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Mother-Daughter Relations in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*

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Abstract

The influence of mother characters on their daughters which is often shaped by the husbands' attitude towards their wives is discernible in Nigerian Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and in her West Indian counterpart, Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. This paper examines mother-daughter relations and argues that while the personality of a mother, commonly, has a strong bearing on the outcome of her daughter, either positively or negatively; sometimes the relationship between a mother and her daughter extends beyond the biological to the socio-cultural, with a daughter often being significantly shaped by her mother's attitudinal predispositions. The paper deploys concepts from feminist theory in the examination of the depictions of mother-daughter relationships that are projected in the two selected novels. The essay hints that within the philosophies of the two novels, irrespective of regions or geographical settings, women as mothers appear to have unique social experiences that make survival the default mode of their socio-familial transactions which also influence their daughters significantly.

Keywords: Influence, Mother-Daughter Relations, Fatherhood, Religion, Oppression, Adichie, Marshall

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Introduction

Although there is rigorous scholarship on parenthood which examines representations of mother characters from the perspective of women as victims of patriarchal oppression as well as the mother-child dyad, the area of mother-daughter relations still remains largely under-examined. The Italian motherhood scholar, Adalgisa Giorgio, says as much when she avows that "the rich corpus of narrative[s] analysed [in *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*] proves that if the dark continent of mother-daughter relationship is not completely lit up, at least it is being explored, and in increasingly greater depth" (34). This paper attempts to further lighten up Giorgio's "dark continent of mother-daughter relationship" through the exploration of the impact of mother characters' conduct and attitudes on their daughters in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, and thus, to contribute to the stimulating mother-daughter conversations in this area of study.

There are diversities of experiences and frameworks that make mother-daughter relations differ from person to person, society to society, culture to culture, country to country, and region to region. Therefore, the cultural frameworks which shape the artistic temperaments of Adichie and Marshall's depictions of mother-daughter relationships are patterned not only by political, religious, and historical meanings, but also, personal and socio-cultural dictates and inhibitions. As a result, Adichie and Marshall's articulation of their visions of motherhood, and by extension, mother-daughter relations, is evident in the way they perceive the subject and how each of them depicts that perception. For instance, Adichie reflects the complexities of motherhood and family-life which are filtered through her artistic imaginations drawn upon the ethnic mores of the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria where male privilege is often highly visible. On the contrary, her African-American/Caribbean counterpart, Marshall, explores motherhood in the context of immigrant experience among close-knit Barbadian community in Brooklyn, New York, in a manner that reveals the mother-daughter relation in a significantly different way. As a result, the two authors offer diverse insights into mother-daughter relations and this variance presents distinct perspectives on the conduct of motherhood. Thus, the shared and disparate dispositions of the main mother characters are examined in order to present a deeper insight on mother-daughter relations in the two narratives.

However, to better appreciate the diverse socio-economic, political, cultural and religious contexts which shape the authors' depictions of mother-daughter interactions in the two texts, a brief consideration of the two settings becomes crucial. *Purple Hibiscus* and *Brown Girl, Brownstones* detail an engaging sequence of events which have often been individually examined as the coming-of-age stories of their female protagonists, Kambili Achike and Selina Boyce, respectively. Interestingly, Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is set in the early 1980s South-eastern Nigeria and narrated against the backdrop of civil unrest, corruption and military coup. The novel focuses on the affluent Achike family where the protagonist, a shy fifteen-year-old Kambili, suffers paternal oppression alongside her mother, Beatrice, and brother, Jaja. Her mother's overall passivity, powerlessness and near-infantile dependence on her husband, Eugene, prevent her from resisting his oppression and protecting her children as well.

Conversely, Paule Marshall's first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, is set in Brooklyn during the Depression and World War II, within the Barbadian community in New York City. The text details the coming-of-age of Selina Boyce, whose parents–Deighton and Silla Boyce, migrate to the United States of America from Barbados and settle in Brooklyn where Selina and her elder sister, Ina, are born. So the Boyce girls, like Marshall, are first generation West Indian Americans. Eugenia Collier and Richard Long rightly observe that "[i]n Paule Marshall are combined two segments of the African heritage, West Indian and Afro-American" (731). Consequently, in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, she encapsulates the richness of the West Indian culture and blends it with the Black American experience, providing realistic representations of the Boyce family struggle for survival in a new cultural environment.

The disparate socio-cultural contexts within which Adichie and Marshall depict female characters who engage in maternal functions, become a crucial canvas for the analysis of mother-daughter relationships. The feminist critic Marianne Hirsch maintains that the literary representation of mother is often complex and fraught with contradiction. In her book,*The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Hirsch determines that the mother-daughter relation is fundamental to any feminist literary analysis (20). Thus, this paper deploys the Gender theory of feminist criticism as structural and analytical tool in the examination of mother-daughter relations in the selected texts because both novels lend

themselves favourably well to feminist reading. Consequently, concepts from normative and trait femininities are exploited for the analysis of mother and daughter characters in the two novels.

Mother-Daughter Relations in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* mirrors events set in 1980s in south-eastern Nigeria (Enugu, Nsukka and Abba) narrated by the protagonist, 15 year old Kambili Achike, in the era of unstable political governance. As a result of the apprehension within the Achike household, there is a lot of tension at the familial, social and political levels which are perceptible in the text. This is the background against which the Achike family, steered by a wealthy industrialist and devout Catholic father, Eugene (popularly referred to as Papa), must function and relate to one another. Also, it is under this circumstance that Beatrice (also referred to as Mama in the text), must compensate for her lethargy by maintaining a state of morbid silence and docile victimhood in the face of spousal oppression. Her daughter, Kambili, seems to reflect a combination of her timidity and docility. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie has truly perceptively noted that:

> Women are shackled by their own negative self-image by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy. Her own reactions too bjective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling.She reacts with fear, dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed. (35)

Thus, Adichie's literary imagination of mother-daughter relationship appears to be informed by the prevailing socio-cultural realities of the setting of the novel in south eastern part of her country, Nigeria, where women such as Beatrice, the main mother character in *Purple Hibiscus*, are culturally wired to be reticent.

Remarkably, like Chinua Achebe's larger-than-life alpha male character, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, Eugene is verbally and physically abusive, and his entire family members live in fear of him. Thus, from the beginning of the novel Beatrice is indirectly punished along with her children as the narrator tells the reader that "[t]hings started to fall apart at home after [Palm Sunday] when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the

room and broke the figurines on the etagere" (3). The broken figurines belong to Beatrice who appears too dumbstruck during this incident. Thus, she could not even complain about the destruction of her figurines because her home is often ridden with the patriarchal culture of tension and a palpable silence that is fear-driven. In this episode, she merely reacts by kneeling down and picking up the broken pieces from the floor. Beatrice appears too impotent to question her husband concerning any of his actions or conduct. In this instance, she should have expected an apology and/or demanded one if her husband is unwilling to offer it.

Beatrice's infantile marital relationship and utter dependence on her affluent husband becomes a crucible which her children would be pressured to drink from in due course. In her informative study on Arab femininities, Ositadinma Lemoha explores the "lapdog" model of femininity under the broader normative femininity concept. Lemoha explains that lapdog femininity is the "socio-cultural construction women accept as the [feminine] ideal although it subjugates them [. . .]. It is called lapdog because women accept the construction slavishly without thinking and/or questioning" (23). This construction of femininity aptly captures Beatrice's subdued attitude as a wife and mother which encourages her husband's unrestrained hegemonic stance that worsens over time. She seems to watch lamely while her children are boxed into regimented lives, forced to adhere to a strict schedule of mealtimes, study and worship, which are strictly supervised by her husband. Atrociously, Beatrice is all too often caught in the middle, taking the brunt of her husband's cruelty, not only physically but also psychologically.

It is very telling that Beatrice, servilely, accepts to be punished by Eugene alongside their children and never gives a word of caution to him or defend herself or her young children. She functions as the home-keeper who must accept everything Eugene attaches to her role in the home. Thus, in her household role performance, she becomes akin to what the American essayist and feminist writer, Adrienne Rich, refers to as "making careers of domestic perfection" (22). Only that in the case of Beatrice, she also seems not to succeed much in this direction as a woman frustrated by oppression. Beatrice remains incapable of offering any form of advice to her children or calling her husband's attention to his deplorable attitude towards his own father which is abominable in their culture. She simply floats around like a shadow around the house until she becomes accustomed to her husband's often, unwarranted eruptions of violence. In a strange posture of

respect and obedience, she yields to every inappropriate word or action he puts up in the home. For instance, she visits her sister-in-law, Ifeoma, in Nsukka shortly after she loses a six-week pregnancy because Eugene hits her with the dining table in their home. As soon as she settles down from her journey, she relates how she lost her pregnancy and her reaction to Ifeoma's advice on her marriage says a lot about her docile personality. When Ifeoma counsels that Beatrice's solution to the never-ending battering from her husband is to leave him and completely abandon her marriage, Beatrice would not even consider the advice as an option. Thus, it becomes glaring that she could not survive without his financial upkeep – she would simply be lost in the world. Her reaction to her sister-in-law's advice says as much when she replies, "[w]here will I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where will I go?" She did not wait for Aunty Ifeoma to respond. "Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them, even, and not to bother paying a bride price?" (245). The exchange between Beatrice and Aunty Ifeoma continues and progressively becomes a shouting match until Beatrice becomes exhausted. However, she believes that Aunty Ifeoma's advice is not only unrealistic but a counsel that is borne out of mere "university talk" (245) that will not augur well for a married woman and a mother.

What Ifeoma does not know at this point is that Beatrice has already started taking care of her domestic oppression in her own way. As the reader would learn later in the novel, before her visit to Nsukka, Beatrice had already started administering small quantities of poison to her husband through his tea. But her reply when Aunty Ifeoma comments that Beatrice must not go back to her husband unless she has lost her mind, Aunty Ifeoma's comment corroborates the idea that Beatrice is a helplessly vulnerable woman, wife and mother. Moreover, it suggests that she has no clue on how to get along on her own without the support of her husband. This corroboration is consistent with Lemoha's lap dog version of normative femininity which is a socio-cultural construction women often readily accept. In *Purple Hibiscus*, a female character such as Beatrice, unwittingly or otherwise, slavishly accepts Eugene's notion of what a good woman should be, and lives by it until she could not endure it any longer. She consents to and tolerates this servile option as the feminine ideal which rubs off on her daughter, without questioning the fact that she is subjugated by it and suffers alongside her young

children. Predictably, her fear and sense of insecurity are real - indeed, by the end of the novel the reader recognises her disorientation as a widow who appears unsure of herself and her world.

Beatrice appears to be complicit in her own sufferings and in not making a case for her children to have better and healthy emotional relationship with their father. Thus, Kambili becomes a daughter who has an inexplicable bizarre understanding of paternal love and affection. She seems to assent to the idea that love hurts when she says, "I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa's love into me" (8). It is deplorable that while on Beatrice's watch, her children (especially, her girl-child) are raised in a manner that makes them appear so odd that they could barely function outside their home. As a result, their cousins in Nsukka, Obiora and Amaka, perceive Kambili as an oddity who is progressively morphing into the likeness of her voiceless and docile mother. For instance, at the dinner table in Aunty Ifeoma's house in Nsukka, Kambili confesses to a strange feeling of being an observer, not a partaker of the meals, conversations, love and laughter which typically mark the interactions in Aunty Ifeoma's home. Kambili pitifully ruminates, "I had felt as if I were not there, that I was just observing a table where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished" (120). She also realises that Obiora and Amaka have freedom of speech. They are not saddled with the posture of weighing the idea of crime and the terror or the punishment which their speech could attract. It dawns on her too that although her cousins are Catholic adherents, their family does not exhibit any of her father's fanaticism, especially as it relates to sin, confession of sin and penance.

In the Beatrice-Kambili relationship, what the reader contends with is a mother and daughter who are both emotionally and psychologically impaired, fragile and helpless. This has devastating consequences for a wholesome relationship between the eventually traumatised Beatrice (spousal oppression) and her equally severely traumatised daughter, Kambili (paternal oppression). Jane N. Ifechelobi likens Beatrice's action of dealing with spousal oppression to that of the admirable character, Nora Helmer, in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. This comparison, no doubt, diminishes the action of Nora who confidently takes a firm decision to liberate herself – stands tall and walks out of an oppressive marital relationship without looking back (25). Beatrice, in *Purple Hibiscus*, lacks such confidence

and strength of character because of the patriarchal programming which she has eternalised in her environment. As a result, she takes the daring, but somewhat, diffident option and begins to administer small quantities of poison to Eugene's tea, and overtime, slowly kills him. This is a timid way of "walking out" of a problematic marriage and an oppressive husband, but that is the only way Beatrice could handle her marital challenges. Although there are interesting parallels on the ways an oppressive marriage and spouse are handled in *A Doll's House* and *Purple Hibiscus,* they are also quite distinct – one appears bold and admirable (Nora), the other appears cowardly, dark and despicable (Beatrice).

It is, perhaps, in admiration of Beatrice's action and in sympathy with Ifechelobi's perception cited above, that Prince Orie writes what appears like some form of reverse elegy celebrating Eugene's death. He stresses that "[n]ow that the monster is got rid of, now that Papa is dead, now that patriarchy has been murdered, Kambili gets loosened of the chains of silence and voicelessness" (40). But the chains of silence and voicelessness are the ones her mother, Beatrice, "enshackles" her with as a result of her unnecessary passivity which helped to give Eugene unrestrained power to terrorise her children. These are the same chains of silence she had wound around herself which had cost her a number of miscarriages as a result of being beaten like a slave. Beatrice merely does herself and her children the favour of removing the monster she has fed and nurtured in Papa (Eugene) through many years of self-imposed servile acquiescence of ill-treatment from an anxious and, possibly, unwell spouse.

Ultimately, Beatrice foists her conduct of self-defeat, dependency, fear and silence on her emotionally fragile daughter who, manifestly, yearns for the support of a strong mother. Beatrice fails to extend that needed-support because she infantilises herself in her marital relationship with Eugene. Brenda Cooper insists that: "[t]hroughout the novel, we see Kambili's inability to cope emotionally with the mixed feelings of love and terror for her father, and adoration and disdain for her passive, abused mother, all of which she is unable either to acknowledge or understand" (3). Evidently, Kambili's sense of ambivalence towards her parents is borne out of not having any significant emotional succor or a feeling of psychological wholeness which only a mother can bestow and reinforce in her children. How can a mother character such as Beatrice function as an effectual role model for her children, generally, and for her daughter, specifically? How much physical and

psychological violence must a mother endure before she takes the stand of "enough is enough?" Even more critical is the question, how long must a mother sit patiently in silence and absorb the indignities of spousal oppression before she can put up an effective subtle, but intelligent resistance and, with time, progressively free herself and her children from the revolting shadow of an overbearing husband and father?

Beatrice's attempt to free herself and children from oppression comes only after her family had already experienced untold sufferings. Even at that, she fails to pursue all available constructive options at her disposal such as making a formal report to the Catholic priest in her husband's parish, personally confronting her oppressive spouse to reconsider his hurtful conduct, and the handling of her martial situation by resorting to Akachi Ezeigbo's notion of snail sense thinking (27), without the extreme reaction of having killed her husband through poisoning his tea. Ezeigbo explains that the "Nigerian woman ought to be wise, sensitive and proactive in her quest for justice and self-actualisation (37). None of these elements are strongly associated with Beatrice's personality. By remaining docile until she is provoked to murder, Beatrice is culpable in the anguish that she suffers with her children. Also, by merely sitting in complete silence and allowing her affluent husband's fanatical religious tyranny to fester and spread to her very young children, Beatrice has erred. The weight of her passive acquiescence can be perceived from the fact that her very vulnerable young daughter eventually becomes a child who is so sin-conscious; she believes that such actions as admiring her reflection in the mirror, merely talking, laughing or even smiling, is a sin before the God her father serves and worships. So, what the reader perceives in Beatrice is a wife and a mother who belongs to the category of females which her vibrant sister-in-law, Aunty Ifeoma, describes as "the many young girls in the university who get married then allow their husbands to own them and their degrees" (75). Thus, her home in Enugu becomes a beautiful edifice where her two children, Jaja and Kambili, although privileged, remain abused, confined and discontented.

Conversely, in *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* the situation in the home of the Barbadian immigrant couple, Silla and Deighton Boyce, appears quite different from the Achikes in *Purple Hibiscus.* Like Marshall's other black female characters such as Merle Kinbona in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, and Miss Williams of "Brooklyn" in *Soul Clap Hands*, Silla is a very strong female character – unyielding and industrious. In a remarkable sociological study on an Afro-

Caribbean Village, Hymie Rubenstein points out that "the entire edifice of west Indian family studies rests on inherently unstable foundation" (220). Correspondingly, in the Marshall's novel, the unstable family situation of the Boyces is evident and traceable to the couple's unresolved differences in relation to their individual life-style choice for their family in America before they left Barbados. Overtime, these disagreements in relation to family lifestyle would result to spousal conflict which would eventually destroy their marriage. Thus, while Silla appears obsessed with her desire to make a respectable living in America and put the poverty which had been her lived-reality in rural Barbados far behind her, Deighton does not share his wife's obsession with the American dream. In due course, he becomes homesick and yearns to return to his native Barbados and develop the plot of land he inherits from his sister. Unfortunately, their two daughters, Ina and Selina are enmeshed in the dispute.

In her reading of Marshall's first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Carol Field explains that "[r]acial conflict and the anger and frustration it nurtures, are part of this tale, but equally, if not more important, are the personal conflicts of men and women making roots in new land, of men and women caught in duels of love and hate, of ambition, envy, and failure." (5) Silla and Deighton allow the irreconcilable personal conflicts between them to overwhelm their marital relationship which, in turn, negatively affects their relationship with their children. Lemoha's "hybributch" femininity espoused in the same study cited earlier, under trait femininity, adequately describes Silla Boyce's conduct and attitude as a wife and mother. Lemoha explains that "hybributch is a combination of the words hybrid and butch [which] describes the femininity that is both hybridized and manlike […] with a broad-based attitude that engenders strength and assertiveness" (26). Silla is a domineering and forceful character who is obsessed with owning one of the brownstone properties on Chauncey Street, Brooklyn, and will stop at nothing to realise her dream of a better life in America. Like in the case of the Beatrice-Kambili's mother-daughter dyad, Silla's domineering and assertive personality also rubs off on her daughter, Selina. In the girl's reminiscences as she walks down Chauncey Street after deciding to leave her mother for her ancestral homeland, all she recollects of Silla, is the idea of raw strength – what she describes as the image of "the mother hacking away through like a man lost in the bush" (307). This image masculinises Silla and makes her come across as a male-mother.

Silla desperately desires the better life associated with the American dream and channels all her energy towards actualising this desire. Mary Helen Washington remarks that Silla's life is a paradigm of the Barbadian community. She is the touchstone, for she proclaims aloud the chaotic trouble deep in the core of the community. Her endurance, her age, her devotion to the dollar and property, her determination to survive in 'this man country' is theirs. Her lights and shadows are theirs. (315) Her husband's attitude to her dream irks her in no small measure, thus, she dismisses him as a man who "is always looking for something big and praying hard not to find it" (21). She insists her husband, Deighton, is not a "real-real Bajan man," because he refuses to live by the standard of the Barbadian-American community. Despite all her manipulations, Deighton refuses to share her interest in struggling to fit in as an American by trying to forge a better life, stamped by the status-symbol of owning a brownstone property in Brooklyn. He rejects all her entreaties to adopt American values in order to succeed economically. Rather, he plans to eventually return to his native Barbados with his family in pursuit of his own dream for a carefree life. But Silla has seen this as the height of irresponsibility and has sworn she would not allow Deighton's planned return to Barbados to happen. Thus, the tension between them continues to mount and their two daughters absorb all these antagonisms with the negative implications on their young minds.

In *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* Marshall skillfully delineates not just the economic challenges immigrants deal with in finding a place as well as opportunities in the new country but, perhaps more significantly, she focuses on the impact of Western culture on Barbadian immigrants and the attendant disruption on their sense of identity. Like most of the female characters in the novel, Silla handles at least two jobs in order to support her family and build a future. She recognises that America offers opportunities that can only be enjoyed through hard work. Thus, if she must realise her goal to own one of the brownstone apartments and, thus, become a landlord not a renter, she must work hard to achieve financial security. However, like in the case of fatherhood, the good or ideal mother lies somewhere in middle of the private and public roles which point to the significance of balancing public and private roles (Osuji 50). In silla's unyielding activities outside the home which is geared towards financial freedom, she fails to recognise this fact. Interestingly, while her attitude has a rub-off effect on Selina, her elder daughter, Ina, is like Adichie's Kambili in a way, and remains fragile, timid, fearful and voiceless. The

Boyces daughters appear waged in by two parents who are dreamers of sorts. Their father, Deighton, dreams, looks, and talks big but, regrettably, remains defeated and hopeless till his deportation and untimely death. On the other hand, their mother, Silla, dreams and desires the fulfillment that comes with the American dream. Her husband's disinterest in joining her to pursue the American dream frustrates and angers her in no small measure and also fuels her determination to realize this dream. Thus, she comes across as cruel, oppressive and unyielding – a woman who is feared by her children, spited by her husband and remains discontented.

While Silla is assertive, on the other hand, Beatrice appears passive, impotent and lacks a voice on the issues concerning her children's lives. Thus Kambili and Jaja lack any form of matriarchal protection or some sort of safe-realm which mothers naturally provide for their children. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, in her essay, "The Metaphysics of Matrilinearism in Women's Autobiography," explains that the "matriarchal realm" or "matriarchate" means a home in which a child grows up, its management and domination by the mother and by feminine values of nurturing, relatedness, progress […] the child is chiefly shaped, especially in the earlier years, by the mother (180). While no such realm, as explained by Demetrakopoulos, exists in the home of the Achikes in *Purple Hibiscus*, but for the Boyces in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* – the mother character, Silla, is self-reliant, thus, the matriarchal realm is palpable and, expectedly, has both positive and negative effects on her children. On the positive side, it helps Selina to develop into an assertive young woman; however, the same cannot be said of her elder sister, Ina, who remains completely crippled by the overbearing dictates and nature of Silla. In her book, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, the psychoanalytic critic, Nancy Chodorow, acknowledges that "girls in relation to their mothers experience themselves as overly attached, unindividuated and without boundaries" (137). This, to some extent, is relatable in the relationship which exists between Beatrice and her daughter, although it is clear that Kambili loves her father in spite of his overbearing disposition. But on the other hand, Chodorow's avowal proves to be a reversal of what obtains in the Silla-Selina mother-daughter bond.

Although Ifechelobi states that in *Purple Hibiscus* Kambili "finds herself in an entire different world devoid of hostility, violence and tyranny" (25), the extent of this self-discovery remains to be quantified. Nonetheless, unlike Kambili, Selina stays assertive from the beginning of the novel and cuts a stronger image of self-assurance, independence and inner strength than her sister, Ina and Kambili. One of the questions that begs for resolution in *Purple Hibiscus* is, has Kambili found inner peace by the end of the novel? Arguably, yes. However, she is not yet what one would describe as psychologically well-equipped to be independent of her mother. In all these, one thing is clear - the reader sees Kambili and Selina, in different ways, steadily towing the lines of their individual mothers in terms of attitudes and conduct. Thus, while the former remains reticent and often dumbstruck, the latter is overtly assertive. By the end of the novel, the pronoun "we" still populates Kambili's interactions with her mother, unlike Selina's confident "I," which is appreciated in the bold choices she makes to chart her own course in order to be free from her mother's interference, by the end of the narrative. In line with her plan, she rejects the Barbadian Community Scholarship that she had won and plans relocating to Barbados. Selina's action leaves Silla, her mother, in a state of devastation. In search of her identity and root, Selina explains to her mother why she must leave for her ancestral home in Barbados. In the course of this final interaction between them, both mother and daughter seem to come to an understanding that a strong connection exists between them which neither of them, before now, has fully grasped. The young Selina then explains to her mother in simple terms, what she desires – to be her own woman:

> Everybody used to call me Deighton's Selina but they were wrong. Because you see I'm truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you see I'm left home and came here alone as a girl of eighteen and was your own woman? I used to love hearing that. And that's what I want. I want it!" Silla's pained eyes searched her adamant face, and after a long time a wistfulness softened her mouth. It was as if she somehow glimpsed in Selina the girl she had once been. (307)

Unconsciously, Selina seems to have eternalised her mother's ideals of an independent woman. As a result, despite Silla's highhandedness, she is attracted to her sense of independence, even though she detests the way she treats her father. What remains yet to be resolved in the narrative is, how does a daughter

break free from or prevent the undesirable excesses of an overbearing mother? Remarkably, the two mother characters are flawed by "excessiveness." Thus, while Beatrice is excessively passive in the face of her husband's religious extremism – silenced through suffering and subjugation, Silla is presented as a strong wife and mother whose strength is both helpful and harmful. In this situation, their daughters become merely their victims. Is it possible for Kambili and Selina to escape the reflections of a helplessly servile mother and an excessively obsessed head-strong mother who must have her way at all costs? How does the daughter break free from or prevent the undesirable excesses of a mother? Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement explore the mother-daughter bond and insist that, "in women there is always, more or less, something of the mother repairing and feeding, resisting separation, a force that does not cut off" (93). From Cixous and Clément's exploration of the complexity of mother-daughter bonding, the reader gains deeper insight into the reason for Kambili and Selina's love-hate attitudes towards their individual mothers while the two young women still reflect the servile and fierce natures of their mothers, respectively, as mirrored in the two novels. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the reader sees Kambili vacillating between fondness for her mother as a victim of oppression and an unvoiced dislike of her inability to resist her father's mistreatments and violence. This idea is more evident in *Brown Girl, Brownstone* where Selina hates her mother's attitude towards her father and even calls her "Hitler" to her face, but in a way, continues to admire her assertiveness and strength of character (184). Curiously, although Sellina adores her father and is very protective of him against her mother's anger at his supposed indolence, her admiration for the mother she calls Hitler, is clearly discernible. Later, this ambivalent disposition becomes even clearer to the reader when Selina divulges that "there was a part of her that always wanted the mother to win, that loved her dark strength and the tenacious lift of her body" (133).

While Selina's daring and independent personality is largely influenced by her stern and hardworking mother, by the end of the narrative, she has also drawn significant life-lessons from others in the Bajan community. These are both positive and negative lessons gleaned from the realities of individuals she has come to know or interacted closely with in her sixteen years of existence in Chauncey Street, Brooklyn. They are people whose lived-experiences have left indelible impressions in her own life. Therefore, when she finally takes leave of her mother

in pursuit of her own dreams, the reader is allowed to have a glimpse into the mind of the young girl to appreciate her ruminations on other lesser known characters who contributed in shaping her conduct and attitude to life. She describes them as:

> Faces [that] hung like portraits in her mind as she walked down the streets: Suggie and her violated body, Miss Mary living posthumously amid her soiled sheets, Miss Thompson bearing the life-sore and enduring, Clive and his benign despair, her father beguiled by dreams even as he drowned in them, the mother hacking a way through like a man lost in the bush. Those faces, those voices, those lives, those lives touching hers had ruined her, yet, she sensed – […] they had bequeathed her a small strength. (307-8)

Like fatherhood, the roles, attitudes and conducts attached to motherhood are complex. Gill Rye seems to appreciate this perception when he avows that "[m]otherhood has been a complex issue for feminism, and feminist debates throughout the twentieth century grappled with its contradictions, from women's relations with their mothers through to women's experiences as mothers" (118). Rye's avowal on the complexity of motherhood resonates with the problematic situation which often stems from the challenges a mother confronts in managing her interests as a woman, wife and mother. The idea of the complexity of motherhood that is advanced by Rye seems to considerably drive the mother-daughter relationships in the two selected texts. Undoubtedly, the problematic situation makes it difficult for the two major mother characters to achieve a sense of unified selves in their status and roles as mothers. Interestingly, the core ideals that shape Adichie and Marshall's distinct artistic temperaments, expressions, styles and thematic concerns which revolve around the family, generally, and mother-daughter relations, specifically, shape their individual visions of motherhood. These visions are discerned from the common ground their narratives share on the convoluted nature of motherhood, especially, in relation to women's roles and conducts. These roles and conducts, in turn, engender a distinct but fascinating array of the individual author's artistic depictions of the diverse mother-daughter relationship in the two selected novels.

The American essayist and feminist, Adrienne Rich, in her insightful book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, examines the significance of the daughter's role in her later status as a mother which forms the integral part of her selfhood. Rich explains that "[t]he cathexis [i.e. concentration of emotional energy] between mother and daughter - essential, distorted, misused – is the greatest story" (225). The emotional energy which Rich points to as very key in the mother and daughter dyad, is more clearly seen at work in the Silla-Selina relationship than in the Beatrice-Kambili story. In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Adichie and Marshall furnish an overall representation of the "killer woman" in different categories (as direct and indirect killers) whose attitudes and conducts as wives and mothers influence their daughters, both negatively and positively.

The salient questions by the end of the two novels are: Is the poisoning of Eugene, the only workable option available to Beatrice as a way she must deal with her husband's oppressive disposition? Equally, must Silla take that extreme action of maliciously ensuring that her husband is deported back to Barbados which eventually claims his life? Is this cold and calculated action targeted at her husband's destruction also the only workable solution available to Silla? The wanton taking of human life is not only inexcusable and condemnable; it is more atrocious when it involves the destruction of one's spouse. Beatrice and Silla are killer-wives who may have inadvertently raised "husband-killing-daughters." More importantly, through the actions and inactions of Beatrice and Silla, as wives and mothers, both women unwittingly, influence their daughters by their conduct and attitudes. Their thoughts and conduct appear to be structured into a pattern of socio-familial behaviours that are transferred to their daughters, for the simple reason that they will eventually find themselves in the same patriarchal socio-familial environments as their mothers.

Conclusion

The mother-daughter relationships which Adichie and Marshall recreate in the divergent worlds of late-twentieth century Enugu, Nsukka and Abba, in south eastern Nigeria, and mid-twentieth century Brooklyn, New York City, reflect how the conduct of mothers influence their daughters. It is remarkable that the choices of responses both mother characters adopt in dealing with the issue of problematic

spouses are informed by their disparate socio-cultural temperaments. However, their individual reactions which eventually destroy their husbands, revolve around the same three available options of confrontation, acquiescence and evasion. Unfortunately, there are no easy options. Silla, in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* confronts Deighton's conduct and eventually faces dire loneliness while in *Purple Hibiscus,* Beatrice initially, acquiesces, but later finds a means of evasion through murder and, as a result, appears distracted and unwell by the end of the novel. Thus, Beatrice and Silla have nurtured two young women –Kambili and Selina, who appear to struggle through their search for identity, familial support/comfort, love and direction in the two novels. Both mothers are instrumental to the destruction of their husbands, and for making their children suffer the consequences of fatherlessness. Ultimately, the two adolescent women absorb some of their mothers' attitude that is already easily discernible in their conduct which has the potentials of not only directing their lives but also shaping their future roles, attitude and statuses as prospective wives and mothers.

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