



Mothered/Othered Daughters: Mother Abjection and Diasporic Identity in Ethnic American Short Fiction

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RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Mother-daughter relationships are usually fraught with tension, which is intensified by the cultural and social conditions under which the mother and the daughter live in culturally diverse societies. Immigrant mothers affect their daughters' identity formation as they simultaneously nourish and hinder their initiation into the societies they reside in. Through adopting Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject as a psychoanalytic critical framework, the study examines the extent to which the ambivalent feelings the daughter usually shows towards her mother are embodied in the conflicting feelings she experiences towards the two cultures forming her identity as a second generation immigrant. This is done by analysing the connection between the mother-daughter relationship, the diasporic daughter's identity and the cross-cultural relations she forms in a culturally diverse setting as manifested in four short stories written by four ethnic-American writers: "Everyday Use" by the African American Alice Walker, "Two Kinds" by the Chinese American Amy Tan, "Aunt Moon's Young Man" by the Native American Linda Hogan and "How I Became My Mother's Daughter" by the Arab American Laila Lalami.

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Several critical studies examine the relation between mothers and daughters in postcolonial works of fiction. Renee Sabrina Latchman (2016), Shannon E. Seanor (2008), Sabrina Brancato (2005), amongst others, argue that the ambivalent feelings the daughter shows towards her mother hold political relevance in postcolonial settings where “remnants of colonization remain and are adhered to through the political system” (Latchman vi). As the mother’s authoritative figure is observed to “perpetuate colonial patriarchal values” (vi) in those novels, the relationship she forms with her daughter is expected to affect the relations the latter forms with members of the dominant culture. The recurrence of the conflict-wrought mother-daughter relationship as a motif in postcolonial fiction is, therefore, indicative of the significant role the relation with the mother plays in such politically unstable settings as their interaction not only intersects with the conflicting political and economic interests there, but with a “set of interlocking relationships of race, class and gender” (Brancato 20) as well.

Yet, as the overtly hierarchical power systems governing colonial and postcolonial relations are replaced with less hierarchical ones resulting from the interaction of diverse cultures in contemporary societies, the need to reassess the colonial perspective from which the mother-daughter relationship is approached is brought to the fore. Rather than “perpetuate colonial patriarchal values” (Latchman vi), the immigrant mother is expected to take on the role of the preserver of the native culture in culturally diverse settings and this necessitates politicising the daughter’s relation with the mother since a new implicit power system is said to govern the latter’s interaction with members of the mainstream culture. As will be shown in the study, the ambivalent feelings the daughter shows towards her mother are, to a large extent, embodied in the conflicting feelings she experiences towards the two (or more) conflicting cultures forming her identity as a second generation immigrant.

Studying the relationship between mother and daughter in culturally diverse societies can, therefore, help arrive at a better understanding of the formation of the daughter’s diasporic identity and the relations she forms with members of the mainstream culture. To what extent are the ambivalent feelings the daughter develops towards the mother mirrored in the conflict she experiences as she tries to balance the two cultures? Could a culturally diverse setting, where the intersecting racial, class and gender relationships are complicated to include the diasporic and transnational relationships, be subject to the same conflicting feelings that tie the daughter to the mother? And, most importantly, could the personal psycho-sexual development of the daughter have cultural and political implications? These questions, amongst others, will be addressed in this study by analysing the connection between the mother-daughter relationship, the diasporic daughter’s identity and the cross-cultural relations she forms in a culturally diverse setting as manifested in four short stories written by four ethnic-American writers: “Everyday Use” (1973) by African American Alice Walker, “Two Kinds” (1998) by Chinese American Amy Tan, “Aunt Moon’s Young Man” (1989) by Native American Linda Hogan and “How I Became My Mother’s Daughter” (2009) by Arab American Laila Lalami.

JULIA KRISTEVA AND THE OBJECT

Julia Kristeva’s (1982) study of the ‘object’ will be used as a theoretical framework to assess the role the mother plays in the psycho-sexual development of the diasporic daughter who, unlike her, has had no direct exposure to the native culture except through her parents. The colonizer-colonized relationship in terms of which Latchman (2016) defines the relation between the mother and the daughter in Caribbean fiction is replaced with a more culturally inclusive relationship in the four short stories. Though this relationship is not as strictly hierarchical as colonial power relations, it is infused with conflicting feelings. Implicit forms of racial, class and gender control govern this relationship, making it seem attractive and repulsive to the daughter at the same time. In an article titled “Parents and Daughters in Two Novels By Arab American Authors: *Khalas*, Let her go!” (2016), Ismet Bujupaj explains that displacement is not the only obstacle standing in the way of establishing a smooth relationship between daughters and parents in diaspora. Other factors such as the traumatising experiences the parents have been through in their childhood and ethnic-based discrimination complicate this relationship (208). With such a transition from the national to the postnational and the transnational, the psychosexual development of the female child who is a member of a second generation of

immigrants is, therefore, worth studying to see to what extent this familial relationship has its intakes on the formation of the diasporic female's identity and on the relations she establishes with members of culturally different groups.

In her writings on motherhood, Kristeva highlights the role of the pre-Oedipal stage in the formation of identity. The theory of abjection she proposes in *The Powers of Horror* (1982) illustrates how indispensable the mother-child relationship is to the latter's well being. Though identity formation in the study of Freudian psychoanalysis is conditioned by the initiation into the Symbolic and the renunciation of the mother, Kristeva insists that the relationship with the mother is not severed; the child, the daughter in specific, rejects the mother and sacrifices her sometimes, but she remains the essential source of identity. "There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (5).

From a conventional Freudian perspective, the fear of annihilation and recess into the disorderly realm of the pre-Oedipal is what forces the child to associate survival and identity formation with the father. Kristeva, however, ascribes this abjection to the fear of remaining under the control of the mother who validates this desire with the maternal instinct of protection. Sensing her narcissistic tendencies, the daughter chooses to abject the mother in order to be emotionally and physically distanced from this horrific relationship. In "Approaching Abjection", Kristeva represents the horrifying experience the daughter goes through as she struggles to free herself from her mother's overprotectiveness by associating the abject with all forms of annihilation: meaning, identity and independence. For the hurt child, the abject comes to threaten her continuity as an individual and her separation as an independent subject from other objects. However, she really cannot separate herself from this state of being.

(...) what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain "ego" that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. (2)

As a transitional state of being which is located on the margins between the self and the other, the abject precedes signification. It is a phase where borders are broken down and systems are subverted. This makes the daughter simultaneously attracted to it and repelled by it as she exalts in this given freedom but is frightened by the "fragility of [its] law" (4). Kristeva's paradoxical statement, "one does not know [the abject], one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully" (9), shows that the abject is a space where identity can be created away from the rules, borders and systems imposed on the individual in the Symbolic. And this is exactly where creativity can be allocated in a realm essentially marked by the collapse of meaning.

Prior to her separation from the mother, the daughter enjoys the privilege of acquiring an identity through transgression, and this gives her the space to form an identity with a minimum of social intervention and hence conformity. Nevertheless, the chaos that the daughter is likely to slip into as she experiences this form of unhinged freedom through her relation with the mother may make her unsure whether she wants to bring the relation with the mother to an end or to maintain it. In the case of mothers and daughters living in a culturally diverse society, those feelings are even intensified as the daughter comes to perceive the kind of identity she derives from her association with the mother as an obstacle in the way to her integration into the mainstream culture and the formation of her identity. For one, the mother is in most cases a first generation immigrant while the daughter is a second generation immigrant.

This entails that the experience of cultural shock and inability to integrate smoothly into the new culture of the foreign society after displacement is unconsciously extended by the mother to her daughter who is not likely to go through the same experience. Belonging to a younger generation, it is either that she has come as a young child to the foreign country or that she has been born there, in both cases the struggle for assimilation is alleviated for her. This turns her relation with the mother into one fraught with tension as the mother is seen to perpetuate the old culture and its traditions which the daughter finds not in line with the mainstream culture

she has been brought up in. As she objects the mother, she finds herself experiencing a state of conflict and inbetweenness as she cannot solely identify herself with either the mainstream culture or her native culture.

Kristeva's theory of the abject has been employed as a theoretical framework in reading contemporary ethnic fiction. An example is Allison Nicole Harris' thesis, "Paradox of the Abject: Postcolonial Subjectivity in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*" (2012), in which the writer draws a link between the abject and the kind of identity the female develops in a postcolonial setting. The daughter's inability to go back to the realm of the mother after her initiation to the Symbolic leaves her in the marginal space of the abject. This situation is analogous to her being "on the boundaries of the colonial dichotomy" (v) as she struggles to form an identity free from colonial attachments. In an article titled "Abject by Gender and Race: The Loss of Antoinette's Identity in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (2012), Iida Pollanen proposes to read the identity crisis the Creole Antoinette goes through in light of Kristeva's theory of the abject. Othered because of her race and gender, Antoinette struggles to become part of a patriarchal and colonial society, but she finds no place except for the marginalised space of the abject to fit in. Her madness, from this perspective, becomes understandable.

DISCUSSION

In the four selected short stories, the questions of identity, cultural assimilation and cultural hybridity have been tackled in a number of studies, but not in light of Kristeva's theory of the abject. In an article titled "Personal Names and Heritage: Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use' (1999), Helga Hoel sheds light on Walker's use of African and Arab names and links her choices to the way the characters, Dee in specific, are portrayed in the short story. Dee decides to change her name to Wangero, which, as Hoel explains, is a name that represents "the whole East African region". This shows that "more likely, she is confused and has only superficial knowledge of Africa and all it stands for" (37). In another article, "Heritage and deracination in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use' (1996), David Cowart argues that Dee, who has chosen not to be named after the people who have oppressed her, does in fact repudiate "the very heritage she claims to revere" (171). Like Hoel, Cowart believes that Dee's attempts to get in touch with her native culture are "misguided" (171) since she fails to see the real, lived value of that culture and clings to superficialities.

In an article titled "Any Tan's 'Two Kinds' as a Portrait of Chinese American Values" (2019), Prisma Yunia Putri argues that the clash between the Chinese and the American cultures affects the relation between the mother and daughter. The different cultural orientations Jing-mei and her mother are exposed to create tension in their relationship. In another article, "Why don't you like me the way I am? I'm not a genius": A Mistakable Understanding of a Child Prodigy in Amy Tan's 'Two Kinds', the Symbolic Crisis of Identity in the Specific Contexts of the American Dream" (2014), Akm Aminur Rashid argues that Jing-mei suffers an identity crisis because of her mother's unyielding attempts to make a child prodigy out of her. This failure to communicate between mother and daughter can, however, be read in more positive terms in the context of the American Dream as it shows that Jing-mei's attempts to defy her mother's authoritative figure are a sign of her growing sense of self.

Reading the four short stories in light of Kristeva's theory of the abject shows that the abjection of the mother is reflected in the conflict the diasporic daughter experiences as she tries to balance the two sides of her identity. The tension that moves from the personal to the political level is observed in the daughters' attempts to either fight off the controlling presence of their mothers or to desperately seek their lost attention. In both cases, the daughters suffer being emotionally in a state of in-betweenness as both maintaining the connection to the mother or renouncing it are causing them pain. The same conflicting feelings are observed as they try to balance the relation between the two parts of their identity. While some daughters manage to strike some balance in their relation with the mother, others fail to do so. To illustrate the differences between the daughters in the four short stories, the discussion below will be divided into four sections based on the form the relation with the mother takes and the role the relation with the mother plays in reconciling or bringing apart the two sides of their diasporic identities.

A hasty reaction the daughter can take to stop the mother's controlling behaviours is the renunciation of the relation with her. In doing this, the daughter believes that she is putting an end to the mother's attempts to maintain this attachment and is establishing herself as an independent subject. In reality, however, the daughter is still in the transitional phase of the abject where the distinction between her self and the (m)other is blurred. Controlled by the fear of annihilation, she is unable to joy in the freedom the abject offers her and this makes her see the connection with the mother as an obstacle in her way to subjectivity and social assimilation.

This reaction is apparent in Tan's "Two Kinds" and Walker's "Everyday Use" where the two daughters feel that their attachment with the mother threatens their initiation into subjectivity. In "Two Kinds", the Chinese-American daughter, Jing-mei, seems not only to reject her mother's attachment to the Chinese way of living, but to see any of her attempts to make her a successful child as a distorted understanding of the American culture, specially its so called American dream. As a second generation immigrant, Jing-mei interprets her mother's desperate attempts at making her a prodigy child as a destructive form of self-love. Her insistence on making Jing-mei excel in whatever skill or talent other children are distinguished for is, to a certain extent, an attempt to convince herself that she succeeded in her role as a mother. This is not to deny that the mother does indeed take the narcissistic feelings Kristeva sees as normal to an extreme by demanding her daughter to live up to whatever expectations she has for her. The several roles the mother asks her daughter to take up every time she fails to live up to one of her expectations complicate their relationship and make the daughter see this love as devouring.

I was a dainty ballerina girl standing by the curtain, waiting to hear the music that would send me floating on my tiptoes. I was like the Christ child lifted out of the straw manger, crying with holy indignity. I was Cinderella stepping from her pumpkin carriage with sparkly cartoon music filling the air.

In all of my imaginings I was filled with a sense that I would soon become perfect: My mother and father would adore me. I would be beyond reproach. I would never feel the need to sulk, or to clamor for anything. But sometimes the prodigy in me became impatient. "If you don't hurry up and get me out of here, I'm disappearing for good," it warned. 'And then you'll always be nothing'. (134)

Though Jing-mei shared her mother's motivation to become a prodigy at the beginning, every time she could not live up to her expectations has made her lose the impetus to go on. The multiple roles her mother enforces on her make her unable to strike a healthy balance between her relation with her mother and her self. And this brings her to the realisation that maintaining this attachment is going to result in self-effacement. This point is emphasised by Azm Aminur Rashid who explains in an article titled "Why don't you like me the way I am? I'm not a genius': A Mistakable Understanding of a Child Prodigy in Amy Tan's Two Kinds, the Symbolic Crisis of Identity in the Specific Contexts of the American Dream" (2014) that the clash between Jing-mei and her mother springs from the different identity goals each has. As the mother "places unreasonable expectations on the shoulders of her young, tender daughter" (34), she pushes her to seek separation to overcome this pressure.

By the same token, Jing-mei finds it hard to strike a balance between the two cultures that form her identity. Here, the mother's narcissistic approaches are to blame as well. Her unrealistic understanding of the American dream makes her force her daughter into becoming the American prodigy child. She, however, fails to realise that her understanding of what a child prodigy in the American context is seen through her Chinese upbringing where strict rules and codes of behaviour are enforced on the child to discipline her and make the best out of her potential. In the American context, making a prodigy of one's child is not usually accompanied with enforcement. That is why the mother fails to make her daughter excel in any of the skills she chooses for her. For the daughter, this faulty understanding of this aspect of the American culture makes her averse to the Chinese culture. She even comes to associate the whole culture with her mother and since her relationship with her mother is based on her rejection of the of the latter's possessive tendencies, the daughter develops the same abject feelings towards the Chinese codes of behaviour and traditions.

“Turn off TV,” she called from the kitchen five minutes later. I didn’t budge. And then I decided, I didn’t have to do what mother said anymore. I wasn’t her slave. This wasn’t China. I had listened to her before, and look what happened she was the stupid one.

(...)

“You want me to be something that I’m not!” I sobbed. “I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!”

“Only two kinds of daughters,” she shouted in Chinese. “Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!” (140)

As can be noted in this conversation, the daughter’s chaotic relationship with her mother shapes her attitude to her Chinese upbringing so that she comes to connect the strictness of her mother and her love for discipline to her rejection of her control to the Chinese culture. She also comes to connect identifying with the American culture as the way to her independence and initiation into subjectivity.

A similar, though less tension fraught, relationship is found between the African American mother and her daughter Dee in Walker’s “Everyday Use”. Like Jing-mei, Dee associates her mother with her native culture and just as she sees her mother not up to date, she sees her native culture so and seeks to modernise it by claiming that what is old needs to be updated by being luxuriously exhibited, not by being put to ‘everyday use’. The conflict between the mother and the daughter is present but is not as severe as it is in the case of the Chinese American mother and her daughter due to the fact that Dee is a grown up and is not living with her mother and sister Maggie in the same place. She is not likely to be straddling the borderline separating her from the mother now. Nevertheless, the fact that the few short visits she pays to the family easily bring up disagreements between the mother and the daughter indicate that the relationship between the two of them has not been a peaceful one when she was younger. Just like Jing-mei, the young Dee is expected to have been conscious of her mother’s attempts to liquidise the distinction between her and her daughter by controlling the latter’s perception of who she is and of the African side of her identity, a thing which Dee refuses given her Americanized approach to her African American roots.

“Well,” I say. “Dee.”

“No, Mama,” she says. “Not ‘Dee,’ Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!”

“What happened to ‘Dee?’” I wanted to know.

“She’s dead,” Wangero said. “I couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me.”

“You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie,” I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her “Big Dee” after Dee was born.

“But who was she named after?” asked Wangero.

“I guess after Grandma Dee,” I said.

“And who was she named after?” asked Wangero.

“Her mother,” I said, and saw Wangero getting tired. “That’s about as far back as I can trace it,” I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches. (Walker 318)

Dee’s insistence on not being called Dee by her mother and her association of this inherited name with racial oppression is an indication of her refusal to maintain the relation with the mother. For her, being called Dee by her mother means that she is still under her mother’s control which she associates with being under the control of “the people who oppress [her]” (Walker 318). In this way, Dee introduces her own perception of oppression as a state of being inflicted by the individual upon himself. This point is worth pondering on as it shows us that the relation with the mother, from Dee’s perspective, is not only narcissistic but is also oppressive. As she insists on naming her daughter after her Grandma Dee, she is indirectly enforcing a borrowed identity on her which turns out not to suit her as an individual.

Dee's abjection of the mother is, in this regard, an abjection of the latter's perception of the African heritage. In the short story, this is clearly seen in the conflicting views Dee and her mother have about their heritage. Thus, while the mother believes heritage has to be put to everyday use, Dee goes to the extreme of seeing her heritage as a precious object to exhibit, not to use. Dee's attitude is also clear in the name she has chosen for herself. While her mother bestowed an everyday name on her (Grandma's name), Dee has gone for a name that reflects her African roots but that is not frequently used in the daily lives of African Americans. The different choices Dee frequently makes shows that she refuses to have her identity merged with her mother's, specifically in dealing with her heritage.

2. REPLACEABLE ATTACHMENT

Abjecting the relation with the mother is also noticed in cases when the mother is not sufficiently assertive in the daughter's initiation into subjectivity. The loss of distinction which the daughter in the case of the controlling mother tries hard to evade is sought by the daughter in this case. The mother's passiveness, however, leaves her succourless as she is willing but unable to joy in the unhinged freedom of the abject. Lacking guidance and support, the daughter is eventually forced to renounce the motherly connection and to seek it elsewhere.

The mothers in the two other short stories, Lalami's "How I Became My Mother's Daughter" and Hogan's "Aunt Moon's Young Man", do not exhibit extreme narcissistic feelings in their relationships with their daughters. On the opposite, their daughters regard their loose feelings of love as a form of passiveness and this is what, ironically enough, pushes them to abject their mothers and seek that motherly connection elsewhere. In the case of these two daughters, the relationships tying them to their mothers do not exactly reflect their attitudes to the native side of their identity as in the cases of Jing-mei and Dee. The reason behind this is the fact that their mothers have chosen not to impose their own perspective of the native culture on their daughters. In other words, they have, though not intentionally, given their daughters some space to shape their perception of the native culture. This so called freedom, however, proves to be as dangerous as the imposing approach which the Chinese American and the African American mothers in the two previous stories have taken up. The lack of guidance the two daughters suffer from as they verge the borderline separating them from the mother leaves them with the same feelings of loss that Jing-mei and Dee experience as their mothers have been enforcing their views on them. They both, as a result, eventually choose to abject the mother as they come to equate their connection with her as a hindrance to the process of individuation.

The reaction of the two daughters to the absence of the motherly guidance differs, however. In Lalami's "How I Became My Mother's Daughter", the daughter resorts to the father figure as a way to make up for the passiveness her mother shows to her need of her. Though the daughter shows readiness to identify with her mother and learn from her doing things the native way, the mother does not seem to reciprocate her daughter's attachment nor to appreciate it. In the short story, the reader is told that in many instances the mother is noticed to be sitting alone in the sitting room watching an Egyptian film and reminiscing about the old days back in Egypt. The reader is also told that, during those periods of self talk the mother frequently indulges in, her daughter is noticed to spend her time with her father whose company she seems to enjoy more. The ear piercing episode in the short story represents another example of the indifference on the part of the mother. As the daughter is having her ears pierced, she hugs the big belly of her mother to soothe the pain. And this can be seen as an attempt on the part of the daughter not to abort her connection with the mother. The mother, however, does not seem to want to take on this attachment on a long term. As they leave the place, the daughter suggests they go eat a scoop of ice cream at a place she likes; her mother, however, suggests paying a surprise visit to her father at work. The different suggestions the mother and daughter make are initially highlighted by Lalami who, at that point, introduces the new character of the daughter's French teacher, with whom the father is having a relationship.

What I hadn't told my mother was that I already knew my father was having an affair. I knew the other woman. Her name was Beatrice Sauget and she was my French teacher.

I'd always walked to school on my own, but when I sprained my ankle after I fell off my bike, my father started to drop me off at school before going to work. He'd ask Mademoiselle Sauget how I did in class, his hands weighing on my shoulders or stroking my hair, and then he'd kiss me goodbye. After a couple of weeks, my ankle got better, but he still wanted to drive me to school every day. (300)

The fact that the daughter knows that her father is having an affair with her teacher, but chooses not to tell her mother about it or to ask her father to put an end to it, makes things more complicated. Thus, to say that the daughter is seeking a connection with the mother in the Kristevan sense is to oversimplify her relation with her mother. Though the daughter does indeed see her connection with her mother a boost to her independence, due to the experience her mother has in aspects her father is not good at such as the ear-piercing experience, she never accepts to be hindered from becoming an independent individual when she sees her mother's role in guiding her diminishing. She immediately resorts to the backup plan in which she keeps the process of individuation active by abjecting the mother and identifying with the father. This is clear when she gets to see her father wearing perfume and dressing elegantly to meet her French teacher and does not mind it.

A similar reaction is observed at the beginning on the part of the Native American daughter Sis in Hogan's "Aunt Moon's Young Man". The daughter senses her mother's indifference at young age and is disturbed by the lack of guidance on her part, especially in issues related to her native culture. Like the Arab American daughter in Lalami's short story, she seeks attachment in the Kristevan sense with her mother and sees this freedom-laden attachment not only a haven, but a means to become a full fledged individual. Like her, as well, she does not choose to sacrifice the mother, but chooses to perceive her as a partner with whom to share her journey of identity formation. The mother's unwillingness to share this process, however, is what leads the daughter to abject her mother and to seek guidance and support elsewhere. And those she finds in Aunt Moon, a woman very different from her mother. As she describes Aunt Moon's personality and behaviours, Sis tells the reader that she is not accepted by the women in the town. Her loud voice and her manly behaviours as the town people see them make her all the more attractive in her eyes to replace the mother's position. And though the narrator says that she does indeed get along with her own mother, unlike Jing-mei and Dee, she still seeks something more genuine than a good relationship. She seeks a role model; someone in whose figure she could come in touch with her true self and with the Native American culture. Sis' mother, in this regard, is as guilty as the Chinese American and African American mothers in the two previous short stories, although her fault is of a different kind. While the two mothers have played an integral role in distancing their daughters from their native cultures through their strict approach, this mother has likewise done but through her indifference to guiding her daughter to know more about her native culture. Her indifference has, therefore, shaped the daughter's perception of the native side of her identity. This point is emphasised by Elise Doney (2009) who argues that the relation with the mother is culturally relevant in the works of Hogan. Thus, as the relation with the mother is disrupted, so is the relation with the land. And this is what forces the daughter to look for a surrogate mother figure to make up for the lack of guidance on the mother's part (3-5).

It should be mentioned that the Egyptian daughter's resorting to her father and Sis' resorting to Aunt Moon can be seen as similar to Jing-mei's and Dee's abjection of their mothers. Though less aggressive and less blunt, their seeking a surrogate mother figure entails that they have gone for the same choice of abjecting the mother to become independent individuals. The one difference between the case of the other two daughters and these is that abjection in their case is accompanied with feelings of guilt at having to sacrifice the relation with their mothers for the sake of their selfhood. These feelings, it ought to be pointed out, can be noticed more obviously in the case of the Egyptian daughter as she abandons her mother and keeps silent about her father's secret relation with her French teacher.

3. BLIND ATTACHMENT

In cases where the daughter feels too weak to embark on the journey of self-discovery on her own, she sees in her attachment with the mother a safeguard and chooses to maintain that relation despite the negative impact it has on her as an individual. What makes this attachment

destructive in the long run is the daughter not being aware of the mother's overprotective presence in her life and of her attempts to merge the daughter's identity with hers. Despite the fact that this relationship is usually not fraught with tension as other relationships, it does not give the daughter the needed satisfaction and is expected to end in the belated abjection of the mother.

This blind attachment is seen in the character of Maggie, the other daughter in Walker's "Everyday Use". To begin with, Maggie is similar to the two daughters in "How I Became My Mother's Daughter" and "Aunt Moon's Young Man" in that she refuses to abject her mother and chooses to keep attached to her despite knowing that this attachment can hinder her journey to selfhood. This is, however, where the similarity ends. Unlike the Egyptian daughter and Sis, Maggie does not experience motherly indifference; her mother is well aware of her daughter's need for her support and guidance and does indeed stand by her side to help her become a full fledged individual. As a child, Maggie has suffered from the scars a house fire has left on different parts of her body and this, as her mother has always been aware, has necessitated giving her extra care and support. Compared to her outgoing and more confident sister Dee, Maggie has had the tendency to isolate herself and communicate less with those around her after the fire accident. Through all those years, her mother has made sure that Maggie is under her protection. No doubt, for the psychologically and emotionally scarred girl, this protective attachment has kept her safe and offered her a sense of self with which she felt comfortable and satisfied. Nevertheless, staying that attached to her mother, both physically and emotionally, has no doubt affected the kind of identity she has formed. Unlike the other daughter, Maggie has not given herself the space to evaluate her relationship with her mother. The four other daughters have paused to assess the pros and cons of their attachment to their mothers and, at finding that staying connected to indifferent or controlling mothers is slowing down their advancement to selfhood, they choose to abject the mother. Maggie, on the other hand, has a mother who is aware of her need for help and support; nevertheless, her involvement has helped Maggie form her identity to a certain point at which the mother's attempts started to fire back. In fact, Maggie's dependence on this imbalanced relationship has hindered her from becoming an independent individual. And this is a thing the mother does not seem to be aware of as a result of her controlling character. Compared to her attempts with Dee, the mother's attempts at directing Maggie's course of life turn out to be more fruitful; Maggie does not give her a hard time as much as Dee does in adopting her ways of seeing things. Maggie's close relationship with her mother makes her see in her figure an embodiment of the African American culture and this helps her integrate its arts and lifestyles into her daily life and make it part of everyday use. Maggie's quilting skill is highlighted by Walker who explains in the short story that she makes those quilts to be used, not to be displayed. This is contrasted with Dee's perception of the African ways of living which, due to the fragile and tension fraught relationship with her mother, have been restricted to a marginalised zone in her daily life. This should not, however, distract us from evaluating Maggie's relationship with her mother objectively. Despite the fact that Maggie's association of the figure of her mother with the rich African heritage and her ability to see in this association a lived reality, she is not able to live this beyond the limited borders of their home. Dee, on the contrary, has proved more successful by introducing her heritage to new places and people, even if in the form of objects to be displayed. The wider circulation and access Dee has been able to achieve makes her seem the more successful at balancing the American and African sides of her identity.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

"I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told they were old-fashioned, out of style.

"But they're priceless!" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

"She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is these quilts, these quilts!"

“Well,” I said, stumped. “What would you do with them?”

“Hang them,” she said. As if that was the only thing you could do with quilts.

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

“She can have them, Mama,” she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. “I can ‘member Grandma Dee without the quilts.” (321)

Dee coming back to get the quilts is not as villainous as her mother sees it. The mere act of coming back proves that Dee acknowledges her African roots and the value of her heritage. Her attitude, however, makes her seem to prioritise the financial value of the African American heritage to the cultural and the national values. In fact, Walker’s portrayal of Dee, her appearance, her style and the fact that she comes accompanied by an African American who has tailored his African heritage to suit the modern American lifestyle he is leading can make her look as an opportunist who sees her own native culture as an object that needs good and well planned marketing. Nevertheless, we should not come to a hasty conclusion about Dee and judge her interest in her heritage as less genuine than Maggie’s. In an article titled “Fight or Flight: A Reevaluation of Dee in Alice Walker’s ‘Everyday Use’” (1998), Susan Farrell argues against interpreting Dee’s different approach towards the African heritage as superficial. Though her mother seems to reject her material interest in the quilts, she still adores the success Dee has achieved on a personal level. Early in the story as she awaits the arrival of Dee outside the house, she fantasises about a “mother-child reunion” (Farrell 180) in an episode of the Johnny Carson shows where she pictures Dee, full of pride, pinning an orchid on her hair. This incident, though a figment of her imagination, proves that, after all, the mother acquiesces to Dee’s modernised view of their African heritage.

4. BALANCED CONNECTION

In a balanced connection, the daughter acknowledges that her attachment to the mother is indispensable to the process of individuation. She refuses, therefore, to hastily abject her, but is aware as well that blind attachment or passive attachment have the same negative consequences as hasty abjection. This makes her able to establish a healthy relationship with the mother whose guiding role she, as Kristeva (1982: 2–5) explains, realises she needs to become a fully-fledged individual. This balanced connection with the mother also mirrors her ability to strike balance between the two sides of her identity as a member of an ethnic group. As she gets in touch with the native side of her identity, she is able to remain in contact with the foreign one.

This balanced relation with the mother is made clear in Hogan’s “Aunt Moon’s Young Man” more than in Lalami’s “How I Became My Mother’s Daughter”. Though both Sis and the Egyptian daughter move from a relationship based on complete identification to one based on separation and abjection, they take different routes. In the case of the Egyptian daughter, choosing to identify with the father figure and to accept his relation with the French teacher shows that though she has had the desire to learn more about her origins and culture at the beginning, she does not keep this interest as she experiences her mother’s indifference and lack of guidance. As she starts to experience a conflict between the two sides of her identity, she chooses to resolve it by forming her identity in light of the foreign culture. The same conflict between the two sides of the identity is experienced by Sis, though differently. Experiencing the same motherly indifference and lack of guidance does not make her less enthusiastic to know more about her Native American roots. And getting to know Aunt Moon boosts this interest in her as she takes the place of her mother guiding her journey of seeking knowledge about her Native American culture. In this story, Aunt Moon comes to stand for the Native American way of life instead of her mother and her ability to integrate the Native American rituals and practises smoothly into her daily life without the need to do so by enforcing them like the mothers in “Two Kinds” and “Everyday Use” or to do so by reminiscing about them like the mother in “How I Became My Mother’s Daughter” eases Sis’ conflict and makes her see her native culture as an integral part of her identity. Unlike the feelings of tension and rejection that Jing-mei and Dee and those of guilt the Egyptian daughter experience, the daughter in

this short story experiences a smoother transition into selfhood. As she experiences the merge of identity with the surrogate mother, she is drawn to the joy and freedom Kriteva associates with the abject.

As she leaves the small Native American community of the town into the large Americanised community of the city, Sis is aware that the identity she has formed as a Native American needs not get in conflict with the American identity she will construct in the new setting. The two sides complement each other; they do not exist in opposition to each other as in the case of the other three daughters. Jing-mei learns the need to balance the two sides of the song as well, but she does so too late. Dee does not seem to want to do so as a child or as an adult. The Egyptian daughter is too immersed in her sense of guilt to want to do so. Sis, on the other hand, manages to reconcile the two sides of her identity and to maintain a healthy relationship with the mother figure despite having to abject her biological mother and to perceive that healthy relationship to achieve individuation.

CONCLUSION

In the case of daughters whose initiation into subjectivity is complicated by the fact that they are members of ethnic minorities in a foreign society, the I'm-relieved-to-have-gotten-rid-of-you relationship with the mother is reflected, though with varying degrees, in the ambivalent feelings those daughters develop towards the native culture and the mainstream culture. Just like the tension-ridden relationship between them and their mothers, the relationship that brings together the two parts of their cultural belongingness is fraught with tension. As the discussion above has shown, those daughters usually seek separation from the mother to become full fledged individuals, because they deem the narcissistic connection with the mother or her passiveness as a hindrance to social assimilation.

In Kristevan (1982) terms, the maternal is described as a narcissistic drive (13–14), but this controlling tendency on the part of the mother should not be regarded as a destructive force, since the mother's narcissism springs from her desire to protect her daughter from the pain she is going to experience as she separates from her without going through the transitional phase of the abject. For the daughter, however, the mother's attempts to shield her from future suffering are seen as a hindrance to her initiation into subjectivity and this, as she believes, gives her the right to defend herself against this extreme form of narcissism through a sudden and harsh renunciation of the mother. It is here where the conflict between the mother and the daughter is said to arise. Experiencing the contradictory feelings of fear and joy as she unites with the mother in the abject confuses her and makes her seek separation from her.

In each of the four short stories, the conflict the daughter experiences in her relation with her mother mirrors the conflict she experiences as she tries to balance the two cultures she is part of. Jing-mei and Dee associate their mother's controlling characters with their native cultures and this makes them connect their independence as individuals with the mainstream culture. The Egyptian daughter rejects the passive role of her mother in introducing her to her native culture but does not seek this knowledge elsewhere. Sis shares the Egyptian daughter's rejection of her mother's passive presence but makes up for it through her relation with Aunt Moon from whom she acquires knowledge about her native culture. A connection of varying degrees can therefore be traced between the feelings the four ethnic daughters develop towards their mothers and the identity they form as members of ethnic groups. And this leads to the conclusion that the mother-daughter relationship amongst ethnic groups, with all the harmony and tension it holds, can be seen to represent the conflict the daughter experiences between the two cultures she belongs to, with the mother wavering towards the native culture and the daughter towards the mainstream culture. Thus, by studying the relations holding the four daughters to their ethnic mothers from the psychoanalytic perspective of Kristeva's theory of the abject, the study has helped assess the role the ethnic mother plays as a supporting force or as a hindering force in her daughter's initiation into subjectivity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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