both the social and biological aspects” (1997: 12). In *Surrogate Motherhood: Conception in the Heart* (2019), Ragone articulates these three categories such as (1) the biological mother who provides the ovum; (2) the gestational mother who carries the embryo without having any blood tie; and (3) the social mother who practises nurturing (131). While the biological motherhood emphasises the real kin, blood tie and genetic link between a mother and a child, ‘social motherhood’ alters the “centrality of biogenetic relatedness,” stressing the maternal bond and the possibility of fictive kin, social tie and constructed non-hereditary link via adoption (117). Since the ‘real’ identity of mother is not utterly entrenched in childbirth, it can be assured that “[p]arenthood is a social relationship, not a genetic connection” (Rothman, 1989: 126).

Regarding the discussions of Collins and Ragoné, the biological and social aspects of motherhood, adoption and mothering modify the prescriptive maternal image. In this respect, Magdalene Redekop promotes the notion of “mock mother” in her book *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro* (2014). According to Redekop, the mock mother is a “composite figure ... [who] is constructed as a result of the impossibility of picturing the ‘real’ mother” (4). The biological blood tie between the mother and the child cannot determine the mother’s identity because mothering or maternal qualities are not

ascribed to only biological mothers. From that perspective, the “mock mother” might be discovered in many sub-forms providing care and practicing maternal roles (Redekop, 1992, as cited in Hansen, 1997: 14). Referencing Ruddick’s argument, it is concluded that the maternal tie and the attachment between mother and child are not limited to the genetic or blood connection, but motherhood is an aggregate concept containing both biological and social aspects of maternity which are embodied through nurturing and caring for the child. Therefore, the definition of mother’s ‘real’ identity and the idealised motherhood cannot be specific or constant, and the social status of woman under the title of ‘mother’ could be (re)constructed by discussing the concept of ‘real identity’ of the maternal figure and destabilising the dichotomy of biological and adoptive motherhood.

2.3. The Ethics of Care and Shifting Roles of Mothers and Daughters as Caregivers

The discrimination of women based on normative gender expectations are challenged by the compound of motherhood –*biological, social, and adoptive*. Overlooking the biological tie, the mother becomes the one who complies with the maternal functions such as nurture, childcare, or parenting. Parental care has been mostly assigned to mothers, yet these roles might shift when the parents experience physical disabilities, mental disorders, or psychological problems or when they are totally absent. The child who needs the care of parents to form an identity turns into the carer of ill parents, leading to a questioning of the normative expectations of motherhood and the dependency of the child on the presence of the carer. Through the lens of Maggie L. Cecchin’s concepts of “filial crisis,” “filial transition” and “filial maturity” and JoAnn Perry’s 3 R’s – “(re)calling,” “(re)learning,” and “(re)adjusting” in caring for mothers with dementia, the normative identities and roles within the mother-child relationship based on the carer/cared dichotomy are questioned and recast.

For birth mothers, the mother-child affection starts from pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding, on the other hand, the adoptive mother can develop the mutual connection through parenting, love and caring. Whether it is biological or social, there is a mutual recognition and relationship between the mother and the child. Adrienne Rich mentions an anecdote from her own motherhood experiences to argue the mutual relationship between mother and the child that “I realized each of us was fastened to the other, not only by mouth and breast, but through our mutual gaze: the depth, calm, passion, of that dark blue, maturely focused look” (1986: 31). From the very beginning, the mother-child affection is established

on the mother/carer and the child/cared binary opposition, placing the mother in a position of the eternal primary carer. However, the mutual relationship between mother and child is not stable but fluid, “involved in a continually changing dialogue” (36). Some physical dysfunctions, neurologic disorders, neurosis, or psychosis of the parents, especially mother as the primary caregiver of the child, demand an identity shift between carer/mother and cared/child roles. Goldsteen et al. stress the responsibility of caring as an integral aspect of motherhood, redefining the filial attachment to the mother:

caring is described as something parents do for their children. It is part of the identity of a parent that he or she cares for the child; this responsibility is embedded in the relationship that exists between them. For this woman it is hard to see this change; to accept that as a daughter she must now take the role of a parent. She does not see it as a ‘normal’ part of the identity of a child to care for her parents. (2007: 8-9)

When a child becomes the ‘carer’ rather than the one who is being cared for, there is a shift in her/his roles and responsibilities, and the prescriptive mother-child affection becomes a matter for debate. It could be posited for both the mother and the child that the identity and role switch is not easy to see, accept, and internalise due to reversal of roles and emergence of new familial dynamics (6). The shifting dynamics in parent and child relationships usually initiate a caregiving duty for the daughters. Through a gender-based analysis of the concept of care, daughters are often deemed responsible for the caring of their aging, physically, or mentally incapable parents after the mother figure in the family. Bhambhani and Anand contend that daughters are “socialized from their childhood to be future nurturers. Looking after their siblings, they imbibe the characteristics of taking up responsibility for others with utmost care, empathy and love” (2018: 171) and from their early childhood are considered as the future ‘mother’ – the carer – of the family to be present as the parents are aging (Kilshaw, 2020: 67). In other words, being a daughter necessitates personal sacrifice and loss of individuality to inherit the role of ‘carer’ in the family, leading to a shift in allocation of domestic roles and dynamics of mother-daughter relationship.

Maggie L. Cecchin exemplifies the compulsory role shift in mother-daughter relationship centring her arguments around the effects of dementia through the concepts of “filial crisis,” “filial transition” and “filial maturity.” According to Cecchin, the “[a]cceptance of change in adult mother-daughter roles and relationships as being as natural as change in mother-infant relationship, provides a pathway for the filial crisis,” revealing

the collapse of fundamental binary opposition of mother as the primary carer – the child as the receiver of care (2001: 105). This crisis leads to a “filial transition” that is the acceptance of “the necessary alteration in generational roles, as opposed to role reversal”, and the “[f]ilial maturity enables a daughter to perceive her mother as a person in her own right, with her needs and limitations, life experience, and history beyond that of her mothering role” (105). The notion that the mother is the ‘primary caregiver’ of the child is deconstructed due to the shifting social roles, responsibilities and expectations resulting from illnesses. Such a change leads to the recognition and empathy with the mother as an individual, not the primary caregiver. At first, the daughter may doubt both ‘daughter/mother’ and ‘cared/carer’ divisions in relation to how normative expectations shape her carer identity. Thereafter, the daughter experiences the filial transition with a constrained embrace of the role reversal in her mutual relationship with the mother. Thus, the daughter consents to role-switching with her mother from the fixed social roles assigning both parties the caring tasks as the parent grows old or suffers from a chronic illness.

In the same vein, JoAnn Perry (2004) elucidates the three ‘R’ stages in mother-daughter relationship due to the dementia that “daughters mastered in giving care are (re)calling, (re)learning, and (re)adjusting, [...] essentially deconstructed their relationships with their mothers by unpacking their understandings of who their mothers were and what their relationships had been, and then rebuilt new understandings” (56). According to Perry, daughters in the stage “(re)calling” witness some changes in mothers’ cognitive abilities or behaviours and recognize their need for care (58). This stage is in contrast to the memories about the healthy mother and traditional mother/carer and daughter/cared dichotomy. In the “(re)learning” stage, daughters “(re)learn who their mother had been, who their mother currently was, and how to ‘be’ with the mother and look after her in acceptable ways in private and in public” (59). As a result of developing an increased sense of empathy towards the ill parent, daughters try to understand the situation and concentrate on the mother’s emotional and physical needs (61). After experiencing the change in mother-daughter dyad and learning how to care for a mother diagnosed with dementia, the daughters ‘(re)adjust’ their lives, perspectives, sensibility that creates both empathy and sympathy for mentally declined and indigent mother figure. The internalization of role transition and readjustment allows the daughter to acknowledge the reversed roles and their individual subjectivities in the process of adopting the carer role, particularly her mother’s individuality in opposition to the ‘primary caregiver’ label of mother.

CHAPTER THREE

PATRIARCHAL MOTHERHOOD AND DIVERGENT DAUGHTERS IN WARSAN SHIRE'S *BLESS THE DAUGHTER RAISED BY A VOICE IN HER HEAD* (2022)

Warsan Shire's first full-length poetry collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022), portrays the experiences of Muslim and Black refugee women residing in the United Kingdom who are oppressed and otherised by the practices of the patriarchy. The poetry collection introduces a female poetic persona, an unmarried daughter, who questions the conventional roles and normative expectations of the society regarding the idealised depictions of wifehood and motherhood. The speaker seeks to understand the reasons behind the imposed dichotomy between genders, the internalised fragility and obedience among mothers, and denounces the established system that perpetuates female subjugation and compels mothers and daughters to remain silent against male hegemony. The maternal figure in the collection embodies the disposition of patriarchy by sustaining its practises through the instruction of her daughters. As one of these daughters, the persona questions the idealisation of wife/motherhood under male-centred authority and the internalised submission of mothers in patriarchal households. The speaker urges oppressed women, particularly mother figures, to take action and resist the patriarchal social norms and systematic abuse. In this respect, Shire's collection depicts various forms of physical, sexual, and psychological oppressions that women experience in strict and traditional households.

As an example of transgressive poetry, Warsan Shire's collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, introduces a robust voice that questions social norms constantly silencing women. Elaine T. Hansen observes that "in contradistinction to their earlier silence, [women] would tell us a new and different story. ... only by telling new stories about their lives can women escape the traditional plots that confine them to the roles of wives and mothers" (1997: 14-15). Marianne Hirsch states that the essence of women's stories could not be discovered through a surface reading of the texts, but "in the submerged depths of literary texts. The question now becomes the analysis of its intricacies and complexities" (1981b: 204). By telling the stories of silenced women, the female poets and writers with a critical point of view "break their culture of silence," particularly deconstructing the ideology of patriarchy and its perceptions of woman-wife-motherhood and offering possibilities for political representation (Donovan, 1989: xiii). The texts

illustrating voiceless women as daughters, wives, or mothers and their relationships within the male-centred social structures create a backcloth for political and socio-cultural changes with a quest for alternatives. The poetry collection of Warsan Shire, hence, demystifies the conventional perspectives about the 'ideal' identity of women as wives or mothers.

The theoretical framework of this thesis provides the conceptual ground for analysing the idealized images of the maternal self that perpetuate gender roles enforced by the patriarchal system. This chapter aims to analyse the reflections of womanhood and mother-daughter relationships through discussing the standardizing role and identity of women as wives and mothers in patriarchal societies. Based on Adrienne Rich's arguments regarding institutional motherhood, the 'death of self,' and mother-daughter relationship, this section aims to analyse how Shire deconstructs the myth of the 'proper' woman archetype through poetic discourse and a strong lyric voice. Drawing on further concepts such as Jasodhara Bagchi's "son-preference," Elaine T. Hansen's "patriarchal mother," Marianne Hirsch's "double self" and "deathbed," as well as Judith Gardiner's "dying mothers" image, this chapter delves into the multifaceted exploration of the maternal identity and complex patterns in the mother-daughter relationship.

3.1. Daughters under the Rule of Patriarchy: Female Sexuality and Objectification of Women's Bodies

Female virginity is primarily enforced as the criterion to be considered an 'ideal' woman under patriarchal norms. In spite of the traditional binary opposition in representing womanhood as good/evil or whore/virgin, Irigaray posits in her interview with Janet Todd et al. that women in the patriarchal system are oppressed under three symbolic categories—"virgin, mother, and whore" (Todd, 1983, as cited in Bode, 2010: 288-9). Women under male hegemony are denied sexual autonomy and can obtain social approval only as virgins, wives or mothers. Deviation from their prescribed roles may result in their marginalization, restricting their agency. In *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, Lynne Segal notes 'sexuality' as a combination of "biology and nature as ideological mechanism for maintaining men's control over women's bodies" (2000: 442). In this respect, female virginity could be seen as a patriarchal archetype which is employed to control and oppress women, as well as categorizing them as either proper or improper. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich stresses that women's sexuality is described and outlined through the patriarchal notions of femininity (1986: 73). Within the boundaries of

patriarchal culture and its practises, man's socio-cultural honour, dignity and respect are contingent upon the virginity of woman and her "sexual reputation" within the society (Holland et al., 2000: 223). Likewise, Nfah-Abbenyi endorses that male sexuality commodifies the female body and enables its sexual exploitation (1997: 103). Defining male sexuality in connection with the commodification of woman, her body and sexuality are objectified by the male-centred structure for the sense of masculine fulfilment and satisfaction.

Warsan Shire's poems challenge the perception of female body as a source of shame and disgrace for the family, drawing closer to the themes related with the physical and psychological maturation of women. To begin with, the speaker in the poem "The Abubakr Girls Are Different" reflects the description of daughters as a potential threat to the family and paternal honour and the notion of female sexuality as a taboo subject. The speaker reports that "[d]aughter is synonymous with traitor, / their father mutters / in his sleep," articulating the belief in daughters as a source of dissatisfaction and disappointment positioned in contrast to sons' loyalty to family values (Shire, 2022: 50). Sons are preferred over daughters because, as Rich proposes, they guarantee lineage continuity as the heirs, successors, or continuation of paternal authority in the family (1986: 195). In patriarchal households, the birth of a daughter might be considered as a family disappointment and dishonour. In accordance with Bagchi's argument concerning the "son-preference", the mother's maternal identity is defined by the existence of a son who is supposed to inherit the family legacy (2017: 13). Renée Larrier similarly notes that motherhood could only be socially approved through sons; therefore, the absence of a son means emptiness, suffering and disapproval for mothers in such households (1997: 195).

Considering the social value and appreciation of the boy child in male-dominated societies, daughters are despised and neglected, and mothers exclusively raising daughters face marginalization due to the prevailing belief that achieving motherhood status could be possible with a son. Therefore, the 'son-preference' of mothers who desire social acceptance and recognition perpetuates patriarchal practises and leads to the internalised female inferiority. Often viewed as not good enough, daughters are raised to fit patriarchal norms and internalise patriarchal perception of woman archetype. In this context, the poem "The Abubakr Girls Are Different" describes how the 'idealised' woman archetype evolves girls into the supporters of patriarchy and debases their individuality. In the poem, the speaker is

warned by an Abubakr girl who “pushes [her] open knees closed” and advises to “*Sit like a girl*” (Shire. 2022: 50). Warning her friend’s way of sitting, the Abubakr girl confirms the practice of patriarchy with the determined conventional woman archetype. The daughter, in this context, is expected to behave and clothe according to the feminine ideals to be ‘decent’ in terms of appropriate sitting – legs closed – and being “long skirted-figurines” (50). Kathleen Barry writes that women and girls are “not only invisible in the family but [also] socially sanctioned by cultural traditions” (1981: 49). The speaker as an example of non-conforming female figure in contrast to the Abubakr girl “finger[s] the hole in [her] shorts, / shame warming [her] skin” (Shire, 2022: 50). The cultural imperatives trivialise subjectivities and autonomy of daughters and create an archetypal figure that is opposed to the ‘inappropriate’ woman subject to social marginalisation. Regarding the margins of patriarchy and cultural imperatives about ‘idealised’ womanhood, the speaker is ashamed of herself due to the fact that she is out of the boundaries of patriarchal expectations of womanhood.

Correlatively, the poem “The Abubakr Girls Are Different” underscores the treatment of women’s puberty as a taboo subject, describing five daughters who unite in a summer home and become conscious of the signs of puberty on their bodies. One of the Abubakr girls, Juwariyah, “leans in and whispers / *I started my period*” (Shire, 2022: 50). Juwariyah’s whisper indicates that discussing female sexuality in public is discouraged and conversations as such could only be confined to closed domestic spaces. While male sexuality is accepted as the family pride and transition to manhood, women are made to believe that their biological process of menstruation is a source of shame, and thus, should be kept as a ‘secret’. Under the deleterious perceptions of women sexuality, the girls

learn how to walk again, mermaids
with new legs, soft knees buckling under
their raw, sinless bodies.

We lie in bed beside each other, holding mirrors
to the mouths of our skirts,
comparing wounds. (Shire, 2022: 51)

Without having any advice or instruction, the ‘raw and sinless bodies’ of the Abubakr girls in the poem undergo the menstrual cycle, particularly the bleeding and cramps, while trying to keep it unknown. The ‘wounds’ symbolise the menstrual bleeding that the immature and naive girls compare among themselves behind the closed doors, discuss and question the biological process of menstruation and its linkage to pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, the word ‘wounds’ could refer to physical and psychological damages the daughters are exposed to as they step towards womanhood. The menstruation cycle indicates women’s biological readiness in childbearing, which also causes the female body to be more open to sexual harassments in the male-centred society.

In a similar vein, the poem “Bless This School for Girls” illustrates arguments of female sexuality, abortion rights, and the circumstances and complications of miscarriage. Falis, the teacher-like female figure, explains and instructs the speaker and other girls about the significant phases in the maturation process of women:

periods, uterus contractions, early symptoms
of cysts, signs of infertility, abortions and where
they were punishable by death, miscarriage—
how long it took to pass the clots and why
you shouldn’t flush as a reflex. (Shire, 2022: 52)

In addition to the social taboo of female menstruation, it is clearly elucidated that the girls are compelled to withstand the physical and psychological hardships such as sexual diseases, infections, shame from miscarriage, and even death penalty for abortion, regardless of whether they are exposed to sexual assault or not. The patriarchal culture does not choose to witness women going through the biological process, but, rather, objectifies female bodies over which the male sexuality and satisfaction can be achieved through physical and sexual harassment. Under these circumstances, women are obliged to encounter the psychological traumas, social disintegration, or even death penalty.

In the poem, “Extreme Girlhood,” the physical and sexual fragility of women and the psychological traumas as a consequence of objectification of women’s bodies could be observed through a feeble speaker who describes her early experiences through the emotions such as being “afraid” and “petrified” and would pray for the protection of her own “body

and home from intruders” (Shire, 2022: 13). She stresses the relation between physical and sexual assaults and psychological breakdown that women confront in the patriarchal social structures. Considering the patriarchal culture and normative implications, women both physically and psychologically struggle to protect their bodies from ‘intruders,’ particularly from forced sexual exploitation. Because of the potential harassment, the speaker “wakes with a fright” feeling “something creeping / deep inside her” (14). Described in the poem as the “caul of dissatisfaction,” “the patron saint of not / good enough,” “prelude to suffering,” and “the ugly one” by the patriarchal culture, the speaker asks for divine intervention in the protection of her body from any type of exploitation as the act of survival (13, 14). The speaker’s demand for divine guidance or comfort is a result of the imposed physical, sexual, or socio-cultural dependence of women in the male-designed system, where patriarchal expectations stratify women’s bodies in a vulnerable position to be exploited and over which masculine power could be exerted.

The speakers in the poems “The Abubakr Girls Are Different,” “Bless This School For Girls” and “Extreme Girlhood” disclose the female subjugation, displaying the authorisation of patriarchy either in woman’s sexuality or the choice of abortion, for which the women are socially marginalised. The female characters depicted in the poems are neglected as ‘not good enough,’ ‘ugly one,’ or the family ‘traitor’. They also face social pressure, otherization, or even death penalty as a result of a miscarriage or (un)willing sexual intercourse or abortion that assert deficiency and inferiority of women contrary to man. From that context, the ‘idealised’ womanhood shaped and imposed by the patriarchy creates a myth that exploits the femininity, girlhood, womanhood, and objectifies the female body through excluding feminine sexual health.

3.2. Daughters under the Rule of the Patriarchal Mother Archetype

The patriarchal society creates an oppression cycle that seizes control of daughters by patriarchal mother figures, thus maintaining male hegemony and cultural imperatives. Traditionally, daughters are often supposed to follow their mother’s steps to be an ideal woman, wife, or mother. Rich notes that the patriarchy uses maternal figures to impose its practises on daughters with the belief that the patriarchal perceptions regarding the identity and status of woman help daughters to survive in the system (1986: 243). Agreeing with Rich, Renée Larrier points out that the mother is a “traditional wife who wants her daughter [...] to follow her lead; that is, marry, manage a house, and raise children” and “[t]he stories

her mother tells her ... define gender roles and reinforce these values” (1997: 198). The maternal figure as an instrument of idealised patriarchal perceptions about ideal womanhood renders daughters to follow the same path and meet the same expectations for social approval. Elaine T. Hansen names this mother stereotype as the “patriarchal mother” within the feminist context to criticise the mother “who is complicitous with the system that devalues motherhood and oppresses women” (1997: 24). From this perspective, the maternal figures in the poems “Bless the Blood” and “Filial Cannibalism” function as an apparatus of patriarchal culture teaching the requirements of ideal womanhood and motherhood. In doing so, they play a dual role in diminishing the individuality of women while reinforcing the male-centred order.

In the poem, “Bless the Blood,” the persona describes a newly married woman named Sophia who convinces her husband that she is chaste and pure by using “pigeon blood on her wedding night” (Shire, 2022: 61). Sofia feels compelled to conceal the fact that she has once lost her virginity for fear of the masculine oppression and social otherization. Moreover, as a manifestation of the patriarchal ideology, the male figure in the poem responds with signs of honour, “smiled when he saw the sheets” and “gathered [sheets] under his nose, / closed his eyes and dragged his tongue over the stain” showing his satisfaction out of her ‘taintlessness.’ The male figure in the poem “whispered / her name—Sofia, / pure, chaste, untouched,” and Sophia

smiled, rubbed his head,
imagined his mother back home parading blood-
soaked sheets through the town,
waving at balconies, swollen with pride. (61)

Sophia believes that the concrete proof of her virginity, blood on the sheets proves her success as the ‘ideal’ woman figure in the male hegemony because the social value of the woman in the eyes of patriarchal system is connected to virginity. Besides, she imagines the mother figure waving the tainted sheets to the town with pride. The mother as an embodiment of the ‘patriarchal mother’ archetype implicitly captures Sophia and causes her to internalise virginity as a confirmation of women’s social status and inclusion. The maternal figure in the poem promotes the patriarchal superiority and female subjugation over body and mind by prioritizing the notion of virginity (Bagchi, 2017: xxiii). The male-centred system induces

women's virginity as a source of parental honour or pride, leading to the marginalization of daughters by their mothers. Adrienne Rich highlights the double victimization of daughters, asserting that "[they] have been nullified by silence, but also by infanticide, of which they have everywhere been the primary victims. [...] Daughters were destroyed not only by their fathers, but by their mothers" because the mothers "carry their own guilt and self-hatred over into their daughters' experiences" (1986: 226, 244). The maternal figure becomes the proponent of patriarchal ideologies and perceptions of wife/motherhood as the 'real' identity and 'true' essence of woman. The poem, "Bless the Blood," hence, discusses the conventional perception of female virginity as a criterion for inclusion and acceptance of women in the patriarchal culture illustrating a copy of the patriarchal mother archetype, Sophia.

Similarly, in the poem, "Filial Cannibalism," the speaker compares the relationship between mothers and daughters to that of wild animals to exemplify how the maternal figure becomes a tool for masculine dominance. According to the speaker, mother animals in nature devour their babies because of the "pure, bright need" (Shire, 2022: 28). Similarly, patriarchal mothers "feed on the viscid / shame" of their daughters who are "forced to secrete / from glands formed / in the favor of men" (28). In terms of mother-daughter dyad, Rich asserts that they have always "exchanged with each other – beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between alike bodies" (1986: 220). Stressing the 'alike' between mother and daughter, Adrienne Hirsch discusses that their relationship is "pre-oedipal and pre-verbal," in which the mother and daughter cannot be completely separated from one another, but are entangled in an intricate web of connections, allowing a discovery of "a double self" (1981a: 72, 73). Identifying with daughters, the maternal figure seeks for authority and power over the powerless, which leaves the daughter in a state of ruin. The poem "Filial Cannibalism," thus, reflects on the primordial mother and daughter relationship, which is based on the eradication of daughter's identity under the empowerment of the powerless mother and the conflict between 'double self.'

3.3. Responsive Daughters of Passive Mothers

Mothers' submission to the patriarchal rule leads to pre-defined roles for daughters; moreover, traumas experienced by mothers have a lasting impact on daughters as they navigate through family dynamics. Daughters who witness or experience abuse at home tend

to doubt the primordial female subordination and idealized image of woman. On the one hand, there is a 'patriarchal mother' who accepts the masculine oppression, keeps her obedience for fear of more physical, sexual, psychological abuses and anxiously awaits change. On the other hand, the daughter of a patriarchal mother who realises the harassments of male hegemony is critical of the resignation of mothers and advocates an action for change. Elaborating her discussions on the mother-daughter dyad, Marianne Hirsch argues the concept of "double self" that although "the young heroine's identity is one-dimensional and incomplete," it "depends on the presence of her mother to function publicly and privately," yet she "tr[ies] desperately to separate and delineate [her] own boundaries" (1981a: 76, 73). Similarly, Judith K. Gardiner posits that the daughter "pattern[s] herself after her mother, acquire[s] her gender identity, learn[s] her roles, and at the same time differentiate[s] herself as a person" (1978: 147). Although daughters are shaped to be the replica of the patriarchal mother archetype, they try to escape from the norms and boundaries of the 'idealised' woman/motherhood so as to establish her own identity and personality. In terms of the daughter's attempt to distinguish her identity, both Gardiner and Hirsch comment on the 'death of mother' in mother-daughter dyad.

Articulating the concept of "dying mothers," Gardiner writes that the daughter "'kills' her mother in order not to have to take her place" but to bury the embodiment of patriarchal submissive mother archetype, with whose death she could regain her own self (1978: 146). In a similar vein, Hirsch mentions the "deathbed" of mothers which symbolises the end of "a fixed point in its social, psychological, and moral topography" (1981a: 73). Altering the patriarchal mother figure, both the home-escape and death of maternal figure advance daughter's self-development and autonomy. In this regard, the conscious and courageous daughters metaphorically 'kill' their passive and unresponsive mothers, in order to gain identity, subjectivity and independence from the physical, sexual and psychological captivity of patriarchy. In this context, the poems, "Bless the Real Housewife" and "Angela Bassett Burning It All Down" in the poetry collection, illustrate the matriarchal aspect of female oppression and its effects on mother-daughter dyad focusing on the concept of the self-sacrificial, silent, patient, but implicitly vengeful wives, mothers and their fervent, brave, liberation-seeking daughters.

The poem "Bless the Real Housewife" underlines the patience of mothers who endure all the physical and psychological exploitations for the sake of her family's pride, her

husband's dignity, children's future, and her own chastity. In the poem, *Hooyo* – an example of patriarchal wife and mother – holds the belief that she will be blessed by God because she “sits, waiting for [her husband] to die” rather than taking an action against him (Shire, 2022: 47). The mother figure sacrifices herself for the family, pushing her physical body beyond its limits:

[c]alcifying her one human body, staying
for the sake of the kids, then staying
for the sake of staying, enduring,
abstaining, waiting for the angel of death. (47)

Due to the fact that the matrimony and matriarchy are both depicted as the ideal for woman (Kilshaw, 2020: 32) and the patriarchy castigates the “single motherhood” without a father figure (Watson-Franke, 2004: 84), mothers in the male-centred societies have to choose patience and submission to avoid marginalisation. The poem addresses the social pressure on the wife and mother figure who endures the hardships of married life to preserve the custody of children and her social position and imagines that only ‘the angel of death’ could save her.

In the third stanza, the speaker conveys the mother's sentiments over the hardship of divorce and single motherhood:

how much harder it is to leave
the second marriage, that she doesn't want to
raise children the way she had to raise us,
and *What would people say?* (Shire, 2022: 47)

She considers the social discrimination of being a ‘divorced mother,’ especially divorced from her ‘second’ marriage. The divorced mother who officially and legally ends husband's ownership over herself is socially acknowledged as a ‘failure’; hence, she chooses obedience and patience so as not to be marginalised as the ‘widow’ woman. Yet, her dream of freedom and peacefulness are what “[s]he thinks of ... and laughs” that can be achieved only after her husband's death (47). From that context, the wife and mother figure in the poem, on the one hand, is an embodiment of patriarchal mother archetype consolidating patriarchal

imperatives through sacrificing her freedom and personal satisfaction; on the other hand, she dreams of the possibility of peace, happiness, and independence upon her husband's death.

In the poem, "Angela Bassett Burning It All Down," the speaker describes women who remain silent and busy themselves with domestic duties to disregard how desperate their lives are in their household:

wives in [his/her] family packed secret suitcases,
eyed the front door, fumbled with lighter fluid
did not snap, instead she stretched, watching yeast ferment,
instead she busied herself with the process of preserving meat. (Shire, 2022: 60)

Although women experience exploitations, some wives and mothers 'secretly' desire the 'home-escape' from physical, sexual and psychological abuses; however, some others keep their silence because of the fact that the female uprising is declared an act of betrayal. Regarding their total submission and silence for years, some women "stabbed her man in the groin, said / the look of disbelief in his eyes made it worth it", attempting to gain their freedom and individuality against their husbands (60). Since one of the mothers in the speaker's family is suffocated with patriarchal ideals of wife/motherhood, she attacks her husband for his 'look of disbelief.' The outburst could be seen as a rebellion and an assertion of autonomy against the rule of patriarchal norms and implications of ideal woman/wife/motherhood. Contrary to this insurgent female figure, the speaker's mother prefers sitting and waiting like the dutiful maternal figure in the poem "Blessed the Real Housewife" because of the fact that the conditional inclusion and social approval of mothers are sanctioned with how obedient, patient, and self-sacrificial they are.

Women staying out of the conventional depictions of 'ideal' are often labelled as 'hysteric,' 'mad,' or 'uncontrollable' if and when they question female inferiority since the demand is antithetical to what the male hegemony imposes — the female submissiveness. For instance, in the poem, "Angela Bassett Burning It All Down," the outrage and intolerance of wives against their husbands are called "[b]itches' *Hysteria*" by men while women see it as "the "[n]atural response" (Shire, 2022: 60). As women who rebel against the feminine ideals are marginalised, Rich argues that "with the jeopardy all women live under in patriarchy, ... while it can be dangerous to move, to speak, to act, each time she suffers rape

– physical or psychic – in silence, she is putting another stitch in her own shroud” (1986: 248). Even if the resistance to male hegemony and oppression is threatening in the patriarchal society, the physical outburst of woman’s anger is acknowledged as a natural response to the primordial oppression. Accordingly, the speaker in the poem notes that “[f]or years I’ve watched from the corner of my eye, / willing [mother] to burn it all down” (Shire, 2022: 60). Contrary to the other female figures mentioned in the poem and the expectation of the speaker, the mother preserves the hierarchical relationship between herself and husband and symbolically waits in silence. She busies herself with ‘meat preserving,’ trying to protect her body from the father’s physical, sexual, psychological violence and social otherization, while the daughter speaker witnesses such an exploitation and questions the ‘idealised’ wife/motherhood. Because the mother figure has no maternal authority or authenticity within the parental framework, it causes matrophobia leading to the ruin of mother and daughter intimacy, connection, affinity, and empathy (O’Reilly, 2004: 162). The daughters criticise and blame their mothers for their powerlessness and silence, and according to Adrienne Rich, they desire to have the type of mothers who strive for personal freedom and show resilience:

As daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman’s self-denial and frustration. The quality of the mother’s life—however, embattled and unprotected—is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create liveable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist. (1986: 247)

Considering the internalised inferiority and obedience of patriarchal mothers, daughters want them to be bolder and more self-reliant, and to struggle for freedom not just for their own advantage, but that of their daughters. According to O’Reilly, mothers should use motherhood and mothering practises to build female resistance in the patriarchal societies. This type of mothering against the traditional depiction of motherhood can empower women, particularly daughters, to have agency and gain their independence back. In her book, O’Reilly writes that “[w]hether it be termed courageous mothering as Rich describes it [...] By mothering against motherhood ... women obtain power in mothering and thereby are able to model the empowerment the daughter will acquire in and through mother-daughter connection” (2004: 165). The mothering practises against the idealised motherhood become

acts of “empowerment” for future generations as autonomy could be achieved by the mothers’ struggles and only if they defy prescribed roles (165).

The daughter speaker in the poem “Angela Bassett Burning It All Down” becomes disappointed and frustrated, yet she does not resist the physical, sexual or psychological assaults. According to Hirsch, the reason behind the silence of some daughters is that the girl within the margins of patriarchal perceptions is not emboldened enough or aided to be autonomous (1981b: 206). They (un)consciously follow in their mother’s footsteps and become an integral part of the patriarchal system. However, some daughters of those passive and submissive mothers, for instance, the speaker in “Extreme Girlhood,” dare to take an action against the patriarchal perceptions and practises of woman/motherhood. The daughter in the poem is not only the protestor but also the ‘hero’ with her bravery for ‘home-escape.’ In the last stanza, the daughter speaker addresses to her mother, noting that she has taken risks to ‘escape’ from home encouraging oneself “by the voices in her head” (Shire, 2022: 14). From the invocation of the speaker, it can be affirmed that the daughter’s ‘home-escape’ becomes an act of survival and initiates a search of identity out of the patriarchal frame.

Consequently, it can be noted that while some women rebel against the conventional practises of patriarchy, others conform to patriarchal norms and designations to avoid marginalisation, which leads to a symbolic self-murder. Meanwhile, the double-victimised daughters in the patriarchal system witness and inherit the mother’s physical, sexual, and mental pain, and similar to the mother figure, they learn to silence themselves in the face of the same patriarchal oppression. In that context, the silence and self-murder of the mothers has an impact on daughters’ lives, ensuring the maintenance of the patriarchal requirements and oppression from generation to generation. While some daughters become passive, submissive, unresponsive ‘apparatuses’ of the patriarchy, implicitly awaiting their mother’s liberation, which is also a liberation of all women, some are brave enough to take a step forward; they doubt, criticise and dare to deconstruct the prescribed definition and imposition of ‘idealised’ woman/motherhood with home-escape and ‘death’ of mothers. Hereby, those daughters could have a chance to ‘raise’ themselves again by a self-produced and defiant voice in their head, as implied in the title of the Shire’s collection, and find an outlet from the male-designed, ‘mythologised’ woman and motherhood depictions.

To conclude, the collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, describes the oppression of women under the patriarchal institution and implication of

‘idealised’ woman and motherhood. The poetry collection discloses the gender discrimination and female subjugation through articulating the issues of female sexuality and virginity as taboo subjects, different types of abuse and objectification of the female body. Women oppressed and subdued by the disposition of patriarchy (sub)consciously internalise the ‘ideal’ and maternal womanhood, male interference, and abuse in pursuance of social and cultural approval and inclusion. Daughters, on the other hand, are double-victimised both by the male hegemony and patriarchal mothers and are taught to be ‘ideal’ woman, wife and mother by mother figures in their families. Hence, the unmarried daughter speakers in Shire’s poems dispute not only the patriarchal imperatives but also how the oppression cycle depends largely on the patriarchal mother figures. Inheriting trans-generational traumas, daughters have more courage to resist these practices and strive for female liberation. In that context, daughters’ struggle to escape from the system turns into a solitary attempt to discover their authentic voices, through which they can fight for their autonomy and individuality.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ‘REAL’ IDENTITY OF THE MOTHER IN JACKIE KAY’S *THE ADOPTION PAPERS* (1991)

The Adoption Papers, a partially autobiographical poetry sequence explores the themes of pregnancy and childbirth, baby abandonment, heritage, family ties, and adoption through the voices of three female figures: the birthmother, the adoptive mother and the daughter. The contrasting figures in the sequence dramatize their experiences with the issues of adoption, identity, race, class, sexuality, and gender from their unique perspectives. Stylistically, the dialogic structure of the collection and polyphonic technique dismantle the single, authoritative, and biased storytelling, resulting in a more multidimensional depiction of the question of adoption. The diverse and contradictory perspectives problematise the conventional depiction of the birth mothers as the ‘real’ mothers and the ostracism of non-biological adoptive mothers. In the opening section of the poetry collection, Jackie Kay introduces the distinguished typographs to differentiate the voices and characters explaining that the daughter is identified with ‘roman’ typeface while the adoptive mother with ‘**bold**’ and birth mother with ‘*italic*’ typing styles. Commenting on the technical aspects of the collection, Pietra Palazzolo asserts that “the memoir’s stylistic experimentation leads to a greater degree of openness, since the three overlapping voices of the earlier work are juxtaposed and resonate with a richer ensemble of utterances” (2017: 109-10). Likewise, Nerys Williams posits that the poem sequence “refutes presenting the three voices as free-standing soliloquies. Instead, the interaction between these three different typefaces on the page creates a complex web of interdependence between birth mother, child, and adoptive mother” (2020: 433). While the multiplicity in narration, voice, and perspective “encapsulates the tension” between three speakers (Fox, 2015: 281), the poetic structure also provides a multifaceted analysis of the ‘real’ identity of the mother through articulating the concept of adoption.

Merve Altin asserts that the poetry sequences *The Adoption Papers* is a long narrative poem that is divided into three main parts in accordance with a certain time span of the speakers’ lives (2019: 46), which Williams finds as an imaginary sphere in which all three female speakers coexist without undermining the others (2020: 433). In this study, the four chapters in “Part One: 1961-1962,” “The Seed,” “The Original Birth Certificate,” “Baby Lazarus” and “The Tweed Hat Dream;” the poem “The Telling Part” from “Part Two: 1967-

1979;” and the three poems, “Generations,” “The Phone Call” and “The Meeting Dream” from the final part “Part Three: 1980-1990” will be analysed. In the collection, Part One illustrates the unexpected illegitimate pregnancy of the birthmother and how the adoptive mother feels about not having a child before the adoption process. The helplessness and despair of the birthmother in childbearing and abandoning her baby are contradicted with the desire and joy of the adoptive mother. Meanwhile, the daughter speaker tries to trace the identity of her biological mother. In Part Two, the daughter as a little child learns that she has been adopted by her parents and questions the issue of maternal bond through biological connection, articulating the ‘real’ mother and ‘other’ mother concepts. In the last part, Part Three, the daughter ponders on the metaphorical meaning of ‘blood’ as a discriminative and differentiating element that is idealised by the social norms, traditions, or religions. Different from the traditional understanding, the daughter persona overlooks the socio-cultural significance of the blood, blood-tie and biological relatedness, emphasising the importance of maternal care and love in mother-child affinity.

Focusing on the adoption of a Scottish-Nigerian non-white baby, *The Adoption Papers* also reflects the 1960’s socio-cultural dynamics in white Scotland. The religious beliefs, political stances, social class, or wealth are regarded as fundamental criteria to become adoptive parents. Barbara K. Rothman proposes that whether the birthmother or the adoptive mothers are considered, adoption is very much a class issue (1989: 130). Similarly, John McLeod observes (2015) that “adoption is fundamentally imbricated in the landscape of economic impoverishment and wealth” (2). The socio-cultural, political and economic spheres substantially regulate the confines of the normative family units, the metrics of adoption and the ‘appropriateness’ of the adoptive parents. Adoption, in that context, could be comprehended as the categorising theme that not only polarises the birthparents and adoptive parents in the inferior/superior dichotomy, but also distinguishes potential adoptive parents as ‘(in)appropriate’ based on their economic wealth, political stances, cultural/ethnic background, or sexual orientations.

Furthermore, Laura Briggs in *Somebody’s Children* (2012) centres her argument around transracial adoption stating that finding a foster family for mixed-race children was more challenging than other children (31). White English adoptive parents view non-white and mixed-race children as “second choice,” and may only adopt a child of a different ethnic background due to the lack of white adoptees (Grow and Deborah, 1974, as cited in Briggs,

2012: 36, 47). Noting the discussions of Briggs, it can be deduced that “[a]s an adopted child of mixed race, Kay’s poetry documents the difficulty of her positioning in a Scottish landscape” (Williams, 2020: 431). Excluding the biological relatedness and genetic connection between the parents and the child, *The Adoption Papers* “initially invokes a different kind of anxiety common to mid-twentieth-century domestic adoptions overall by focusing on both mothers’ inability to comply with early 1960s’ gender norms” (Fox, 2015 281-82). Moreover, the adoption process (re)constructs the conventional depictions of mothers, blurring the concrete polarisation of birthmothers and adoptive mothers under the label of ‘real’ mother.

This chapter aims to analyse the idealisation and admiration of biological motherhood as the ‘real’ identity of a mother. Throughout the chapter, the predominant conventional notion of blood, genetic relatedness and biological mother-child attachment are questioned and deconstructed in the context of adoption and social motherhood to understand how identity interacts, changes and is (re)shaped by some environmental factors. Grounded in Adrienne Rich’s concepts of “natural mother” and feeling of “unmothered,” this section intends to examine the adoption and (de)construction of motherhood and identity in a mother-child relationship based on concepts such as “sense of self-loss,” “bloodmother/othermother,” “biological/social mothers,” and “ovarian/uterine/social mothers.” This study examines the impact of adoption on the birth mother, adoptive mother and the adoptee and the role of mothering in mother/child attachment, critically comparing the personal experiences and life stories of the speakers. The birth mother loses her social position as the mother figure both for her out-of-wedlock pregnancy and baby abandonment whereas the adoptive mother becomes ‘the mother’ of the adoptee who practises mothering functions. Therefore, the concept of motherhood as a multifaceted construct and conventionally shaped by socio-cultural norms cannot be simply based on a biological connection; however, by exploring the shift from the blood mother to the social/adoptive mother, this chapter aims to reveal the significance of maternal attachment and mother-child affinity through maternal care in redefining the ‘real’ identity of the mother.

4.1. The Social Ostracism of Birth and Adoptive Mothers

The Adoption Papers deals with the theme of motherhood through an analysis of two diametrical maternal images: the birthmother and the adoptive mother. Demarcating maternal womanhood, the male-centred social structures emphasise that the crux of religious and social legitimacy of reproduction is matrimony. Hence, infertility, abortion, or extramarital pregnancies and childbirths are in contrast to the conventional depictions of womanhood and maternity. According to Adrienne Rich, the real issue about institutionalised maternal womanhood is that it is “an experience in which women have historically felt out of control, at the mercy of biology, fate, or chance” (1986: 182). The discussions around motherhood and rights over women’s bodies are largely dominated by the authoritative male power in patriarchal societies. Without having control over the imposition of maternal womanhood, the mother figure is stereotyped by some idealistic depictions such as “beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood ... is her single destiny and justification in life” (34). In other words, the traditional depiction of the mother figure disregards the individuality and identity of the mother. On the whole, patriarchy imposes legitimate maternity under the official marital status to maintain the stereotypical maternal figure and ideology of motherhood. Although the central reason behind their social censure is different, the birth and adoptive mothers in the poems are stigmatised in the Scottish society in the late 60’s as they deviate from normative implications and expectations of the maternal identity.

As a critique of the belief that maternity is an inherent part of womanhood, the collection problematizes the question of adoption and the ‘real’ definition of motherhood. The significant attention behind the typographical shift hints at the daughter persona’s innate identification of the adoptive mother as the ‘real’ mother rather than the birthmother because of not performing the maternal practises in the collection. First, the adoptive mother with birthmother’s italic font starts her narration states that “*I always wanted to give birth / do that incredible natural thing / that women do – I nearly broke down / when I heard we couldn’t*” (Kay, 1991: 10). Through childbearing, the adoptive mother wishes to prove her biological capacity and gain social status. Yet, she notes that she feels “broke down,” inadequate and disappointed when she learns they cannot have a biological baby. The adoption becomes the only option for the couple to have a child:

there's always adoption
(we didn't have test tubes and the rest then)
even in the early sixties there was
something scandalous about adopting,
telling the world your secret failure
bringing up an alien child. (Kay, 1991: 10)

Referring to the socio-cultural sphere, the adoptive mother expresses how adoption exists as a taboo subject in the 60s Scotland, when there was no fertility treatment available for infertile couples. Some circumstances such as extramarital pregnancy, illegitimate childbirth, or adoption are mostly recognised as reasons for social exclusion. Focusing on this, Altın proposes that the “adjectives ‘incredible’ and ‘natural’ ... used to describe the act of giving birth contrast with the notion of adoption which is considered as something ‘scandalous’ by the society,” and thus, the adoptive mother thinks that “not being able to give birth is a kind of failure” (2019: 253). Similarly, Kate Greenway argues that the “apology and confession about a desire for physical experience, opens with the adoptive mother revealing her distress upon learning she could not do ‘that incredible natural thing / that women do,’ but how she eventually opted for adoption” (2016: 152). It is apparent that the adoptive mother persona here underlines her qualms about adoption and social ostracism for revealing their ‘secret failure’ to the society and deconstructing the normative definition of parenthood. Furthermore, the child might also be marginalised as an “alien child” for being an adoptee in the white 60s Scotland (Kay, 1991: 10). Here, adoption of a baby who is recognised as an ‘alien’ underlines the fact that the baby does not biologically belong to the adoptive family. Besides, the adoption of a mixed-race baby has unfavourable consequences: the “social stigma attached to adoption” and “the decision to raise ‘an alien child’ against the public feeling that such a child is a contingent citizen with no biological claim to the family” (Brown, 2007: 222). In that regard, the word “alien” is ambiguous to define the mixed-race adoptee in the story as it might refer to the adoption process, emphasising the otherness of both the baby and process itself.

The adoptive mother’s misgivings about the social exclusion of the baby and herself are interrupted by the daughter’s testimony on her birth and adoption story. For her, the

adoptive mother is the ‘real’ mother who has picked her, loved, nurtured, and made sacrifices and still does:

I was pulled out with forceps
left a gash down my left cheek
four months inside a glass cot
but she came faithful
from Glasgow to Edinburgh
and peered through the glass
I must have felt somebody willing me to survive;
she would not pick another baby. (Kay, 1991: 10)

The daughter’s perspective reveals that her birth was not easy, and she is put into the ‘glass cot’ after birth due to poor health conditions. The hardship of life begins from the moment she is born; however, her adoptive mother does not let her down and travels from Glasgow to Edinburgh, ready to provide love and care she needs as a new-born baby. Because of being abandoned by her own birthmother, the contrast between the biological and social identities allows the daughter in the story to resist a fixed definition of identity and explore a more performative ground to embrace her evolving self (Elgezeery, 2015: 127). Throughout the collection, the daughter is half confused and half thankful given that she feels assured ‘at least’ someone wants her to live and be mothered, loved, and nurtured as a baby. In the last three couplets, the birthmother disturbs the daughter’s narration, conveying her feelings about her adult daughter:

I still have the baby photograph
I keep it in my bottom drawer
She is twenty-six today
my hair is grey
The skin around my neck is wrinkling
does she imagine me this way. (Kay, 1991: 10)

The birthmother avoids sharing details about her pregnancy or childbirth, but keeping the baby's photograph in her drawer shows the sorrow and regret of abandoning her baby and the desire for a possible mother-child reunion. According to Greenway, baby abandonment is an "agonizing decision, leaving [the birthmothers] bereft and traumatized throughout their life," and their loss "becomes a secret and lingering grief, hidden from the world" because it is out of the normative prescriptions and socio-culturally seen as a great shame for the mother (2016: 154, 150). Even though the birthmother is biologically connected to the daughter speaker, her decision of abandonment and lack of maternal practice position her as "a kind of mothering in absentia" (2016: 154). Revealing her sorrow and regret, the theme of remembrance is also explored as the birthmother, who wants to restore her relationship with the daughter, tries to imagine her as a twenty-six-year-old woman while questioning whether the daughter has ever imagined the birthmother many years after adoption.

In the poem "The Seed," the birth and adoptive mothers argue against the marginalisation of illegitimate pregnancy and infertility in the eyes of patriarchal society by narrating their personal stories. While the birthmother expresses her stigmatisation due to her out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the adoptive mother states her marginalisation for not having a child. Greenway proposes that "[b]oth women are in situations from which they cannot escape; they are both trapped in their bodies and biologies. [...] one has excess, the other an absence of physical procreative potential. (2016: 152). The birthmother in the poem narrates her illegitimate pregnancy that causes a despair and reason for her social ostracism. She underlines that her pregnancy is unexpected and unfortunate since she **"never thought it would be quicker / than walking down the mainstreet / [...] / for that particular seed to be singled out / [...] / amongst all others"** (Kay, 1991: 12). The birthmother was a child herself when she got pregnant and unaware of the circumstances and responsibilities of pregnancy, childbirth or mothering. For the birthmother, the pregnancy does not take much time or effort, but it is biologically easy and quick as walking that happens in **"a split second / not a minute or more"** (12). Her immaturity and naiveté during the pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering leads to unfortunate consequences she never imagines such as social marginalisation or disintegration due to her out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

Even though the birthmother is biologically capable of reproduction, her unexpected pregnancy leads to a concern because it is extramarital. For fear of the possible social marginalisation, the birthmother figure **"wrote a short note / six weeks later – a short**

letter” to the father figure, expecting him to legitimise the pregnancy with matrimony, so that, she could gain official status as the wife and the mother (13). However, the father figure rejects her request by writing back to her a letter that “[h]e was sorry; [they] should have known better / He couldn’t leave Nigeria” (Kay, 1991: 13). As Victoria Browne articulates (2018), “[p]regnancy is a phenomenon that is deeply value-laden and coded with hierarchical norms, attracting social approval and disapproval in fairly equal measures” (41). Surrounded by the patriarchal cultural norms, the approval of a woman’s maternal identity is also contingent on the legitimacy of pregnancy. The birthmother in the poem is, likewise, afraid of revealing her extramarital pregnancy and bearing a fatherless child, and thus she considers adoption as an alternative option.

The first section of the collection contrasts the birthmother’s repentance for her sexual intercourse and illegitimate pregnancy and the adoptive mother’s lamentation of her infertility. The ostracism of birthmother for the illegitimate pregnancy, here, turns into an exclusion of the adoptive mother for childlessness. Calling into question the ‘easy and quick’ pregnancy of the birthmother, the adoptive mother points out that she “*can’t believe [she has] tried for five years / for something that could take five minutes*” (Kay, 1991: 12). The adoptive mother feels guilty and frustrated over her state of childlessness in five-year time period and desperately desires to experience the child-bearing process:

I want to stand in front of the mirror

swollen bellied so swollen bellied

...

I want to lie on my back at night

I want to pee all the time

...

I want the pain

the tearing searing pain

I want my waters to break

like Noah's flood

I want to push and push

and scream and scream. (Kay, 1991: 12-13)

Depicting the basic complaints of a pregnant woman, the adoptive mother refutes the adversities of pregnancy and childbirth such as the pain or cravings: “*discomfort like some women / crave chocolate*” (12). Nerys Williams contends that Kay’s dramatization of the adoptive mother who aspires to be pregnant or desires to experience childbirth creates a “great pathos,” including infertile women’s feeling of incompetence (2020: 433). Her fervent wish to become a mother can be a result of patriarchal cultural norms imposed upon women to pursue personal fulfilment and social approval or be related with the primordial instinctual desire to become a mother.

The worries of the birthmother about her unexpected extramarital pregnancy evolves into the married adoptive mother’s sincere wish to have a baby. According to Adrienne Rich, patriarchal norms compel women to prioritize their roles as mothers and wives, simultaneously discouraging them from engaging in productive pursuits beyond marital and maternal duties (1986: 40). Similarly, Gayle Letherby concedes that “motherhood is a proof of adulthood and a natural consequence of marriage or a permanent relationship with a man” (2018: 243). For instance, the birthmother figure in the poem is an example for the marginalisation of women for the illegitimate childbearing even though she fulfils the patriarchal expectations of the maternal womanhood, and the adoptive mother is criticised for her infertility in spite of her matrimony. Regarding Rich and Letherby’s assertions regarding the intertwined nature of matrimony and maternity, both mothers in *The Adoption Papers* are aware of the fact that pregnancy and childbearing are legitimised through matrimony, the matrimony is recognised to be symbolically achieved by pregnancy and childbirth. Therefore, the illegitimate pregnancy of the birthmother and the childlessness of the adoptive mother in the poem “The Seed” present a dichotomous sense leading to the stigmatisation of the birthmother for her extramarital pregnancy and of the adoptive mother for her infertility.

4.2. The Dichotomy of Adoption: Someone's Loss, Someone's Joy

The Adoption Papers shows that the abandonment or adoption of the baby is a dyadic theme, illustrating what biological mothers experience alongside the otherisation of the adoptive mothers. Furthermore, the collection explores the emotional or psychological traumas experienced by all components of the baby abandonment and adoption procedure: the birthmother, the adoptive mother and the adoptee. For instance, the poem "The Original Birth Certificate" illustrates the birthmother's emotional loneliness and depression after childbirth and combines it with the sentimental emptiness of the adopted daughter. Similarly, the poem "The Phone Call" partly portrays the inner conflict of the adoptive mother persona by depicting a phone call between the daughter and one of her biological relatives. Also, the poem, "Baby Lazarus," illustrates the grief, regret and pain of the birthmother due to her 'compulsory' baby loss in opposition to the adoptive mother's thrill at becoming a 'mother.' The concepts of baby abandonment and adoption reflected in these poems, thus, are as life changing as pregnancy and childbirth that psychologically influence the birthmother, adoptive mother, and the daughter.

In the first three parts of the poem, "The Original Birth Certificate," the daughter speaker recalls the day when she receives her 'original' birth certificate including some information about her 'real' identity. In this context, it can be suggested that the daughter speaker as an adoptee instinctively desires to learn about her birthmother, father, or her origin. This process of unravelling information about her identity is depicted as a form of psychological 'torture', resulting in an emotional void:

So slow as torture he discloses bit by bit
my mother's name, my original name
the hospital I was born in, the time I came.

Outside Edinburgh is soaked in sunshine
I talk to myself walking past the castle.

So, so, so, I was a midnight baby after all. (Kay, 1991: 14)

Edinburgh, as the birthplace of the daughter speaker and the place where her adoption story begins, symbolises the emotional fluctuations and ambiguity surrounding the daughter speaker's feelings about her abandonment and adoption. The daughter persona's sense of confusion stems from the presumption that the birthmother has abandoned the daughter only because she has never loved her. Adrienne Rich depicts the psychological and emotional crisis of the adoptees as follows:

if a mother had deserted us, by dying, or putting us up for adoption, or because [...] she needed to leave without a child – whatever our rational forgiveness, whatever the individual mother's love and strength, the child in us, the small female who grew up in a male-controlled world, still feels, at moments, widely unmothered. (1986: 225)

Even though the excuses or motives behind the abandonment could be rational, it can cause psychological trauma to the child, leaving her with a persistent feeling of being 'unmothered'. The adopted daughter in the poem expresses her frustration at the idea of being rejected by the birthmother, fixating on an unimportant detail about her birth—being “a midnight baby after all” (Kay, 1991: 14). Valerie L. Popp writes that “identity cannot be encapsulated in a name; her status as ‘a midnight baby’ provides the potential point of identification” (2012: 306-7). Similarly, Pamela Fox promotes the idea that the birth certificate functions “as limit texts, revealing certain facts [...] yet ... no intimate relation. The cache of ‘adoption papers’ produces only a nonbinding identity” (2015: 287). Knowing her original name, the birthmother's name, or the birth date and time does not construct the identity or the sense of belonging of the daughter speaker, for whom one's identity and attachment to a parent could only be through nurturing and mothering.

The gloomy portrayal of Edinburgh, her focus on the birth time, the repetition of ‘so,’ ruminations in the last two lines of the quotation display the daughter speaker's confusion, emotional emptiness and need of escape from the reality. Expanding on the feeling of being ‘unmothered,’ the daughter's inner crisis could also result from her disappointment at the stereotypical ‘good’ mother figure that is disputed by Adrienne Rich as a “natural mother” image who has no independent identity but find satisfaction in mothering all day with children at home, much isolated from the public sphere, with a “selfless” maternal love (1986: 22). In her discussion of the ‘natural’ mother figure as an apparatus of the patriarchy, Rich tries to underline the social inclusion of mothers on condition that they devote themselves to the family, childcaring and nurturing at the expense of their subjectivity. The

birthmother persona in the poem is, therefore, portrayed in opposition to the ‘natural’ mother figure and becomes an ‘unnatural,’ egocentric, uncaring mother for the daughter speaker, alongside a loss of her maternal status.

In response to the daughter’s emotional instability and frustration concerning her ‘unnatural’ mother, the poem simultaneously illustrates the physical and psychological conditions that the biological mother undergoes during the delivery process and its aftermath. Saying “**I am nineteen / my whole life is changing,**” the birthmother highlights her naiveté as her life undergoes a sudden and unexpected transformation at a young age (Kay, 1991: 14). As Adrienne Rich also quotes “[n]othing could have prepared me for the realization that I was a mother” (1986: 36), the motherhood is neither a concept that women are accustomed to nor a simple or one-sided matter to conveniently internalise, but physical pains, deformations and psychological traumas in pre- and postpartum processes can only be grasped by first-hand experience. In a similar vein, Laney et al. argue that “motherhood, which is often an intensive and lifelong relationship for women, can have a significant impact on women’s identities” owing to the stereotypical, or as Rich writes, the institutionalised motherhood image (2015: 127). The childbirth is a period during which the individuality of woman is diminished by the new maternal self and the mothering responsibilities caused by postpartum depression, self-doubt, despair, or fear due to lack of experience. Being raised by the idealised image of maternal womanhood as potential future mothers, women may face the “realities of motherhood in juxtaposition with their ideals of motherhood,” which furthers a tension, stress, or “a sense of self-loss” (127, 131).

The childbirth as the physical unification of the mother and the baby symbolically marks the start of identity change towards a self-sacrificial and devoted ‘good’ mother archetype. The birthmother in the collection expresses:

I cannot pretend she’s never been

my stitches pull and threaten to snap

my own body a witness

leaking blood to sheets, milk to shirts. (Kay, 1991: 14)

Referencing to her postpartum physical symptoms such as ‘leaking blood’ and ‘milky shirts,’ the birthmother realises that her postpartum body shapes her identity even though she is separated from the baby for its poor health conditions. The mental and psychical exhaustion, as well as the delicate state of the baby ‘in the glass cot’ at hospital, cause distress, and the birthmother even contemplates the baby’s death which might cease their anguish:

suffocate her with a feather pillow

Bury her under a weeping willow

Or take her far out to sea

and watch her tiny eight-pound body

sink to shells and reshape herself.

So much the better than her body

encased in glass like a museum piece. (Kay, 1991: 14-15)

Literally speaking, death of the baby for the birthmother speaker, whether by ‘suffocating with a pillow,’ ‘burying,’ or ‘drowning,’ is better than witnessing the sufferings of the baby and being trapped in the baby cot in the hospital due to her poor health condition. In a figurative sense, the intention of killing could also be comprehended as the anger of the mothers towards the system, patriarchy, and social stigmatisation of unmarried mothers, and death might be an insurrection against the conventional imperatives of maternal womanhood.

Rich describes the temper of the birthmothers as the “wells of anger,” noting that “[w]e spoke of our own moments of murderous anger at our children, because there was no one and nothing else on which to discharge anger” (1986: 24). Regarding the mother-child relationship under the authority of patriarchy, the mother may project her anger, enmity, or grudge against the social system onto the child as a way to react to the stigmatisation and marginalization. From this perspective, motherhood under patriarchy emerges as a “powerless responsibility” (Rich, 1986: 52), or as Sara Ruddick writes in the article

“Maternal Thinking,” it is a “poignant conjunction of power and powerlessness” (1980: 343). The woman who is powerless against the cultural imperatives of the patriarchal structures becomes a superior figure to the child:

I toss I did not go through these months

for you to die on me now

on the third night I lie

willing life into her

breathing air all the way down the corridor

to the glass cot

I push my nipples through. (Kay, 1991: 15)

Unable to cope with the physical and psychological hardships, the biological mother decides to abandon the baby. The use of the homonym “**lie**” in the quotation leads to ambiguity; in other words, the birthmother could either lie down next to the baby for breastfeeding, or she could lie to the baby about wishing her a life. The wordplay here turns the birthmother into a more controversial figure, embodying both good and bad qualities within.

In the context of adoption, the adoptive mother also feels panic at the thought of losing the child to the birthmother and daughter reunification. The constant fear of reunion becomes the dilemma that sneaks inwardly in the adoptive mother’s mind and gnaws at her soul. For instance, in the chapter “The Phone Call,” the adoptive mother persona expresses her fear as she witnesses the phone call between the daughter and her biological grandmother, and the daughter asks for the birthmother’s phone number or address. After the daughter leaves for the reunion, the adoptive mother describes her emotional instability stating that:

Now she’s gone. I get phone calls regularly.

It’s not that I think I’m losing out but

*I've surprised myself just the same;
 I've had to stop myself saying, 'drop
 it, you'll get hurt'. I do worry
 of course I do, but it's me that's hurt.* (Kay, 1991: 39)

These lines reflect the adoptive mother's emotional turmoil over the daughter's desire or attempts to contact the birthmother and biological relatives. According to Fox, the adoptive mother here feels "threatened by her daughter's 'desire' to know her birth mother" (2015: 288). She expresses her concern over the daughter's departure and cries "*bloody Adam / Carrington discover he's not a Carrington / any more*" (Kay, 1991: 39). The adoptive mother might subconsciously resist the idea of sharing her daughter and losing her to the birthmother. Besides, the adoptive mother speaker expresses the absurdity of 'original' mother, family blood, or genealogy arguments as all "*daft*" to discuss the issue through mentioning a fictional character who realises 'he is not what he has known to be' (39). The birthmother experiences a sense of powerlessness and an inability to reconstruct her motherhood identity, while the daughter deals with the feelings of being 'unmothered'. Moreover, the adoptive mother tries to cope with a crisis over her maternal self as the daughter discovers a new maternal attachment.

The poem "Baby Lazarus" focuses on the birthmother and adoptive mother through exemplifying the birthmother's confusion during the decision-making process alongside the joy of the adoptive mother. The poem illustrates the birthmother's justification for the baby abandonment, underlining the fact that the choice between abandonment and death of a child is not a matter of preference but an obligation. Barbara K. Rothman claims that the birthmothers abandon their babies due to their naiveté, youth, social marginalisation for their illegitimate pregnancy and poverty (1989: 130). The adoption or death of the out-of-wedlock babies is not a choice of the unwed mothers, but a result of their socio-cultural and economic dependency. As an unmarried mother with an illegitimate pregnancy, the birthmother in the chapter stresses some headlines such as "**MOTHER DROWNS BABY IN THE CLYDE**" or "**MOTHER GIVES BABY AWAY**" to remark upon the social ostracism and prejudices faced by mothers who abandon or kill their babies (Kay, 1991: 19). The unwed women with illegitimate children desperately seek for alternatives for their out-of-wedlock pregnancies, either through the abandonment, adoption, or death of the baby.

The birthmother speaker stresses that she was quite vulnerable when she decided to give away her baby: “[n]obody would ever guess. / I had no other choice / Anyway it’s best for her” (20). Abandoning her baby for adoption is the best option since she is “glad she’s got a home to go to,” and the adoptive parents can provide a safer, better and healthier environment for the physical and psychological development of the baby (20). As a transitory element between the birthmother and the adoptive mother, adoption creates a dichotomous interpretation argued by Rothman as “lack of access to contraception or abortion becomes someone else’s joyful adoption” (87). Considering the economic dependency and loneliness of the birthmothers, the abortion is always a choice to end unwanted or unexpected pregnancies.

The birthmother in the poem “Baby Lazarus” refers to her sense of emptiness and emotional unsteadiness after signing the adoption papers, even though she believes that giving up the baby is the ‘best’ option. Throughout her journey from the agency back home, she faces with the reality that she has lost her baby, repeating to herself “I must stop it. Put it out my mind. / There is no use going over and over” (Kay, 1991: 20). Kate Greenway analyses the birthmother’s decision to “dug a hole the size of [her] baby / and buried the clothes [she]’d bought anyway” (Kay 21) as “a kind of ritualized funeral service, the only closure that she can muster” (2016: 154). It might metaphorically indicate the first phase of the bereavement process after the loss of her baby, also a means of keeping her memories of the baby as a source of persistent suffering and guilt. However, the grave creates a spiritual connection between the birthmother and the baby that the birthmother later confesses:

A week later I stood at my window

and saw the ground move and swell

the promise of a crop,

that’s when she started crying.

...

Late that same night

she came in by the window,

my baby Lazarus

and suckled at my breast. (Kay, 1991: 21)

Although she has buried the clothes and memories of her baby, the fresh grass on the grave and the dream remind the birthmother of her baby. The birthmother's regret is also underlined in the poem, as evidenced by her assertion that she "**cursed [her]self digging a pit for [her] baby**" (Kay, 1991: 21). Alluding to the miraculous rebirth story of biblical figure Lazarus and *Book of Job*, the birthmother persona unconsciously regrets abandoning her baby and wishes for the revival or return of her baby, particularly believing her sufferings, pain, sense of guilt, her unwanted baby and the baby loss are all given from God. In contrast to the birthmother's feelings of loss and repentance, the adoptive mother expresses her sense of excitement about the adoption:

*We drove through to Edinburgh,
I was that excited the forty miles
seemed a lifetime. What do you think she'll
look like?
...
Our baby has passed.
We can pick her up in two days.
Two days for Christ's sake,
could they not have given us a bit more notice?* (Kay 20)

She feels blessed, grateful and wholly excited for finally having a baby, even though it is not through childbirth: "*I'm not a mother / until I've signed that piece of paper*" (19). Katherine Cockin expresses that the adoptive mother's "signature is required to legitimize and authenticate identity, but the baby's ill health at birth delays the process and postpones the moment of changed identity for the adoptive mother" (2003: 287). The confirmation of adoption papers and adoptive mother's signature, here, socio-culturally verify her position within the society as the 'mother' and bring sheer bliss.

4.3. The Identity of the 'Real' Mother

Regarding the conventional depiction of maternal womanhood, the representation and definition of the 'real' identity of mother is quite challenging. The pregnancy and biological tie are socio-culturally seen as the primary criterion for being recognised and appreciated as the mother in the patriarchal society. This might lead to the categorization of the birthmother as the 'real' mother in contrast to the adoptive mother as the 'artificial and constructed' maternal figure. However, this dichotomy is challenged by the depiction of the biological mother giving her baby away and the adoptive mother taking good care of the baby in the poem sequence. Conversely, the myth of matriarchy and the cultural imperatives of blood tie are all invalidated with the non-biological mother figure who practises the mothering requirements through adoption. The poems, "The Tweed Hat Dream," "The Telling Part," "Generations" and "The Meeting Dream," offer a multifaceted analysis of the 'real' identity of mother by challenging the roots of maternal attachment and the inapplicability of the blood tie and biological motherhood as the idealised 'real' mother identity.

In her work "Black Women and Motherhood" (2005), Patricia Hill Collins conceptualises the 'bloodmother' and 'othermother' images, stating that "[b]iological mothers, or bloodmothers, are expected to care for their children" whereas the "[g]randmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins act as othermothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children" (152, 153). Although Collins' "birth/othermother" argument primarily focuses on the conception of the non-white stepmothers and their roles through the othermothering framework, it can be applied to the case of adoption and adoptive parenting. Exploring the impact of Collins' understandings of the motherhood and family, Kaila Adia Story also describes the "othermothering" as a "concept of accepting responsibility for a child that is not one's own" (2014: 11). Adopting a similar position, Helena Ragoné concedes Collins' concepts and posits "social motherhood" in contrast to the "emphasis on the centrality of biogenetic relatedness" (1997: 117). Ragoné's classification of motherhood types as "the biological mother," "gestational mother" and "the social mother" as discussed in the theory section informs us about the cultural normative practises that define the "biological mother" as the 'real' mother; however in the case of surrogacy she is also the one that "occupies a position similar to that of a woman who places her child up for adoption" (2019: 131). Hence, the biological motherhood

is positioned against the surrogate and adoptive motherhood, thereby underlining the significance of mothering practises rather than genetic relatedness or blood tie. Considering the surrogate and adoptive mothers, Ragoné draws a parallel between them as “both [of them] focus not on biological relatedness, not on biological birth, and not on the scientific model of women as co-creators, but rather on the idea of intentionality” (2019: 70, 148). Beyond the scope of genetic link and blood tie between a mother and a child, Collins and Ragoné claim that the identity of the ‘real’ mother cannot solely be reduced to pregnancy and childbirth, but it is also about social motherhood, maternal functions and sentimental attachment between the mother and the child.

In the poem “The Tweed Hat Dream,” the daughter and the adoptive mother describe their feelings about being adopted and mothered by a non-biological mother figure and mothering an adoptee. The balanced perspectives focus on the assertion that the blood tie is not necessary for the maternal attachment, but the mother and child connection is established through the practises of ‘mothering’. For instance, in the first stanza, the daughter calls the counselling agency in Edinburgh to trace the birthmother’s identity and residence, answering the question of the agency, “what do you expect from it,” she notes that “[i]f she wants to meet me that’s fine if she doesn’t / that is also fine” (Kay, 1991: 22). As the daughter speaker has had no chance to establish mother-child attachment with the birthmother, she is cold and distant towards her. Besides, her lack of interest for the prospect of a family reunion or maternal affinity might be viewed as a defence mechanism, manifesting her fear of not finding enough information about the birthmother’s identity.

Depicting the birthmother as a stranger in contrast to the adoptive mother’s closeness and warmth, the daughter speaker questions the idealised notion of ‘real’ mother figure and discovers a deeper connection with her adoptive mother:

a few genes, blood, a birth.

All this bother, certificates, papers.

It is all so long ago. Does it matter?

Now I come from her,

the mother who stole my milk teeth

ate the digestive left for Santa. (Kay, 1991: 23)

The daughter speaker argues that biological factors such as ‘genes’, ‘blood’, or ‘certificates, papers’ do not define the identity of the ‘real’ mother or the mother-daughter relationship. Popp expresses that “the fissure between the biological mother named on the birth certificate and the adoptive mother who raised her ... confirms the rift between inheritance and experience” (2012: 303). Furthermore, Özlem Aydın claims that “although identity is closely related with familial construction, shared memories and experience [are] reflected through the adoptive mother” (2008: 85). The birthmother is not the ‘real’ mother in the eyes of daughter even though they are biologically linked because she has internalised the adoptive mother figure as the ‘real’ mother who has witnessed her growth.

The poem, “The Telling Part,” polarises the obligation of childbirth and choice of adoption, affirming the deconstruction of biological relatedness. For the daughter speaker, the childbirth is mostly an outcome of the patriarchal cultural imperatives; however, adoption is the personal choice and desire of the mother. The daughter here underlines the contrast between childbirth and adoption stating that “[m]a mammy picked me (I wiz the best) / your mammy had to take you (she’d no choice)” (Kay, 1991: 25). The adoptee in the poem feels superior to other children focusing on that the biological child could be an inevitable or unwanted burden, whereas the adopted child is always a preference and decision of the parents. Moreover, the adoptive motherhood is centrally positioned in contrast to the conventional idealisation of biological motherhood. When the adoptive mother reveals the truth that she is not her ‘real’ mother, the child self of the daughter writes “I love my mammy whether she’s real or no” because she “took me when I’d nowhere to go / my mammy is the best mammy in the world OK” (1991: 25). Considering the concepts and arguments of Collins and Ragoné on the notion of ‘real’ motherhood, the daughter speaker questions the cultural normative depictions and imposed significance of biological motherhood, extensively in contrast to the adoptive mother figure as a ‘mock’ or ‘replica’ of the birthmother. For the daughter, the “reality of her mother is not based on difference of colour but her existence for the daughter” (Aydın, 2008: 83), and thus, the labels associated with the failure in maternal identity—infertile, childless and non-biological—are reversed by the depiction of the daughter’s attachment to the adoptive mother:

After mammy telt me she wisnae my real mammy

I was scared to death she was gonnies melt

or something or mibbe disappear in the dead
of night and somebody would say she wis a fairy
godmother. So the next morning I felt her skin
to check it was flesh, but mibbe it was just
a good imitation. How could I tell if my mammy
was a dummy with a voice spoken by someone else?
So I searches the whole house for clues
but I never found nothing. (Kay, 1991: 26)

Due to the prescribed definitions and normative expectations about the maternal figure, the daughter in this poem “puzzles over matters of biological connection in starkly literal terms – human or ventriloquist’s puppet –” (Fox, 2015: 282), and the adoptive mother is believed to be an imitation, the ‘dummy’ figure trying to mimic the birthmother. In a state of confusion, “child speaker in the poem articulates a seemingly naive interpretation of authentic motherhood that later challenges any notion of ‘the real’” (282). Magdalene Redekop describes ‘mother’ as a composite, layered figure consisting of many arguments within, and calls it a “mock mother” to underline the difficulty in defining the ‘real’ identity of her (2014: 4). The biological connection implied in the identity of the ‘real’ mother is played out and constantly undermined through ambiguous references to the “mammy” figure:

we are never sure at any point which "mammy" she is talking about. The notion of "mammy" is transferable and so also liable to change. Real mammy (the very term "real" is problematic) is the birth mother because she shares genetic information with the child, and yet "real" mammy can also be seen as the physically present, tangible adopted mother. Conversely, "not real" mammy is the non-blood related adoptive mother but "not real" mammy is also the absent, and therefore imagined, birth-mother" (McClellan, 2005: 120).

The daughter speaker highlights that she cannot find any faux substance of the adoptive mother to be ‘dummy,’ and thereby, the adoptive mother becomes the ‘real’ mother figure for the daughter speaker.

The adoptive mother persona, in the same way, is criticised for her social mothering, which is stressed by the patriarchal society as “*not like having your own child though is it*” (Kay, 1991: 27). Although the adoptive motherhood and social mothering are often discredited due to the absence of a blood tie, the adoptive mother speaker argues that ‘ideal’ motherhood should be entangled with mothering practises, nurturing, and childcare:

I say of course it is, what else is it?

she’s my child, I have told her stories

wept at her losses, laughed at her pleasures,

she is mine.

I was always the first to hear her in the night

all this umbilical knot business is nonsense

– the men can afford deeper sleeps that’s all.

I listened to hear her talk,

and when she did I heard my voice under hers

and now some of her mannerisms crack me up. (Kay, 1991: 27)

It is underlined in the quotation that the adoptive mother is the ‘real’ mother owing to the fact that not the birthmother, but her own self has hitherto been with the daughter, “*told her stories / wept at her losses, laughed at her pleasures,*” or been the “*first to hear her in the night*” (27). The adoptive mother is the one who has practised the maternal duties, physically and emotionally supported the daughter throughout her life, which also “invites an inquiry of what ‘real’ mothering is and underscores how care and love do not only have genetic links” (Greenway, 2016: 159). Furthermore, the adoptive mother speaker notes that there are some similarities between her and the daughter that “*I heard my voice under hers / and now some of her mannerisms crack me up*” (Kay, 1991: 27). In the context of adoption, the adoptee cannot have a strong physical resemblance to the adoptive parents, yet she is depicted in the poem as a copy of the adoptive mother, having very same voice, manners, or gestures. “In lieu of blood relation,” as Nerys Williams comments, “personal anecdotes, an

adoptive family history, and speech patterns reformulate ideas of belonging and the nurture of a life story” (2020: 433). Despite the lack of physical resemblance and the absence of biologic connection, the adoptive mother posits that the mother-child bond is not naturally inherited through birth or blood, but rather it is enhanced through mothering practises. Hence, the adopted daughter in the poem resembles the adoptive mother in voice, act, or manners, rather than the birthmother with whom she only shares the blood tie.

Articulating the discussion on the pre-eminence in maternal attachment over the biologic link, the poem “Generations” explicitly critiques the social imposition of the purported blood and physical resemblance association through illustrating the connotative and denotative meanings of blood to form a multifaceted analysis. In the poem, “Generations,” the daughter speaker accepts that she has neither information about her ‘original’ line nor biological relatedness and physical resemblance to her adoptive parents. Seeing her unfamiliar face on the mirror, the daughter persona rejects the conventional belief that genealogy or ‘blood tie’ can induce the physical resemblance and emotional bond. Moreover, she claims that the physical resemblance as an emblem of blood tie cannot be achieved through biological childbirth, but the physical ‘contradictions’ are possible even between birthparents and their children:

I have my parents who are not of the same tree
and you keep trying to make it matter,
the blood, the tie, the passing down
generations.
We all have our contradictions,
the ones with the mother’s nose and father’s eyes
have them;
the blood does not bind confusion. (Kay, 1991: 35)

With a reference to the ‘tree’ as a “generational marker, a sign of lineage,” as Pateman states, the daughter is frustrated over the insistence on the genealogical approach to parent and child relationship (2014: 79). By “expressing her disquiet at the insistence on blood and its supposed importance,” the daughter speaker argues that even the biological children are not

exact copies of their birthparents (Pateman, 2014: 79). The blood tie, genealogy or the biological relatedness become impotent to define identity or to ensure close affinity between the parents and the child.

Furthermore, the poem “Generations” demystifies the importance of blood as a defining factor in establishing an intimate bond between the adoptive parents and the adopted child. Even though blood is seen “emblematic of biologised claims to cultural belonging, and indeed, the daughter comes to view it as a vehicle to self-knowledge” (Brown, 2007: 223). She ironically questions the overvalued importance of biological tie and continuity of genealogy “I know my blood when I cut my finger. / I know what my blood looks like,” “[i]t is dark ruby red,” (Kay, 1991: 35). The literal sense of blood as a totalising substance is juxtaposed to its figurative meaning, disparaging the social priority over biological motherhood, blood tie, or the ‘original’ identity:

It is the well, the womb, the fucking seed.

Here, I am far enough away to wonder –

what were their faces like

who were my grandmothers

what were the days like

passed in Scotland

the land I come from

the soil in my blood. (Kay, 1991: 35).

In this quotation, the daughter speaker extensively criticises the emphasis on the biological kinship by belittling the seed and soil metaphor. For the persona, being curious about one’s ‘origin’ is pointless to construct the identity of ‘real’ mother. The description of the birthmother as a “faceless” figure who “has no nose,” “neither eyes nor / fine boned cheeks” in the poem also dissects the cultural idealisations of the identity of ‘real’ mother (Kay, 1991: 36-37). In the interview by Nancy K. Gish (2001), Kay underlines that the daughter speaker in the sequence cannot imagine the birthmother, “can’t make her physically real for her. Whereas her adopted mother is very physically real, very affectionate, warm, earthy, full-blooded, the birth mother is not; she is the opposite of those qualities” (214). While the

adoptive mother has full presence in the collection, the depiction of the birth mother is limited to a series of minor details, particularly “an unidentified face” (Williams, 2020: 433). The daughter speaker believes that the ‘real’ mother is not determined by blood tie or biological relatedness, but rather by maternal affinity and emotional bond established by mothering practices.

Likewise, the poem “The Meeting Dream” questions the ‘real’ identity of mother through the juxtaposition of perspectives of these three speakers and amplifies the physical dissimilarity between daughter and birthmother focusing more on the emotional unfamiliarity and the feeling of coldness. The daughter, despite a biological connection, is physically differentiated from the birthmother. The emphasis on the differences invalidates the social significance of genealogy, demystifying the concept of blood as an essential notion of mother and child bond. The daughter states that she “always imagined her hair dark brown / not grey” because of her own Afro hair (Kay, 1991: 40). However, the daughter realises that she is “smaller, fatter, darker” than the birthmother, except seeing “[her] chin in hers / that is all” (40). Besides, the daughter speaker notes that “[t]here is no sentiment” and they “don’t cuddle or even shake hands,” or they “don’t ask big questions” but just “smile sudden as a fire blazing / then die down” (40). Even though they have a biological connection, the absence of maternal attachment creates a sense of coldness, turning the birthmother into a myth, an unreal figure to exist because “she is too many imaginings to be flesh and blood” (41).

Since the daughter persona has never met her birthmother or had a chance to establish mother/child affinity, she could only ‘imagine’ her biological mother in contrast to the adoptive mother who is “flesh and blood”. Expanding the arguments over the futile emphasis on blood tie, the adoptive mother in the poem “The Meeting Dream” highlights the mother/child resemblance between her and the daughter persona:

See me and her

there is no mother and daughter more similar.

We’re on the wavelength so we are.

Right away I know if she’s upset.

And vice versa. Closer than blood. (Kay, 1991: 41)

The daughter unfamiliarity and emotional coldness towards the birthmother is contrasted with the connection she feels with the adoptive mother. According to Fox, “[o]ccupying ‘the same wavelength,’ [the daughter and the adoptive mother] ‘read’ each other almost instinctively (2015: 288), and her remark ‘closer than blood’ implies that “genetics or biology [is nonessential] to keep close in that very spiritual way in which you can inhabit each other's selves, but you can do it in lots of different ways” (Kay as cited in Gish, 2001: 219). Underlining the difficulty with the actual definition, the birthmother in the poem “Generations” states that **“you’ll never really know your mother. / I know who she thinks I am – she’s made a blunder”** (Kay, 1991: 36, emphasis original). Delving into the ‘real’ identity of mother, Elaine Tuttle Hansen discusses that the mother always wants or wishes to be known as a mother even if she does not practise the mothering functions, abandons the baby, or gives her for adoption (1997: 20). In this regard, the birthmother in the poem tries to omit the daughter’s false impressions about her identity as a ‘bad’ mother figure and still desires to be considered a mother. Yet, she is “‘not as real’ as, ‘more ethereal’ than the adoptive mother, [...] the birth mother is both an imaginative construction of the adopted child and a real person inaccessible but known to be there” (Gish, 2001: 230).

The poems, “Generations” and “The Meeting Dream,” problematise the concept of blood and its symbolic dominance over the definition of ‘real’ identity of the mother and mother-child attachment. The adoptive mother and the daughter’s interdependent relationship reveals a deep emotional bond shaped by nurturing and affection, transcending the limitations of biological relatedness. As noted above, the implication of blood as a scientific indicator of identity and the imposition of the ‘real’ identity of mother with biological pregnancy and childbirth become impractical with the dichotomous perspectives on biological and social motherhood and maternal attachment through mothering practises. In the collection *The Adoption Papers*, the mother identity is not fixed, but prone to resist, alter, or (re)form under diverse factors and environmental circumstances. Jackie Kay’s formal choices such as dialogical shifts and juxtaposition of three speakers’ perspectives shifted from the birthmother speaker to the adoptive mother as a result of baby abandonment, adoption and adoptive mother-child resemblance and emotional bond. The polyphonic structure significantly suppresses the one-sided definition and narration of motherhood, and problematises the difficulty in demarcating the precise margins of the ‘real’ identity of mother and mother-child affinity. It also points out how the daughter doubts on the conventional concept of identity that becomes unsettled and enigmatic, and how she

practises more a performative version of identity through tracing her bloodline, who she was and who she becomes.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE ETHICS OF CARE AND SHIFTING ROLES IN MOTHER-DAUGHTER DYAD IN ANN GRAY'S *I WISH I HAD MORE MOTHERS* (2018)

Ann Gray received the 2018 International Book and Pamphlet Competition with her most recent collection, *I Wish I Had More Mothers* (2018), published by Smith/Doorstop Books. The poetry collection explores the mother-daughter dyad in the context of caregiving as a daughter witnesses the demise of a mentally ill mother. The traditional mother-daughter dynamic is deconstructed through the introduction of a mother figure who is diagnosed with dementia and explicitly defies the image of patriarchal cultural mother figure as the primary caregiver in the family. The female speaker introduced as Ann is the daughter of the dementia sufferer mother, Mutti, in the collection. The collection reflects Ann's personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts about the gradual loss of the mother due to decline in cognitive abilities and her changing role as the carer of her mother. The mother in the collection is physically confined to the domestic space and mentally succumbs to dementia. The mother's mental disruption leads to an identity crisis and role shift in mother-daughter dyad regarding the carer/cared dichotomy. Losing her cognitive abilities and maternal functions, the mother switches from being the primary caregiver in the household, whereas the child, particularly the daughter of the family, adopts the maternal role by caring the dependent mother and complicates the conventional depiction of mother as the carer.

This chapter aims to investigate the crisis of identity, division of roles based on the traditional mother/carers and daughter/cared binary opposition in the scope of feminist background in this chapter. In her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich proposes the motherhood as a reciprocal relationship that a mother establishes "with a particular child, or children, is *one part* of female process; it is not an identity for all time. [...] But in the eyes of society, once having been mothers, what are we, if not always mothers?" (1986: 36-7). Similarly, Elaine Tuttle Hansen observes that "the intersubjectivity of mother and child is, from the moment of birth, always and properly tentative and temporary as much as it is fiercely connected and interdependent" (1997: 21). In traditional households, the burden of care largely falls on the shoulders of mothers, creating a recurrent pattern for maternal identity and rhetoric of care for the well-being of the family members, predominantly the duty of childbearing:

women gritting their teeth at the incessant demands of child-care still find it hard to acknowledge their children's growing independence of them; still feel they must be at home ... be that ear always tuned for the sound of emergency, of being needed. (Rich, 1986: 37).

Mothers internalise the normative requirements of being the primary and eternal caregiver of the family and devote themselves to their children. Hence, their mothering functions as the 'ideal' maternal figure while the child stays the 'child' of the mother even if s/he becomes an independent adult. The traditional mother and daughter social roles with the precise responsibilities, however, could be reshaped due to some unpredictable and inevitable circumstances. For instance, the mother's physical, psychological or mental illnesses figuratively abolish the conventional mother/carer and child/cared dichotomy due to the fact that she becomes physically feeble, dependent or mentally declined. The 'cared' figure in the dichotomy, the daughter, has to shift her position to the 'carer' so as to take the responsibility of caring ill parent. Therefore, the prescribed mother-daughter relationship based on the carer/cared binary opposition is reconstructed due to the mother's failure in mothering functions and decline in cognitive abilities. Ann Gray's collection depicts the daughter speaker as the carer of the mentally incapable mother figure, challenging the normative description of motherhood as the subjective identity, which proposes an alternative perspective for patriarchal normative identities, social roles and responsibilities. The collection, *I Wish I Had More Mothers*, thus, provides a multifaceted analysis of prescribed traditional and social identities of the mother and the child around the discourse of ethics of care.

The theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis facilitates the interpretation of mother and daughter relationship entrenched in carer/cared normative opposition through the role and identity shift owing to the mental disability of the mother figure in the dyad. Alongside Adrienne Rich's description of motherhood as a reciprocal relationship and one segment of womanhood, this chapter also employs Maggie L. Cecchin's concepts of "filial crisis," "filial transition," and "filial maturity" and JoAnn Perry's three R's, corresponding to three stages of identity formation, "(re)calling," "(re)learning," and "(re)adjusting". Relying on Cecchin and Perry's arguments, this section explores the deconstruction of common mother-daughter dyad from the daughter speaker's perspective within the rhetoric of care and emotional burden of witnessing the demise of chronically ill parent through

articulating the concepts of memory loss, time-shifting, physical and psychological confinement. Within the process of caring, the daughter of the dementia sufferer mother questions the prescriptive social positions, roles and requirements dictated by the patriarchal social system on women as the caregivers of the family units. The mother/daughter dyad within the benchmarks of carer/cared opposition is gradually reversed due to the mother's mental impairment, adjusting daughter's 'child/cared' position to the 'adult-self' where she undergoes physical and emotional burden, but could also have a chance to realise the mother as an independent subject, freed from the male-designed label 'motherhood.'

5.1. "Filial Crisis" in Mother-Child Dyad due to Dementia

Within the conventional image of mothers as primary caregivers, they are expected to nurture and care for children under any circumstances. The imposition of the normative expectations creates an archetypal mother and child relationship in which the mother is the ultimate carer and the child is the cared. The identities of those two figures are (re)shaped in accordance with the internalisation of this dichotomy in a mother-child relationship. The poems "I wish I had more mothers" and "When my mother is dead" enunciate the crisis in mother and daughter dyad due to the mother figure's mental illness. The dementia sufferer mother with a decline in cognitive abilities invalidates the notion of mother as the main carer of the household, furthering physically and mentally incapable mother image in contrast to the conventional depiction of mothers' role. Hence, the daughter speaker assumes the role of the caregiver for her mother, leading to an identity crisis and a shift in the dynamics of mother and daughter relationship. In the eponymous poem, "I wish I had more mothers," the caregiving daughter persona stresses the significance of the mother's role in their relationship despite the emotional burden of dementia care, witnessing of the decline in her mental health and finally her eventual loss. In the other poem, "When my mother is dead," the speaker emphasises the implacability of mother's social identity, role and responsibility in the mother-child dyad, even in her absence.

Articulating the social identity and role shift in mother-daughter dyad, Adrienne Rich propounds that "[t]he loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (1986: 237). The switch in carer/cared dichotomy between the mother and daughter challenges the conventional depictions and benchmarks for motherhood status, mothering practises, and their relationship. Enunciating Rich's perspective of 'female tragedy,' Maggie L. Cecchin highlights how the family dynamics are disrupted by the sudden

intrusion of dementia into the relationship between a parent and a child: “dementia creeps uninvited into lives of mothers - daughters have no anticipation of, or preparation for, being a daughter of a mother with dementia” and “[b]ecause of the often unrecognised, insidious onset of dementia, early stages frequently generate interplays of misunderstanding, tension, and guilt” (2001: 104). The loss of a daughter, a mother and their changing responsibilities of caregiving as a result of dementia, hence, induces tensions, anger, ambiguity because of the fact that the process requires shifts in the socio-culturally stipulated identities, roles and responsibilities. In a similar vein, Minke Goldsteen et al. note that the changing roles in the caregiving process might lead to a crisis and an atmosphere of “uncertainty,” where the socio-cultural expectations are conflicted with the daughter’s confusion about how she should behave as the carer of the ill mother (2007: 8). The illness of the mother and her inability to provide care reverse the normative expectations of the social identities, conceptions and responsibilities requiring a shift in mother-child dyad. In this regard, Cecchin underlines that “dementia alters existing mother-daughter relationships,” where the mother does not confirm the expectations and implications of the traditional depiction of motherhood, and the daughter figure taking the ‘mother-carer’ identity and its responsibility for ill mother questions the notion of motherhood status and mothering (2001: 104).

Building upon Cecchin’s arguments, JoAnn Perry asserts that the first stage of becoming a caregiving daughter of dementia patient mother is “(re)calling” when daughters are prone to remember memories of their mothers who were once mentally healthy and active (2004: 56). Dementia depresses and corrupts a person’s life and personality in diverse ways. The conditions before and after are so contradictory that the carer daughters mainly emphasise “how they called or visited their mother and saw or heard behaviors, appearances, and statements that were inconsistent with the recalled and remembered images of her” (Perry, 2004: 56). In the first stage of the process, the daughter faces with the reality that even the mother is physically alive, what is remembered about the mother before mental illness and what the mother has been undergoing since the diagnosis of dementia is controversial because of the fact that the traditional mother image who practises mothering functions becomes physically and mentally incapable. Witnessing the change in mother’s characteristics, lifestyle and maternal abilities, the daughter personas in the poems “I wish I had more mothers” and “When my mother is dead” exemplify Perry’s “(re)calling” and Cecchin’s “filial crisis” stages where the chronically ill mother – insidiously becoming the cared for in the filial relationship – prompts the filial crisis in mother/carers and child/cared

opposition while daughter speakers queries the carer/mother image propounding the identity and social role crises through the implacability of mother.

In the poem “I wish I had more mothers,” the speaker imagines alternative mother figures, each possessing different qualities than her own mother. She wishes she had mothers while the one “wasn’t exhausted,” another “could have sat typing, night after night,” and the third one “could’ve been / effortlessly elegant, dabbed at cologne with her fingers,” whereas the fourth mother “could have been / the dreamer,” or “could have gone wherever she thought” (Gray, 2018: 9). If she had had all those diverse mothers, the speaker thinks she “could have walked away from / the gloating mother-knows-best and gone to another” (9). Here, the daughter speaker describes these multiple mother figures with distinct personalities, abilities, or characteristics. Yet, those characteristics are embodied in the mother figure that the speaker welcomes, except for the one “who wept when it all got beyond her and said / we’d all made her life so difficult and really let her down” (9). The speaker is desolated not only by the gradual decline of her mother’s health but also by her blame that causes the daughter speaker to feel impotent in ‘enhancing’ the circumstances related to the mother’s mental health. Imagining a coffee table rounded with all the mothers sitting, chatting and laughing, the caregiver daughter persona expresses her ongoing desire for approval and closeness in her relationship with the mother:

I’d want the one who cried

in the pantry the first Christmas I was nursing, to have told me

and let me feel loved. I’d be able to laugh at the one that rang

to tell me my new boyfriend needs a baby, as if I ought to try

harder – forget about the cancer or the thirty years too late –

because I’d have the one who thought I was a triumph through

every failure, who’s mind was still sharp and tender, who could

listen, who still had enough of a whistle to call up a dog. (Gray, 2018: 10)

Despite the poor health, anger of the mother and hardships in caregiving, the speaker still feels attached to her mother diagnosed with dementia because the mother is the one who once was tender and a dutiful mother, seeing her daughter as a source of pride for their

family. In her semi-autobiographical article, Françoise Baylis describes her dementia sufferer mother, Gloria, as not mere the woman who is scowling, threatening, or insulting but is the one who gives birth, nurtures, and practises all the physical and emotional mothering functions through infancy to adulthood (2017: 221). Similarly, Janelle S. Taylor shares her personal experiences with her mother diagnosed with dementia that “[d]espite all the changes she has been through, my mother ‘still’ is in many ways the cheerful, affectionate person I have always known her to be” (2008: 316). Witnessing the physical and mental demise of the mother figure due to dementia, the daughter speaker in the poem exemplifies Cecchin’s ‘filial crisis’ phase, doubting the dramatic and unexpected role-shift in mother/daughter dyad resulted from the decline in cognitive abilities of the mother because of the fact that including all types within, the mother cannot be replaced or imitated by anyone, even by the speaker herself. The daughter speaker also undergoes the ‘(re)calling’ stage of Perry where she tries to hold on memories of once healthy mother as a resistance to the reality of the loss of mother.

In the poem “When my mother is dead,” the speaker discusses the ‘mother’ status through articulating the argument over death of the maternal figure. In the very first line, she simply asks, “[w]ho will be my mother when my mother is dead” (Gray, 2018: 11). For the speaker, her ‘mother’ as the combination of all mother types within a body is more of a surreal being who cannot be replaced by any other figure. Hence, the persona aims to emphasise the feeling of ‘emptiness’ after the mother’s death by asking many rhetorical questions to come to terms with the feelings of loss and grief:

who will draw the blue curtains when we play in the woods

who will put us to bed – who will sing ‘Speed Bonny Boat’

... who will sit in the back

with the little ones smelling of sick – who will taste salt

on her lips when we’re miles from the sea ...

...

have girlfriends

called Auntie, keep our secrets (11).

According to Sharon R. Kaufman, dementia is “‘a condition both of death-in-life and of life-in-death’” (2005, as cited in Taylor, 2008: 322). The mother’s mental illness and inability to practise daily activities burdens the daughter with the responsibility of care, and the society names the dementia sufferer mother as the “person dies but their body lives on” (Taylor, 2008: 321); however, the daughter speaker is afraid of losing the mother and the maternal care and comfort because the physical death of the mother will create ‘void’ within herself. For her, the mother’s presence and their mutual affinity as the mother and daughter are “grounded in emotive relations and are not equally dependent on the ability to remember objects and subjects” (Baylis, 2017: 219).

The speaker is also shocked to realise that motherhood as an abstract concept is actually ephemeral. In that context, the concept of physical or mental death detaching mother from children deconstructs the established mother as the carer and child as the cared binary opposition, causing the child speaker to doubt the unconscious belief in the ‘eternity of mothers.’ For instance, the speaker’s question “who’ll be the north pole – be the sun?” foreshadows how she will lose her orientation, stability in her life, as well as warmth and nurturing of the mother when she is gone (Gray, 2018: 11). Regarding the normative depictions of mother as a self-sacrificial, tender, primary caregiver at the centre of family bounding, mothers are recognised as having permanent responsibility of their children. Yet, “[t]hroughout this process of decline, as awareness of limitations increases, patients and family members experience anticipatory grief, and family roles begin to change” (King et al., 1991, as cited in Podgorski and Deborah, 2009: 25). Therefore, any possible physical death or mental decline in cognitive abilities of the mother figure in an unexpected time triggers the suspicion of traditional depiction of mothers as caregivers. In this regard, the daughter speaker in the poem struggles to accept the mother/carer and daughter/cared role reversal. In addition to the crisis of the speaker, she underlines the implacability of mother identity and complexity of the carer position. The mother as the nurturer connotation is destroyed by dementia, yet the mother status cannot be replaced by anyone, including the daughter.

5.2. “Filial Transition” and the Daughter Practising ‘Mothering’

The memory impairment, aggression, apathy, or disruption of thought patterns immobilise the mother with dementia from usual every-day activities. The child, mainly a daughter, adopts the burden of care, requiring a process of adjustment to the new role. In that context, daughters are socio-culturally expected to follow the social norms and customs for caring for the ill parents. In terms of the gender-based analysis of the care in mother-child relationship, “[a]n only daughter, an unmarried daughter, daughters who are unemployed, and daughters who live in close proximity are more likely to become caregivers for aging parents (Fingerman, 2001, as cited in Ward-Griffin et al., 2007: 14), and when “son’s parent is affected by dementia the son’s wife usually becomes the caregiver” (Brody et al., 1994; Cicirelli, 1993; Globerman, 1996; Pohl et al., 1997, as cited in Perry, 2004: 51). Daughters are more likely – and also prone – to sacrifice their lives to be the carer than sons because, according to Judith Arcana, “[a]ll our mothers teach us is what they have learned in the crucible of sexism” (1979, as cited in Hirsch, 1981b: 213). Therefore, providing care for the incapable, aging, physically or mentally declined parents is conventionally ascribed as the ‘duty’ of women, either daughters or daughters-in-law in the family. Within the process of role transition from being the ‘cared’ for to becoming the ‘carer,’ daughters face with physical, emotional, and mental burden of caregiving. On the one hand, being the caregiver induces some negative outcomes such as witnessing the gradual decline of mother’s mental health or the feeling of helplessness in the face her deteriorating condition through remembering old memories when she was healthy and would actively practise mothering. On the other hand, the process gives an opportunity for daughters to have first-hand experience in dementia care by spending time with their mother. In the poems “Bathing” and “Without Us,” the daughter acquires better acceptance and maturity than other family members as she witnesses the effects of dementia on her mother. After coming to terms with the most common symptoms of dementia such as memory loss, aphasia (difficulty in comprehension/expression), dyschronometria (distorted time perception), or hallucinations, the daughter proceeds to the next step from the ‘filial crisis’ or ‘(re)calling phase to the ‘filial transition’ and ‘(re)learning’ stages where she consents to the role shift from the ‘cared’ to the ‘carer.’

Analysing the role and responsibility change in mother-daughter dyad, Cecchin emphasises that “being a daughter of a mother with dementia give[s] way to filial transition”

(2001: 105). The process is gradual, and in parallel with the mental decline of the mother figure, family members such as husbands, wives, or children turn into the 'family carer' (Goldsteen et al., 2007: 2). In this context, the daughter mainly adopts the maternal practices which were once carried out by the mother. According to JoAnn Perry, Cecchin's "filial transition" stage is the "(re)learning" process when daughters discover "things about their mothers that they had not previously known. This included learning about aspects of the mothers such as their accomplishments, losses, and traits, such as sentimentality" (2004: 59). The shift in carer/cared dichotomy within the context of mother-child dyad assigns maternal roles to the daughter. On the one hand, witnessing the demise of chronically ill mother, the daughter undergoes a process dominated by emotional stress and losing of personal space and time. On the other hand, the process may eventually lead to the daughter's acceptance and maturity as she fully grasps the symptoms of the illness. Hence, the mother-daughter affinity might be reconstructed, and a renewed emotional bond might be established based on patience and confidence despite the reversal of maternal and filial roles.

The poem "Bathing" portrays a scene in which the speaker washes her elderly mother suffering from dementia. The mother figure disrobes her clothes for the bath, "laying out her flannels, hanging up her petticoats", and the speaker observes her aging body, "full breasts / now falling sideways, the soft four-baby belly, the still slender legs" (Gray, 2018: 12). Once she was a fresh, young, and active mother and now becomes aged, mentally sick and in need of care. Focusing on the details about the mother's body, the daughter navigates through emotions of responsibility, pity and fear of the same fate of aging or experiencing an illness as such. The scene of bathing also illustrates how the mother and daughter have closeness, affection and touching. While bathing, the daughter persona remembers her childhood memories when the mother would bath them, "sing, rub her thumb and forefinger close / together in the soap to blow wild trembling strings of bubbles" (12). For the speaker, the mother in memories were such a lively, tender, and vigorous maternal figure that she would function the mothering practises as the primary caregiver. The two scenes juxtaposed in the poem highlight the emotional change of the daughter speaker due to the role and responsibility shift in the dyad, where the excitement and joy of the daughter speaker's childhood yield to the sorrow and pity for the mother. Opening more about the process of the mother's mental illness, the speaker underlines that dementia and the role transition develop gradually over the years in parallel:

[t]hree years

ago I could phone her. Two years ago she could type, ...

That year, sitting at the organ, she found

she'd lost the music, the keys, the stops, the pedals, the black

and white of it – her church hollow with the sound of unaccompanied

voices. (Gray, 2018: 12)

Within a couple of years, the mother “slips in and out of herself. Her world is shrinking” because of dementia that causes her to lose whatever she has already known (12). The metaphoric reference to the ‘church’ image ‘hollow with unaccompanied voices’ could be interpreted that the mother’s inner peace and stability are hollowed and damaged with the disruption in thought pattern, cognitive decline, emotional or behaviour problems due to dementia. The reference could also mean the confinement and growing solitude of the mother since she loses her ability to recognise others, particularly her family members, relatives, or friends. By reason of the decline in motor skills and cognitive abilities, dementia patients are socially secluded from the environment and relationships by those without dementia. As Janelle S. Taylor writes, the social confinement ensues when “other people stop ‘recognizing’ and ‘caring’ about them” in connection with “labels contribute to social abandonment and isolation of the person living under the description of dementia: ‘Not Who She Once Was.’ ‘No Longer Herself.’ ‘Not Really There.’” (2008: 318, 2011: 62). At this point, the daughter as the carer becomes the only person with whom the mother can socialise. This also leads to the seclusion and confinement of the daughter in the same space as the one that the mother is inhabiting.

The poem further focuses on the changing dynamics of maternal identity and the associated responsibilities. As Mutti fails to meet her daily needs, the daughter persona’s social role is transitioned to practise maternal functions:

[i]f I could live here. If I didn’t have to go. If I could do this every day

until I lose her. If I could sing. If I could blow those strings of bubbles.

If I could hold what she still has and keep it safe for her. (Gray, 2018: 12)

Since the dementia puts the mother in need of care, she loses her social position as the 'primary caregiver'. Consequently, the daughter persona in the poem doubts whether she could really fulfil this role or practise those maternal functions after the mother. In her adult self, the daughter has to sacrifice her own life, feeling the urge to provide care, protection and safety for her mother. Yet, the use of 'could' underlines the daughter's ambivalence about losing her personal boundaries while fulfilling the requirements as the carer. Carol Podgorski and Deborah A. King assert that the dementia care is chiefly supplied by the family members exerting themselves to protect the patient from danger and discomfort as long as possible (2009: 24). In their new relationship requiring great efforts, patience, kindness and self-sacrifice, the caregiver could sometimes describe the process "as 'a marathon,' an 'exhausting vigil' given bodies 'who need to be constantly watched or restrained,' an 'ordeal' ... and most tellingly, an 'endless funeral'" (Cohen, 1998, as cited in Taylor, 2008: 323). Due to the hardship in caregiving, the daughter speaker is in a dilemma between losing her individuality and personal life and the mother figure while trying to reach a compromise with her new role as the carer of the mother. The 'filial transition' of the daughter, thus, consists of having an opportunity to spend time with the mother, correspondingly keeping the mother-child affinity in her relationship as much as possible and recompensing for the mother's maternal practises through mothering the mother.

In the poem, "Without Us," the daughter persona expresses how old and amnesiac mother loses her perception of reality and capability of doing every-day work on her own, and thus she has to take the responsibilities for care and housework such as cleaning the house, cooking, or laundry. In contrast to the ambiguity of the previous speaker, she has already adapted herself to her new role as the carer of the mother. The dementia sufferer mother figure undergoes impairments of memory and perception of reality, "peers into [the speaker's] face, are you, she hesitates, Ann?" to which the speaker responds, "I am. I'm your eldest daughter" (Gray, 2018: 15). The hesitation about her daughter's identity, Ann, is proof that the mother forgetting her daughters' name also implicitly forgets her social status as the mother. When the speaker answers that she is Ann, her eldest daughter, the mother replies, "[o]f course ... with a little laugh" (15). The entanglement in her memory creates such a volatile (dis)trust in already known facts, names and identities that the daughter persona expresses "[n]either of us believe I've convinced her" (15). Since dementia causes her to lose control in memory, thinking and behaviour, the mother's instability leads to the loss of motherhood status and failure in mothering. Besides, the cognitive impairments with

distorted time perception and hallucinations cause her to delve into the past, especially her own childhood memories. The loss of time and reality damages the mother-child relationship and creates an invisible wall where both parties cannot go beyond the other. In this regard, Taylor notes that dementia builds:

a clear line between us: place me here, on the side of reality, competence, and personhood, and put her over there, on the side of delusion, incapacity, and the not quite (or no longer) fully human. What I took from that moment, however, was something different. I realized that what she was longing for was not my childhood home, but *hers*. She missed her Mom and Dad. She was trying, in her own way, to hold on to them – just as I was trying, against the odds, to hold on to her. Our predicament is exactly the same. (2008: 332)

For the mother, her childhood memories are the ones that she could hold on to, where she could find parental warmth, peace and protection. However, for the carer/child, the mother's presence on the other side of the line, the side of delusion, means the loss of the mother. The life with dementia produces "associations of complexity, uncertainty, and loneliness," causing the "family members [to] find themselves in a strange territory" (Goldsteen et al., 2007: 4). Because of this 'clear line' or 'strange territory' between the dementia sufferer and the carer, neither the mother nor the daughter speaker can step into each other's realm. Articulating a gap in mother-child relationship resulting from the loss of time and reality, the mother's mental impairment harms the mutual trust in mother-child affinity, yet the shift in carer's perspective on dementia and its effects on mother-child affinity provides kindness, acceptance and maturity as a next step in the caring process (Baylis, 2017: 214). The daughter speaker also writes about how she handles and feels about her mother's delusion and constant time-shifting as the carer:

[s]ometimes she'll whirl
about the house causing mayhem, on other days we'll find
her upstairs, in a room she says her mother left her when
she died, ...
Lost there, she's 4 years old, without her father. She weeps,
searching for his clothes, his shoes, his overcoat, his hat.

He will need them when he goes out on his visit. It's so

little, what we do to be there, where she is without us. (Gray, 2018: 15)

The mother remembering the past occurrences rather than the present ones proves that she is detached from reality due to dementia. Afflicted by a damage to her short-term memory, the mother acts like a four-year-old child, waiting for her dead mother or father's homecoming. The disruption in memory, emotion and thinking causes the mother figure to become lost in the past while creating a deep sense of helplessness, despair and emotional void on the carer/daughter who is sorry for leaving the mother alone on the side of delusion 'where she is without [them].'

The mother figure has already lost her cognitive abilities, emotional stability and thought pattern, and her unexpected reactions, anger, insults, accusations, or her delusions and distorted time perception make the domestic duties not only a physical but also psychological burden for the daughter. For instance, the mother figure shouts, "[g]et out! I want to bite you" at the speaker who is recognised as an "intruder in [mother's] kitchen unnecessarily cleaning / everything that's sticky or has left a rusty stencil of itself / inside the pull-out drawer" (Gray, 2018: 15). In return, the daughter speaker "softly" replies to mother, "[y]ou can, ... and it's / forgotten. [They] return to chocolate in two faded cups, to / cutting cake, to finding forks and saucers" (15). It could be clearly stated that the daughter tries to protect the affinity between them through internalising and accepting the mother's health condition even when the mother loses her tension. In this respect, Baylis comments that "with a better understanding of the disease, I might have had kinder, gentler interactions with my mother while she was in the early stages of dementia" (2017: 213). Supporting this view, Alison Phinney proposes in "Self, Lost and Found" that caring for the dementia patient "provides unique perspectives that foreground the person rather than the disease" (2018: 245). Within the process of care, the carer daughter builds a more empathetic approach and understanding of both the mental illness and mother's identity. The mother's volatile behaviours require comprehension, tolerance, and kindness to protect the mother-child affinity.

Moreover, the mother in the poem shouting at the daughter speaker unconsciously sees her as an 'intruder' in the kitchen who violates the mother's power by organising her personal space. It can be claimed that the speaker becomes an invader for a moment, who

tries to ‘trespass’ or seize control of the house and ‘dethrone’ the mother. It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by ‘dethrone’ through centring the argument around Adrienne Rich’s idea of power. According to Rich, power is a “primal word and a primal relationship under patriarchy. Through control of the mother, the man assures himself of possession of his children; through control of his children, he insures the disposition of his patrimony,” therefore, “there is an inescapable correlation between the idea of motherhood and the idea of power” (1986: 64, 72). It can thus be noted that the conventional, patriarchy-based power dynamic between the father and child through the mother also forms the basis of the matriarchal power in the dichotomy. For the mother figure in the poem, the matriarchal power over the daughter is lost because of her mental impairments and inability at mothering functions. Yet, the daughter speaker’s patience implied in her soft reply proves that the carer/daughter as the caregiver remains attached to the mother’s previous self despite the tremendous transformation the latter undergoes (Baylis, 2017: 221). Despite the loss of mothering functions, matriarchal authority, the destruction of carer-mother association in mother-child dyad, the daughter persona in the poem embraces the mother’s presence, her mental illness, emotional fluctuations and temper tantrums with patience, kindness, love, and care.

5.3. “Filial Maturity”: The Acceptance of the Shifting Roles

Along with the emotional worry and burden of care, the carer/daughter empathises with the gradual physical and mental downfall of the dementia sufferer mother. The empathy of the daughter leads to the acceptance and maturity in the mother-child relationship where the daughter embraces the mother, her illness, and the role shift in the mother-daughter dyad. This furthers the restoration of the mother-child affinity in a new ‘daughter/carer’ and ‘mother/cared dichotomy.’ According to Cecchin, the last stage of the identity and role shift in the mother-daughter dyad owing to dementia is “filial maturity,” where the daughter embraces the mother figure beyond her mothering functions (2001: 105). The crisis and transition in the dyad yield to the acceptance, recognition and consent that the mother is mentally decaying, her mothering functions are long past, and neither her mental health nor maternal functions can be restored in the future. Therefore, the daughter internalises her status as the carer of the mother “while mothers continue to be perceived and valued as a parent regardless of increased dependency and frailty” (Cecchin, 2001: 106). The memory,

thinking and behaviour impairments of the mother figuratively abduct her everyday abilities and maternal practises, yet she remains physically present for her children.

Similarly, JoAnn Perry asserts the last 'R' of the care-giving procedure as "(re)adjusting" after the '(re)calling' and '(re)learning' processes that daughters become aware of "how to be with and care for their mothers" and the time of "reflection on the experience; some daughters found they were gaining a personal insight. [...] Some explored larger issues around family and life" (2004: 62, 63). The effects of dementia in the last phase in mother-daughter relationship is about "how the daughters viewed their mothers, how they reconstructed their relationships with their mothers, and how they approached spending time with their mothers" (66). In this context, the daughter speakers in the poems "Joy," "Ghazal: time is gone" and "Singing for Brain" realise the mother's individuality and her needs regardless of her mother status while adapting and internalising the responsibility of being the carer of a mentally ill mother. The caregiving daughter in these poems welcomes the mother's mental decline, including physical, emotional, or psychological hardships they face with within dementia caring process. To a certain extent, the physical presence in contrast to the mother's gradual mental recession can preserve her position as the mother in the mother-child dyad.

The speaker in the poem "Joy" mainly emphasises the theme of stability in contrast to the inevitable changes of life. She wishes for constancy in the mother-child relationship in the scope of carer/cared opposition, yet the ambivalence about losing the established mother-child dyad through an amnesiac mother is at first difficult for the daughter speaker to embrace. The process of acceptance and maturity starts with the loss of mother-child dyad where the daughter persona notes the stage that she has "been looking for something [she] once had and miss/and want again" (Gray, 2018: 5). The loss of carer/cared dichotomy and difficulties in caring for the mother with dementia cause her to feel like a buried corpse, "all that soil on [her] body" causing pressure and weariness (5). The mother is mentally ill, and the burden of caring leaves the daughter speaker emotionally drained. Furthermore, she is "sure to lose her. [The mother is] losing nouns and [daughter has] / to rummage in [her] brain to help her find them" (5). The daughter has to perform as a specialist, psychologist, or an interpreter of the mother's wishes, which "demands some level of success in the undertaking. Within this process of mastering, there was a considerable range of abilities and commitment on the part of the daughters" (Perry, 2004: 56). Since dementia caring is named as the

‘process of mastering’ that requires some effort, the daughter speaker’s weariness is a combination of the physical tiredness due to the mother’s inability, the emotional crisis for her mental downfalls, and the urge for continuity of care despite the fear of losing the mother.

Implicitly knowing the fact that the mother with dementia is getting worse day by day, the daughter speaker changes her perspective from negative to positive, noting that “what’s bad for you, might be good” (Gray, 2018: 5). She expresses that “I phone my mother every morning to start her day / – the way she knows it’s me, the way she says, / hello dear, before I’m speaking. [...] A mother is a precious thing” (5). In spite of the mother’s decline in motor skills and cognitive abilities, Taylor argues that the mother is still her mother stating, “[w]hen I express an opinion, she agrees. When we sit together, she attends to my presence, reaches out to me, pats my hand. These communicative practices are, I believe, also practices of *caring*” (2008: 328, emphasis in original). Articulating the presence of the mother rather than her mental impairments, Taylor rejects the victimisation of the daughter adopting the caregiving duties or seeing the mother as a burden or a source of trauma for the caregiver (2008: 324). In that context, the mother’s phone calls, voice and sincere responses are still ‘precious’ things the speaker in the poem is thankful for. Despite the mother’s decaying health and exhaustion due to the burden of care, the daughter reassures her deep-rooted attachment to her mother and feels affection and warmth towards her.

The ambivalence and duality about having a mother figure diagnosed with dementia reaches its apex in the poem where the speaker reflects her contradictory point of view about the concept of ‘homecoming:’

not sure if coming home
was good or bad, or neither, or both. There’s no reward
for coming home if no one’s there, no one you love, no one
to put out a hand or smile to see you. My mother knows
and tries to hold me in her voice. Mothers do what they can. (Gray, 2018: 5)

The concept of homecoming is idealised with family attachment only if the father, mother, and children love and embrace each other, thus, the absence of those figures alters the positive understanding of home-coming into a negative one, where home becomes ‘empty’ without the mother or father. For the daughter speaker ‘homecoming’ and ‘empty home’ are

intertwined concepts. On the one hand, she is glad that home is not empty with the presence of the mother; on the other hand, she still cannot overcome the feeling of emotional void left by the metaphorical loss of the mother figure in mother-child dyad. Articulating the concept of loss within the conflicting perspective, Perry posits that “[t]here was pain and awareness of loss [...] All daughters mourned the loss of the mothers they once had and also managed to find something or some times that were special” whereas the mother does not have a complete awareness of the role reversal or the emotional burden of the situation that the daughter struggles with (2004: 60). Therefore, it could be affirmed that the desire for restoration of an earlier version of their relationship and attachment is ironic, as the daughter still pursues the mother-child affinity, yet the emotional care of the mother is forever lost for the daughter.

The poem, “Ghazal: time is gone,” portrays the direct speech of Ann with Mutti, unveiling Ann’s true feelings and thoughts about the mother-daughter relationship before and after dementia. The title of the poem also stresses the alteration, times before and after the mother’s mental illness and its reflections on their relationship. Enunciating the differences between carer/cared and mother/daughter dyad, Ann notes that she “was cheese to the chalk of” the mother, emphasising the physical and characteristic differences (Gray, 2018: 8). While the mother was the primary caregiver of the family before dementia, she was dominant, as the daughter persona confesses “all [her] wildest plans had no thought for” the mother figure (8). In that context, it can be deduced that before dementia, the daughter had no responsibility for caregiving, but mainly focused on her life, needs, or desires, and the mother’s life is metaphorically compared to a “bottle tightly corked” (8). For the speaker, the mental illness “is blowing [mother’s life] now, way to the North of” the mother (8), exceeding the limits of her personality that causes some extreme feelings or behaviours. Michael Ignatieff et al. argue the effects of dementia on identity, personality and behaviour that the patient becomes the one who “remained a person when no attribute of personhood remained. ... Very complicated why it was that she remained who she was when nothing that she was remained” (1999, as cited in Kaufman, 2017: 555). Adopting a similar position, Podgorski and Deborah discuss the major changes in personality or behaviour by which dementia is characterised that “[a]s memory difficulties continue to worsen, significant personality changes may emerge” (2009: 25), and Baylis agreeing with Ignatieff, Podgorski and Deborah expresses that the negative personality changes in dementia sufferers could also have adverse results on mutual relationships (2017: 216). Combining those analogous

arguments, it could be concluded that dementia is not only a mental illness that creates a decline in cognitive abilities or motor skills, but also deconstructs the personality and behaviour of the patient within the process. Therefore, the daughter speaker in the poem has to confront and overcome the outcomes of dementia that alter the personality and behaviour of the mother where her 'true nature' is directed to be out of 'the bottle tightly corked.'

The speaker also stresses the role-shift in mother-child dyad with dementia; "and everything I ever thought of you / lost in the present need to care for you" (Gray, 2018: 8). The persona becomes the carer of the ill mother and internalises the 'mother' identity and "bristle[s] when passers-by balk at [mother] / or when small children stand and gawk at [mother]" (8). Similar to the archetypal mothers protecting their babies, the daughter speaker instinctually guards her 'baby' – the weak, ill and impotent mother – from all the dangers, trying to "swaddle" and "cradle" her to be "safe from the way [mother's] mind has stolen" (8). Amplifying the 'protectiveness' of caregiving daughters, Perry proposes that daughters of dementia diagnosed mothers are

protective of their mother for her safety, but more interestingly in terms of the mother's interface with the public. [...] Part of protecting the mothers was keeping them from unpleasant experiences and from knowing that there were so many things that they could no longer do. (2004: 61-62)

At this point, the daughter grieves over the dependent mother whose physical disability in relation to her mental impairments could sometimes make the mother feel 'less,' 'weak,' or 'ineligible.' The daughter regrets her mother's condition and tries not only to protect her mother from imbalance and inconstancy, but also from any annoying, insulting reactions or comments which might also agitate the carer daughter.

The poem "Singing for the Brain" depicts the daughter's persistent efforts to restore the lost intimacy between herself and the mother through dancing, which also exemplifies how the mother, daughter and their attachment are described outside of the confined space of home. In the poem, the speaker and the mother are in the public hall where the crowd "sing rounds in a circle / then [they] dance" (Gray, 2018: 13). The speaker showing some intimacy and love to the mother "take[s] the tiny stoop of [her] mother / in [her] arms and slowly move her to the music" and then tries to "find a place between her spine for [her] hands" (13). The daughter speaker attempts to restore the mother and daughter affinity in her

relationship through a physical touch. However, the mother “holds herself away” as “she feels like a cactus” when the speaker tries to embrace her (13). Due to the disruption in memory, the mother fails to provide maternal affection to the daughter and feels irritated and agitated when she is touched. Yet, the speaker “melt(s) [herself] to her, try to / find somewhere for [her] neck above her shoulder,” and relentlessly tries to repossess the mother/child intimacy that is lost because of dementia (13). While they are dancing, the atmosphere in the hall is depicted as tender and intimate that joy is “soaring from other faces; husbands, / wives, even daughters,” as joy through dancing with the mother continues “until she says / that’s enough now and we sit ourselves down” (13). In that context, dancing is a moment when the daughter speaker has a chance to reexperience maternal intimacy and affinity without any public anxiety or shame. In contrast to the marginalising reactions or comments of the society, the atmosphere in the dancing hall is welcoming and appreciative, and the daughter defying public confinement enjoys the moment of the mother-daughter connection. Given the concepts of ‘filial maturity’ and ‘(re)adjusting’, the dance scene of the mother and daughter also illustrates the daughter’s growing maturity in the process of care, embracing the new daughter/carer and mother/cared opposition in the mother-child relation.

Ann Gray’s collection, *I Wish I Had More Mothers*, illustrates the identity and role shift in mother-daughter dyad under the consequences of dementia. The poetry collection disputes the internalisation of prescribed social identities in mother-daughter relationship in accordance with carer and cared opposition through building the argument upon identity, role and responsibility shift in conventional roles of mothers in the caregiving process. The mother figure loses her social status as the primary caregiver of the children and family because of dementia and due to the dramatic disruption in cognitive abilities, she gradually becomes more dependent on care while the daughter of the family, as the descendant of mother, switches her position in the relationship to be the carer of the mentally incapable parent. Within the patriarchal imposition of gender-based description of care, the daughter is expected to sacrifice her identity so as to adopt the mothering practises. As a consequence, she experiences identity crisis and doubt in traditional definitions of social roles that lead to maturity and acceptance where she learns how to embrace and appreciate the mother separated from her mother status. In that context, dementia alters the mother-daughter relationship where the mother practically loses her caregiver responsibility while the daughter witnesses pain and possible loss of the mother. Hence, the prescribed normative

identities and roles of both the mother and the daughter in the collection are interchanged, reshaping mother-daughter relationship in an alternative form.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to investigate how contemporary women's poetry addresses the conventional depiction of motherhood, maternal identity, and mother-daughter relationship through an analysis of a range of thematic and formal practices. In the scope of concepts such as patriarchal impositions on motherhood, the marginalisation of childless women, adoption, genetic tie, mother-daughter dyad, and the rhetoric of care, I argued that the selected poetry collections of Warsan Shire, Jackie Kay and Ann Gray criticise the traditional depiction of motherhood as the ideal, true achievement of women for social inclusion and approval, and redefine and reshape the discourse of motherhood through challenging viewpoints presented in their work. Considering the multifaceted theoretical and literary representations of these concepts, the primary sources were chosen to achieve a balance between poetic analysis and theory, while also contributing to the field through the exploration of thematic and formal possibilities.

Building the theoretical background of this thesis, Rich's 'institutional motherhood' and Hansen's 'patriarchal-self-sacrificial mother' discussions provide a critical approach to the depiction of idealised maternal womanhood in the patriarchal social system that maintains female oppression and subjugation. The 'deathbed' and 'dying mothers' metaphors of Hirsch and Gardiner also expand the argument into the liberation of daughters through the patriarchal mothers' symbolic death – particularly through the end of the male hegemony or home escape. In addition to the analysis of the image of motherhood in patriarchal culture, Collins' 'blood/othermother' and Ragoné's 'social/biological motherhood' assertions explore the 'real' identity of mother in adoption discourse, juxtaposing the birth mothers' blood tie and adoptive mothers' mothering capability. Furthermore, those concepts are significant in questioning whether the biological relatedness could establish emotional attachment in mother-child relationship. Commenting on the conventional descriptions and interpretations of the maternal figure, Redekop posits the 'mock mother' archetype to stress the difficulty in one-layered definition of maternal identity. Along with the patriarchal perception of motherhood and biological/adoptive mother dichotomy, the reversal of filial roles and responsibilities between the mother and daughter due to the mother's illness examines the established identity roles and disposition of motherhood. According to 'filial crisis, transition, and maturity' discussions of Cecchin and Perry's three (R)'s delve into the reshaped mother-child relationship between the

physically and mentally incapable mother figure and the carer daughter. The shift in social roles and daughter's caregiving process lead to the embracement and appreciation of mother in her own rights. In compliance with theoretical discussions on motherhood, the main point of the study questions the (non)tradition and (non)biological forms of motherhood. The discussions and concepts are important to trace and analyse the traditional representations and narrations of motherhood, adoption, blood tie, rhetoric of care, and mother-daughter relationship in contemporary British women's poetry, contributing a probe into the de/reconstruction of motherhood discourse and mother-daughter affinity in women's poetry.

In *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, Shire disputes the pronatalist prescriptions for motherhood where women are forced to fulfil the normative marital and maternal requirements to be recognised and welcomed in the society. The diverse female characters in the collection exemplify the internalisation of female subjugation and the traditional limitations imposed on them from childhood onwards. The physically, sexually, and psychologically exploited and otherised wives and mothers in the collection become the tool for the continuity of male-centred oppression cycle. The unmarried daughter speaker presents those patriarchal mothers as passive, obedient, and dutiful figures who adopt the roles of male authority and shape the daughters through patriarchal norms. Perpetuating the male hegemony and the cycle of othering, those mothers victimise daughters for social approval, inclusion, and appreciation. The double victimised daughter speaker in the collection, however, is 'raised by a voice in her head,' escaping from the patriarchal mother's voice and the traditional impositions of male hegemony to gain her independence. Experiencing abuses, otherisation, horror, shame, and sense of insufficiency, the daughter's liberation is important to create a rift in the established system that leads to the building block of female resistance. The aim of the poet could be to assert the idea that an alternative perception of womanhood is possible when the subjugated women in the male hegemony have enough courage to liberate from the primordial patriarchal ideologies.

Expanding on the idealisation of maternity, Jackie Kay problematises the 'real' identity of mother through illustrating a contrast between birth and adoptive mothers in *The Adoption Papers*. Although the collection has been analysed before by other literary scholars, particularly focusing on the issues of race, class, nationality, or conducting much a stylistic study as the long narrative poem, this thesis contributes by offering a multidimensional examination of the 'real' identity of mother within the benchmarks of adoption and birth/adoptive mother dichotomy instead of putting emphasis on those

overused race, class, and nationality themes. The polyphonic poetic structure provides a ground for the readers to discover the differing perspectives of mothers about caregiving, the process of 'becoming' a mother and coming to terms with the darker aspects of maternal responsibilities. Moreover, the daughter's quest for self-discovery underscores the close tie between daughters and mothers in shaping the daughter's identity and navigating through imposed roles and norms. Another important inquiry in this chapter was the socio-cultural perceptions about the blood tie and biological motherhood in opposition to the social mothering practiced by the adoptive mother in the text. Even though the male-centred society emphasises the blood relation, the birth mother's illegitimate pregnancy is otherised for being out of norms, and the adoptive mother's mothering secures her position as the mother despite the lack of biological relatedness. The conventional depiction of motherhood, hence, loses its attributed approval with adoptive mother's maternal capacity and mothering practises. On the one hand, the birthmother fulfils the patriarchal norms with pregnancy and childbirth, yet the illegitimacy of the pregnancy and baby abandonment lead to her social ostracism, and on the other hand, the adoptive mother marginalised for infertility proves her maternal womanhood with adoption and mothering. Here, Kay shows the hypocritical depiction of 'real' and 'ideal' motherhood in the context of adoption, concluded with ostracization of the birth mother due to baby abandonment and of the adoptive mother for infertility.

In *I wish I Had More Mothers*, Ann Gray elaborates on the analysis of mothering and mother-daughter dyad within the context of caregiving, mainly focusing on the challenges that arise as the mother figure in the poems ages and faces health issues. The persona in the poems not only tries to come to terms with the gradual loss of the mother but also the destruction of primordial mother-daughter relationship rooted in the caregiving duties. Due to the circumstances of mental illness, social roles and responsibilities of mother and daughter are required to be interchanged, where the daughter starts mothering the mother. Within the process of caregiving, the daughter witnessing the decline in mother's memory, thinking, and behaviour, remembers her childhood days when the mother is presented as healthy and grieves over the loss of the mother figure in her memories. The switch and transition complicate the normative assumption about the mother as the primary caregiver dynamic. In the collection, Gray shows that mothers cannot be defined only with motherhood status or mothering capacity, but they are individuals in their own rights and embraced separated from motherhood position. This proves that socio-cultural roles and

responsibilities are not rigid but could be possibly modified and reinterpreted through diverse dynamics. Considering the dementia sufferer mother figure in the collection, the daughter, first, struggles to accept the circumstances that require role and responsibility shift in the dyad. Then, she adjusts her position from the cared to the carer of the mother. In the light of gender-based analysis, the traditional perception about daughters as the caregivers of the ill parents is perpetuated with the image of daughter in the collection, yet she is not forced to take the caring responsibility. Despite the physical and mental difficulties, the speaker is happy for the role switch since she could have chance to spend much time with the mother before she dies, which enables her to explore the meaning of motherhood. Finally, she comes to a new level of maturity where she embraces and appreciates mother with much an empathic way.

Analyses of the poetry collections in this thesis also provide a comparative and comprehensive study on thematic and structural distinctions. Shire's poems reveal the physical, sexual, and psychological female subjugation in the context of immigration and displacement. The persona in the collection discovers a transgressive bold voice "raised in [her] head" as she gradually defies the conditional inclusion of mothers with internalised sense of female inferiority transmitted from mothers to daughters. Similarly, Jackie Kay's daughter persona undergoes a similar process of questioning about her identity as she discovers her connection with the missing birth mother, doubts the social appreciation and so-called significance of birth mothers, focusing on the emotional effects of mothering in mother-child attachment. The polyphonic, sequential, and autobiographical structure of Kay's collection is very practical to recount non-standard subjective experiences of birth and adoptive mothers and the adoptee, rejecting an authoritative voice over how these women feel and express their opinions. Articulating with maternal care, Ann Gray's poems argue the traditional depiction of mothers' caring responsibility, which qualifies mothers as the one and only eternal caregiver of the child and the family through exploring the possible role and responsibility shift in mother-child dyad. The speaker's confusion about her changing role as the caregiver and her grieving tone could be compared to Shire's persona who desires to free herself from the mother who imposes the male-designed ideologies on her. However, Gray's speaker is very mournful about losing the mother and tries to accompany the mother as much as she can.

Despite centring their arguments around varied aspects of motherhood through employing different thematic and structural practises, the poetry collections of Shire, Kay

and Gray propose a process of dynamic and performative identity construction in the contemporary British women poetry. Considering the scholarship on motherhood in literary studies, especially in poetry, a comparative reading of these texts and thematic propositions revealed in those poems will contribute to contemporary British poetry studies and recent analyses on the concepts of motherhood. The limitation of the study is that the theoretical framework is mainly built on Adrienne Rich's arguments from her book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, and other scholars' key concepts particularly chosen for the thematic qualities of each poetry collection and discussed to deepen the analyses and support the main arguments. Moreover, in further studies, the themes of race, class, ethnicity, xenophobia, refugee woman narratives, and nationality contexts in the poems analysed or the psychoanalytical perspectives of Luce Irigaray and Nancy Chodorow might be employed to illuminate the unconscious and linguistic processes that shape this archetypal relationship.

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