

“And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other”: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Hanan Al- Shaykh’s *The Locust and the Bird: My Mother’s Story*

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Abstract

The mother-daughter relationship is the most crucial human rapport. Western and Arab theorists have dealt profusely with this close female bond that persists as a determining force of personality structure and social system. Adrienne Rich (1986) and Nancy Chodorow (1978b) undertake an analysis of the institution of motherhood in the context of western patriarchal society. In the Arab world, major studies of this theme such as Suad Joseph and Dalya Abudi’s works deal with the mother-daughter bond as culturally specific. This study attempts a psychoanalytic and feminist analysis of this “great unwritten story” where the two disciplines engage and enrich each other. This will be explored in ‘the life writings’ of Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother*, and Hanan Al- Shaykh’s *The Locust and the Bird: My Mother’s Story* in which the mother-daughter relationship is the core concern. Kincaid and Al- Shaykh’s works contextualize what Rich (1986) calls “the essential female tragedy” portraying “the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter” and how this is articulated through genre choice, language, and colonial/patriarchal oppression. The study will also investigate the auto biographical nature of both texts.

Keywords: Jamaica Kincaid, Hanan Al- Shaykh, mother-daughter relationships, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, *The Locust and the Bird: My Mother’s Story*, life writings, psychoanalytic and feminist analysis

“Every mother contains her daughter within herself and every daughter her mother....Every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter” (Jung, 1969, p.162).

“The daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overweeningly affectionate and hostile toward her daughter” (De Beauvoir, 1974, p. 317)

“Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flaw of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other” (Rich, 1986, p. 225)

The above quotations embody the rationale for considering the mother-daughter relationship cross-culturally and as the most crucial human rapport. Western and Arab theorists have dealt profusely with this close female bond that persists as a determining force of personality structure and social system. Adrienne Rich’s *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986) and Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978b) undertake an analysis of the institution of motherhood in the context of western patriarchal society, and promote a socio-psychological approach in examining this complex and interwoven relationship. In the Arab context, major studies of this theme such as Suad Joseph’s *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (1999) and Dalya Abudi’s *Mothers and Daughters in Arab Women’s Literature: The Family Frontier* (2011) deal with the mother-daughter bond as culturally specific.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the complexities of mother-daughter relationships through two autobiographical literary texts by two women writers from doubly marginalized communities, one Caribbean and the other an Arab. Through such autobiographical writings, these women write themselves into history. This study employs a psychoanalytic and feminist analysis of this “great unwritten story” (Rich, 1986, p. 225) where the two disciplines engage and enrich each other. This will be explored in ‘the life writings’ of Jamaica Kincaid’s (b.1949) *The*

Autobiography of My Mother (1997)* [note: Hereafter referred to as *TAOMM*] and Hanan Al- Shaykh's (b.1945) *The Locust and the Bird: My Mother's Story* (2005)* [note: Hereafter referred to as *TLTB*] in which the mother-daughter relationship is the core concern. This paper hopes to fill the gaps in research done on those two writers especially the latter about whom little has been written. The study will show how both texts, deal, each in its own way, with this relationship "essential, distorted, misused" (Rich, 1986, p. 225) unravelling the silences surrounding it. Kincaid's and Al- Shaykh's works contextualize what Rich labels as, "the essential female tragedy" as it plays out in different cultures portraying "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter" (p. 237), and how this is articulated through genre choice, language, and colonial/patriarchal oppression. The paper will also make use of the critical precepts of autobiography theorists such as George Gusdorf, Regina Blackburn, Bernice Reagon, among others, to investigate the autobiographical nature of both texts.

According to Rich (1986), the relationship of mothers and daughters is highly substantial because it shapes how women relate to other women and to themselves as women. Writing autobiographically, Rich recounts how she, like other women, has "tried to return to her mother, to repossess and be repossessed by her, to find the mutual confirmation from and with another woman that daughters and mothers alike hunger for, pull away, make possible or impossible for each other" (p. 218). For ages, patriarchal institutions have fostered guilt as a barrier between mothers and daughters. Rich explains, "The institution of motherhood finds all women more or less guilty of having failed their children; and my mother in particular, had been expected to help create, according to my father's plan, a perfect daughter"(p. 223).

Rich's (1986) analysis exposes the strong, contradictory and sometimes ambivalent relationship between mother and daughter. She writes, "The first Knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality comes from her mother. That earliest enwrapment of one female body with another can sooner or later be denied or rejected, felt as choking possessiveness as rejection, trap or taboo; but it is, at the beginning the whole world" (p. 218). The intimacy of mothers and daughters is widely acknowledged. Rich maintains that they "exchanged with each other-beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival-a knowledge... flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other"(p. 220). She defines it as "a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal" (p. 220).

Adopting the standpoint of psychoanalytic object relations theory, Nancy Chodorow's study (1978b), argues that in western culture, girls' relationships with their mothers are more intense, ambivalent, and lingering than those with their father. Nurtured by a parent of the same sex, daughters retain their mothers as primary object throughout adolescence and into adulthood. Correspondingly, women's mothering is a gender activity; namely, it is a product of feminine role training and role identification. In Chodorow's view, girls are taught to be mothers, trained for nurturance, and told that they ought to mother. She further argues, "[Girls] are wrapped in pink blankets, given dolls and have their brother's trucks taken away, learn that being a girl is not as good as being a boy, are not allowed to get dirty, are discouraged from achieving in school, and therefore become mothers"(1978b, p. 31). Furthermore, girls "identify" with their own mothers as they grow up, and this identification produces the girl as the mother. Alternately, as cognitive-psychological trends would have it, girls choose to do "girl things" and eventually "women-things", like mothering, as a result of learning that they are girls and wanting to be girl- like (Chodorow, 1978b, p. 31). Consequently, a woman's psychological capabilities for parenting are built into her personality through her continuing intense relationship with her own mother.

A new interpretation of the feminine Oedipus complex suggests that because a woman becomes a mother, the Oedipus complex is as much a mother-daughter issue as it is one of father and daughter. In her article "Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration" (1978a), Chodorow suggests that "the mother-daughter relationship contributes in fundamental ways to the character of the feminine psyche, as well as contributing to the creation of a male-dominant psychology in men" (p.137). Addressing heterosexual orientation, Chodorow explains that it is "a major outcome of the oedipal period for most girls, and that the traditional psychoanalytic account of the development of female sexuality, and the growth of the girl's relationship to her father describes this" (p. 138). Chodorow (1978a) believes that "a girl identifies with her mother in their common feminine inferiority and in her heterosexual stance" (pp.138- 139). She further argues that, "A girl's "rejection" of her mother, and oedipal attachment to her father ... do not mean the termination of the girl's affective relationship to her mother. Rather, a girl's dual internal and external mother-infant world becomes triadic" (1978b, p. 126). Notwithstanding, a girl may feel the need to separate from her mother, she also simultaneously loves her. In fact, the mother represents for the girl, "a safe and familiar refuge against her father's frustrating and frightening aspects. (1978b ,p, 129). Accordingly, the girl's relation towards her mother is a relational ambivalence exemplified in the tenacity of attachment as well as an inclination for autonomy.

One of the ways Kincaid articulates what Rich (1986) terms "essential female tragedy" (p. 237) is maintained in her choice of genre. In her semi-autobiographical novels, Kincaid gives voice to the women of the British West Indies. George Gusdorf (1980) stipulates that autobiography is, "the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (p.

33). In view of that conceptualization, Regina Blackburn (1980) explains that black women use autobiography to redefine “the black female self in black terms from a black perspective” (p. 147). A revealing case in point is the black protagonist redefinition of herself through writing her mother’s story in Kincaid’s work. In *Lucy* (1990) and *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1997), Kincaid explores the ongoing impacts slavery and colonialism have had on the psyche of the West Indian woman wherein the struggle for separation from the colonial past is intersected by the heroine’s struggle with her mother. Issues of patriarchy are united with conflicting cultural perspectives to create female protagonists who cannot look forward without looking back. For these characters the past is ever present, and the struggle for identity is conflated with the struggle to separate themselves from their colonial pasts (Seanor, 1963, p. iv). In this case, Kincaid’s autobiography becomes, in the view of Bernice Reagon (1982) a “cultural autobiography” (p. 81).

Kincaid’s fascination with the dynamics of the Caribbean mother-daughter relationship stems from her tenuous relationship with her own mother. In an interview with Dwight Garner (2008), Kincaid remarks that *The Autobiography of My Mother* is about Xuela, “a fertile woman who decides not to be” (p. 2) and who is modeled after her mother. Kincaid adds that Xuela’s character is drawn, “from an observation I’ve made about my own mother: That all her children are quite happy to have been born, but all of us are quite sure she should never have been a mother” (Garner, 2008, p.2). She rewrites the history of a Caribbean woman as one of resistance to the patriarchal trend of Caribbean motherhood. Instead of creating a character, like Kincaid’s own mother, who produces children despite the brutal, harsh and destitute conditions into which they are born, Kincaid’s heroine, Xuela, works to prevent reproduction entirely.

Identifying mother- daughter texts as semi-autobiographical or ‘life writings’ is of great implication since they address “the multiple imbrications of self, m/other and writing” (Donnell, 1999, p. 124). Therefore, they are working with and against literary genres. Kincaid is embracing feminist theorists’ call for women to “write themselves,” to give life and importance to their own stories and their mothers’ by recording them themselves. Hélène Cixous (2001) notes that traditionally women have been “driven away” from writing as they have from their own bodies. Creating their own texts, women reject having their lives written for them. Shannon E. Seanor (1963) maintains that

Kincaid, coming from a colonial history in which West Indian women have been subjugated to many forms of patriarchy, writes the true lives of Caribbean women. Instead of subscribing to patriarchal notions about the role of women and the tendency of the dominant patriarchal and foreign forces to silence the voices of West Indian women, Kincaid talks back. (p. 7)

Articulating previously unheard voices, West Indian women give a new voice to black female experience everywhere. In *TAOMM* (1997), Xuela comes into life with no mother. The novel opens with the impact of the death of Xuela’s mother giving her birth on her. Xuela’s following words reverberate such an impact:

My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind.... And this realization of loss and gain made me look backward and forward: at my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world. (p.3)

It is tangible that naming, possessing, and identity are deeply interconnected in Kincaid’s text. A revealing case in point is Xuela’s thoughts about her mother, her mother’s name and her own feelings of self-possession and dispossession:

And your own name, whatever it might be, eventually was not the gateway to who you really were, and you could not ever say to yourself, ‘My name is Xuela Claudette Desvarieux.’ This was my mother’s name, but I cannot say it was her real name, for in a life hers, as in mine, what is a real name?” (*TAOMM*, 1997, p. 79)

Xuela’s subjectivity is marked as a substitute to her mother’s, to which she is joined by “a paradoxical and painful ‘connection through separation’ which is signified by the text’s refrain: ‘My mother died the moment I was born’” (1999, p. 128) as put by Donnell.

Another aspect of the mother-daughter relationship is the ability to talk and write back, returning maternal contempt with daughterly counter-contempt. Louise Bernard (2002) observes; “it is in the taxonomic ordering of this self-inventory and the connections that emerge between her fictional and nonfictional voices that Kincaid pushes against the boundaries of autobiography and memoir”(p. 118). On asking her about the novel’s title, Kincaid explained in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel (1996) that her purpose was to write “the life of a certain kind of woman from the British-ruled West Indies,” (p.68) and although it was not her life or generation, she wanted to say things “in a voice that seemed autobiographical” (Wachtel, 1996, p.68) in the novel. She further explains, “The tradition of autobiography of course is that it’s your own life you’re talking about, but I believe that I can trace my line legitimately through the maternal, and that all the female lives that came before mine are part of me, so I can think of it as my own life, my own

biography, through strictly speaking it's not at all" (Wachtel, 1996, p.69).

In fact, the writing of autobiography is a difficult dichotomous process marked by "slippage between mothers and daughters, mothers and mothers, fact and fiction, history and literature, autobiography and biography... [it] foregrounds those questions of authorship and ownership which are implicit to all acts of writing, but are particularly highly charged with reference to autobiographical works which traditionally authorize themselves by their claims to authentic representation"(Donnell, 1999, p. 127).

In *TAOMM* (1997), Kincaid, the daughter and/or ghostwriter, tells a fake story of her mother that includes family stories passed down by her mother as well as the story of Kincaid's own girlhood and adult relation with her angry and disdainful mother who becomes an internalized part of Kincaid heard in her angry and contemptuous authorial voice. Just as Xuela, in response to the contemptuous hostility of others, enacts power, rage, and contempt scripts as she learns to humiliate the humiliator, so Kincaid as a retrospective storyteller assumes a similar power over her mother" (Bouson, 2005, 117).

In an interview with Moira Ferguson (1994), Kincaid describes her writing as "very autobiographical," insisting that when she began to write, the act of writing "was really an act of saving" her life (p. 176). She conceives writing as a process that is "always full of pain," albeit, it is "a way of being" (Snell, 1997, p. 28). Consequently, she writes because she does not know "how else to live," and writing also allows her to live "in deepest way" as she puts in her interview with Ferguson (1994, p. 169). "Deepest ways" denotes living with strong feelings and possessing what Chodorow (1999) calls "the power of feelings" which constitutes the core of the whole autobiography.

Kincaid highlights the significance of feelings and emotions in an interview with Donna Perry (1990). She avers that the author must "find the emotion somewhere inside" herself to write (p. 495). In her analysis of the psychoanalytic contribution to the study of feelings, Chodorow (1999) states, "A particular feeling condenses and expresses an unconscious fantasy about self, body, other, other's body, or self and other." She goes further and explains "Through the power of feelings, unconscious fantasy recasts the subject-emotions and stories about different aspects of self in relation to one another and about the self and body in relation to an inner and outer object world"(pp. 239-40). Chodorow (1999) argues that cultural meanings are kept alive for the individual because they are "emotionally charged and continually invested with fantasy, conflict, and shifting private meaning" (p. 201).

Chodorow's theorization bears relevance to Kincaid's representation of the private and cultural lives of her protagonists. However, in spite of the fact that critics believe that mother-daughter and family relations are central to Kincaid's work, yet they shun the psychological in her writings and instead allegorize and politicize the personal and relational. Therefore, as frequently maintained by Kincaid's critics, her troubled relationship with her mother is a metaphor for her troubled relation with her colonial Antiguan culture and the colonial motherland. Commenting on such a troubled relation, Lizabeth Paravisini- Gebert (1999) writes that, "there is a clear correlation established throughout Kincaid's work between motherhood and the colonial metropolis as motherland" (p. 27). Although the relations between Kincaid's female characters and their mothers "are crucially formative," they are also "always mediated by intimations of life as colonized subjects" so that "[c]ultural location becomes paramount" in Kincaid's art" (Ferguson, 1994, p. 1). In fact, alienation from the mother" is equivalent to alienation from home land.

With respect to the role of language in articulating the mother-daughter relationship, as it relates to power, social and racial foundations within the pre-independent space of Dominica, "is central to Kincaid's characterization of Xuela as a symbol of extraordinary antithesis. In the exercises of a near demonic persona, Xuela asserts a playful misrecognition of her designated subject position" (Bernard, 2002, p. 130). This is tangible first, through a self-imposed silence, symbolically representative, perhaps, of the death of Carib Indian culture. She states, "Until I was four I did not speak ... I knew I could speak, but I did want to" (*TAOMM*, p. 6). Secondly, this is performed through "a refusal to speak when spoken to in the language of address" (Gilmore, 1994, p. 20). It is through language that Xuela maintains a defiantly counter-hegemonic stance. The first words she utters are in English, "the language of people I would never like or love" (*TAOMM*, p. 7). Conversely, she chooses to communicate with her loathed husband in French creole: she writes, "He [Philip] spoke to me, I spoke to him: he spoke to me in English, I spoke to him in patois. We understand each other in the language of our thoughts" (*TAOMM*, p. 219). Kincaid presents a discourse that is literally double-voiced in the Bakhtinian sense. Not only does Xuela seize the immoral language of the colonizer, but she also chooses to employ modes of communication within specific colonially-charged social contexts. Xuela's manipulation of language stands as a counter statement. Each utterance marks the instabilities of both the spoken word and the subject's positionality. Xuela ultimately refuses "to be unified, and thus maintains the contradictory and opposing grounds on which identification must occur" (Bernard, 2002, p. 131).

Indeed, *TAOMM* (1997) "inscribes the autobiography of someone who is the "I" of writing. The extralinguistic presence of the mother, a dead aboriginal Caribbean woman (a Carib), cannot be located in the situation that is written; but she is

the condition of possibility for the narrator and the narrative” (Gregg, 2002, p. 927). In this manner, Kincaid uses language as part of her reclaiming mission. Xuela says:

[T]hat should have been the surprise: not that I spoke, but that I spoke English, a language I had never heard anyone speak ... But no one noticed...That the first words I said were in the language of a people I would never like or love is not now a mystery to me; everything in my life, good or bad, to which I am inextricably bound is a source of pain. (*TAOMM*, p. 7)

Gregg (2002) further comments on the use of the oppressor’s language:

These first words are, significantly, in English when all around her only Creole is spoken. The radically conjoined absences of the Native Caribbean mother and the mother tongue of English, both of which are nowhere but everywhere manifest, constitute a womb of space that spawns the seemingly self-engendered English speaking subject. In their inseparable linkage, these irreconcilable worlds – the lost mother and pervasive, invisible mother tongue-provide the historical, ideological, and phantasmic coordinates that make possible Xuela’s speech; and they constitute the very source of her being and her pain. (p. 929)

The little girl’s distinctiveness is revealed after four years of silence when she chooses to utter her first words which are significantly, a question, in plain English not in French or English patois. The question spoken in plain English, “where is my father?” launches an important connection that will continuously be referred to and stressed upon. Such a connection is maintained between the father figure and the language of the British oppressors. Half African, half Scottish, her father chooses to deny his dual heritage and sides with the world of the colonizer, Xuela remarks, “And so as in my father there existed at once victor and vanquished, perpetrator and victim, he chose, not at all surprisingly, the mantle of the former, always the former, this is not to say he was at war with himself” (*TAOMM*, p.192). His choice will always be a source of pain and shame for his daughter whose crucial goal in life will be to grasp and accept all aspects of her convoluted personality, family history and national heritage.

Concerning colonial/ patriarchal oppression, the act of Xuela’s inherent rebellion is exhibited in the breaking of Ma Eunice’s favorite plate. It has openly political implications. This plate made of bone china is decorated with an idealized picture of English countryside, “underneath which one word is written in gold letters: HEAVEN” (*TAOMM*, p. 9). The irony of the situation is that both Ma Eunice and the child at this point miss the buried note of the picture (that England is the only heaven on earth). Since they are not even aware of the existence of the English countryside, they see the “wide-open field filled with grass and flowers in the most tender shades of yellow, pink, blue, and green” (*TAOMM*, p. 8) as a “truthful” depiction of a future state of peaceful existence void of any human worry or care.

Since Xuela would not apologize for breaking the plate, Ma Eunice forces her to kneel down in the sun with her hands raised up above her head, with a large stone in each hand. This punishment will make a lasting impression on the child. Looking back on it, the grown-up Xuela can see the emblematic meaning of the act indicative of “the relationship between captor and captive, master and slave, with its motif of the big and the small, the powerful and the powerless, the strong and the weak” (*TAOMM*, p. 10).

Thus, “breaking” the rules and defying the status quo become attached to questions of colonial power. This idea is developed through Xuela’s description of her experiences in the British school where the first words she learns to read are “THE BRITISH EMPIRE” (*TAOMM*, p. 14). Margarita Dimitrova Marinova (1998) states, “It is at this school that she first realizes her own foreignness, and the subsequent sense of not-belonging makes her feeling of loneliness even deeper. Not only is she the only girl in a class of seven boys, but everybody else, including the teacher, is of African descent”(p. 18). Xuela’s connection to the Carib people is maintained in her Caribbean mother who epitomizes, “the defeated and the exterminated” (*TAOMM*, p.16). Unlike such Caribbean people, the African people, “had been defeated but had survived” (*TAOMM*, p. 16). Moreover, the defeat of her people is being transferred to her as a person, without any acknowledgment of her own individuality. Defying such stereotypical and orthodox compartmentalization, the girl develops a habit which is to stay with her for the rest of her life; she begins to talk to herself, “because [she] grew to like the sound of [her] own voice,” but also because her voice “had a sweetness to [her], it made [her] loneliness less, for [she] was lonely and wished to see people in whose faces [she] could recognize something of [her]self” (*TAOMM*, p.16).

Finding her voice, Xuela uses it to control the world the way she knows it in order to protect herself and to attain all her personal goals, despite the pain that her actions may inflict on the people around her. Eventually, Xuela uses her newly acquired skills in writing English to write a letter to her absent father asking him to interfere with her fate and change her life for the better. Although the letters she composes to her “dear Papa” are not meant to be sent to him, they find their way to the intended receiver. Consequently, Xuela’s father finally claims her as a child and comes to take her to live with him and his new wife.

As a matter of fact, Xuela has lived with Ma Eunice for years. Yet, her father decides abruptly that she should go to live with Monsieur and Madam La Batte, Lisa, an older middle class couple who oppressed Xuela. At the age of sixteen, Xuela becomes Monsieur La Batte's mistress and he impregnated her with the permission of Madame La Batte. This whole scene is depressing and frustrating to Xuela, not only because of the way is her sexuality developing but also because she never understood Monsieur and Madam La Batte. Finally, Xuela realizes that "[t]o want desperately to marry men ... is not a mistake women make, it is only ... what else is left for them to do? I was never told why she (Madam La Batte) wanted to marry him (Monsieur La Batte)" (*TAOMM*, p. 64). In fact, Xuela's sexual submission to Monsieur La Batte can be interpreted as 'concubinage,' a practice that was widespread in the Caribbean during slavery and never ended. In the practice of concubinage, white male slave owners kept black females in their homes for sexual services with the knowledge of their white wives. Jenny Sharpe (2003) comments:

Concubinage was not a sexual transgression against domestic life, which is a reading we have inherited from the abolitionist and missionaries who condemned the practice as immoral. Rather, it was part of a normative West Indian domesticity in which slave women served in such intimate capacities as the surrogate mothers of white children, secondary wives of white men, and mothers of their mixed-race children. (p. xxii)

Although the text does not classify Monsieur LaBatte as white or of European descent, his sexual relations with Xuela can be described as a continuation of the patriarchal hegemony that was practiced under slavery and colonialism, even if he is African Caribbean. Eventually, Xuela will endure the dark painful experience of getting an apparently illegal, secretive abortion by a woman who had practiced on many women in her isolated area. Kincaid skillfully portrays the scene:

She[a woman called 'Sang-Sang'] gave me [Xuela] a cupful of thick black syrup to drink and then led me to a small hole in a dirt floor to lie down. For four days I lay there, my body a volcano of pain; nothing happened, and for four days after that blood flowed from between my legs slow and steadily like an eternal spring. And then it stopped. The pain was like nothing I had ever imagined before. (*TAOMM* p. 82).

After going through such a horrible experience, Xuela admits that she has become a new person who knows things she has never known before. She adds, "I knew things that you can know only if you have been through what I had just been through. I had carried my own life in my own hands" (*TAOMM*, p. 83). Rather than surrendering to Lisa's wishes, Xuela objects and makes her own decision about the future. She sneaks from the house at night to rid herself not only of an illegal pregnancy but also of Lisa's expectations of her.

Later in the narrative, Xuela's gender and sexual roles are deeply convoluted by her marriage to Philip, a European man whom she does not love and also by her sexual relationship with Roland, a married stevedore whose wife abhors her considering her "a whore, a slut, a pig, a snake, a viper, a rat, a lowlife, a parasite, and an evil woman" (*TAOMM*, p. 171).

The first impediment Xuela faces is the fact that she is married to a man she does not love. Yet, such marriage brings her wealth, privilege, social status and cultural sanctuaries. Furthermore, she finds comfort in her sexual relationship with Roland because of the similarities in their social status. The second part of the complication includes the fact that Roland wants to impregnate her and she refuses to allow him to do so. He seems to live up to the ways Jaipaul Roopnarine (2004) describes African Caribbean men and how they view manhood, "For most African Caribbean men there are three essential components to manhood: rampant heterosexual activity, provisioning for the family economically, and being the head of the family" (74). Despite reservations, Xuela's ostensible acceptance of this view and her preoccupation with economic security rather than sincere love and affection, following Madam LaBatte's model, leave her disturbed and traumatized about gender and sexuality. In the same vein of Madam LaBatte, Xuela's desire to be without economic worries gets her into a critical situation. She will become victimized not only by capitalist oppression but also by sexual oppression. This constitutes some of the dangerous consequences of colonial ideologies for African Caribbean women.

In fact, Xuela's sexual affairs with Monsieur LaBatte and Roland, both married men, epitomize a re-enforcement of the despondency and confusions that Xuela faces with respect to her gender and sexuality roles as she develops into womanhood. Xuela suffers from the same fate of exploitation many other women around the world experience; she is being exploited sexually by both her husband Philip and her lover Roland. Choosing to marry to become a housewife for purely economic security, Xuela, according to Maria Mies analogy, becomes a double "sex object." Maria Mies (1986) states, "The strategy of gendered division of labor is based on a patriarchal, sexist and racist ideology of women which defines women basically as housewives and sex objects" (p. 142). While Mies' critique can be used to prosecute Xuela's oppression, it is functional as a scathing censure of patriarchal British colonial rule in Dominica and the rest of

Anglophone African Caribbean in the course of the early and mid-twentieth century. During such a period, African Caribbean women experienced inequities and bigotries on gender grounds. Xuela reflects on her grandfather's background and the way that he has treated women and his own children in Dominica. Her grandfather, John Richardson had many children with many different women in the places where he had lived.

Pondering over her father's past, Xuela seems to conclude that there is no likelihood that equality will become the basis for determining the proper gender and sexuality roles for women in Dominica or the Anglophone African Caribbean as a whole, anytime in the near future. Xuela's cynical outlook regarding gender and sexual equality in Dominica is tangible throughout the text. The general impact of the colonial patriarchal ideology is manifested in the restrictions imposed on Xuela's gender and sexual growth.

Subsequently, Xuela finds out that she can use her sexuality as a weapon against both Monsieur LaBatte and Philip. She defines Philip's relationship to her as one of unfulfilled desire. Being an easy prey to her, Philip exemplifies what Robert Young (1995) identifies as colonial sexual desire for the other (p. 3) which demarcates an inclination to conquer and colonize the female other. Linda Lang-Peralta (2006) remarks that at the root of this desire "lurks the belief that the female Other is sexually deviant, and having declared her deviant, lascivious and degenerate, the conqueror literally cannot keep his hands off of her" (p. 70). As one of the conquerors, Philip "wants her entirely. He wants her to be his possession, and because she denies him that possession, he loves her. His is the desire of the conqueror" (p. 70) as put by Lang-Peralta. Correspondingly, Philip is another of Kincaid's emasculated male figures, an unremarkable, ordinary man, devoid of self-confidence, with skin that Xuela describes as "thin and pink and transparent" (*TAOMM*, p. 152). Being British, he was burdened by things over which he and his kind no longer had any control. Xuela asserts that he was "empty of real life and energy, used up," (*TAOMM*, p.153) and did not look like anyone she could or should love. Her marriage, which she acknowledges as a defeat, will be rooted less in love than in, "an apparent desire for mutual self-punishment and expiation, not a desire for masochistic suffering but as penance for the ravages of history of which they have been both victim and unwitting inflictors" (Paravisini-Gebert, 1999, p. 46).

As the seventy-year old Xuela approaches the end of her narration, she focuses not only on the mystery of her own origins and that of her parents but also on the death of her parents and approaching her death as well. She recalls her feeling of superiority when she stood over the body of her dead father: "The two people from whom I had come were no more. I had allowed no one to come from me. A new feeling of loneliness overcomes me then" (*TAOMM*, p. 213). She comes to love her father "but only when he was dead, at that moment when he still looked like himself but a self that could no longer cause harm, only a still self, dead" (*TAOMM*, p. 214). Near the end of her novel, Xuela comes to accept her aloneness as an indispensable fact of life. She notes, "[A]t last a great peace came over me ... I was alone and I was not afraid, I accepted it the way I accepted all the things that were true of me: my two hands, my two eyes, my two feet, my two ears, all my senses, all that could be known about me, all that I did not know. That I was alone was a true thing" (*TAOMM*, p. 223).

Near the end of her life, Xuela remarks, "Who was I? My mother died at the moment I was born became a central motif of my life" (*TAOMM*, p.225). She hears "the sound of much emptiness," a "soft rushing sound... waiting to envelop her" (*TAOMM*, p.226). J. Brooks Bouson (2005) states, "Having outlived her father, stepmother, half-sister, half-brother and husband, Xuela, while being one of the vanquished and defeated, triumphs over others. Seemingly self-possessed and defiant to the end, she refuses to belong to a nation or a race or to have a child; refusing to perpetuate the "'crime' of racial and national identities" (p. 139). Yet she remains, in effect, a prisoner of her origin and her mother's memory.

Xuela insists that her autobiographical account is as much about her mother's life as it is about her own life. She states, "In me the voice I never heard, the face I never saw, the being I came from. In me are the voices that should have come out of me, the faces I never allowed to form". She further confirms that this account "is an account of the person who was never allowed to be and an account of the person I did not allow myself to become" (*TAOMM*, pp. 227-228).

In the Arab context, the mother-daughter relationship takes a turn that is culturally specific. The reason is that it is manifested differently and its theorization takes alternative directions. The lives of both mothers and daughters are largely shaped by gender identity and gender positioning. Gender boundaries of space divide the Muslim social order into the universe of men consisting of public spaces, and the universe of women comprising the domestic sphere of the family. This gender based spatial division reflects the societal hierarchy and power allocation, a more simply the subordination of women to men.

Suad Joseph (1999) views this interpersonal relationship within the confines of cultural constructs and structural relations in Arab societies. She depicts the 'connective system' as characteristic of the Arab patriarchal society. Joseph's "construct of patriarchal connectivity" (p. 11) bears relevance to the issue of the intersection of the selves of mothers and daughters. She explicates that by "connectivity" which implies "structural means of reproducing fluid selves" (13); namely, relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid. She further adds:

Connectivity entails cultural constructs and structural relations in which persons invite, require, and initiate involvement with others in shaping the self. In patriarchal societies, then, connectivity can support patriarchal power by crafting selves responding to, requiring, and socializing to initiate involvement with others in shaping the self, and patriarchy can help reproduce connectivity by crafting males and seniors prepared to direct the lives of females and juniors prepared to respond to the direction of males and seniors. (pp. 12-13)

In fact, connective systems are characterized by “diffuse boundaries” in which members of a community respond to and require “the involvement of others” (p. 13) as put by Joseph. In addition, Joseph’s definition of the role of men in patriarchal society pertains to the discussion of the mother –daughter relationship in the text under consideration. She illustrates that in patriarchal systems, “Males and elders are privileged to enter the boundary of the self of others, shape its contours, and direct its relationships” (p.13). Accordingly, “The connective patriarch may view his wife (wives), sisters, junior siblings, and children as extensions of himself. He may speak for them, make decisions for them, read and expect to be read by them” (p.13).

In another leading study, Dalya Abudi (2011) conceptualizes the privacy and sanctity of family in the Arab World as accountable for the mystery and silence that shrouded the topic of the mother-daughter relationship. She maintains:

To fully understand the ties that bind mothers and daughters, I analyze their relationship from various perspectives: psychological, feminist, cultural, religious and political. I illustrate the myriad patterns of this primary bond and gauge its far reaching implications not only for mothers and daughters but also for family and wider society. (p. 4)

Abudi argues that there are several reasons for focusing on the mother-daughter relationship. First and foremost is the life-long bond between mothers and daughters that is of great implication to all women, whatever their ethnicity or background. In fact, “an exploration of mothers and daughters sheds light on a key family relationship which is vital for the shaping of self, gender personality, and gender roles, and which has profound effects on women’s individual development and choices”(Abudi, 2011, p. 4). Another reason for analyzing the mother-daughter relationship has to do with the prominent role mothers play in bringing up children and socializing them as functioning members of society. She affirms, “Psychoanalytic theory recognizes that interaction with the mother, who is the child’s primary caretaker during infancy and early childhood, has determining effects on the development of the child’s personality” (p. 4). Abudi joins other scholars who note that in the Arab world, arguably to a greater extent than in the West, the child’s mind and personality are shaped by the mother during the first seven or nine years of life. The child is entrusted entirely to the mother or a mother-substitute. More rationale for this study affirms that “the mother-daughter relationship is the most intimate, intense, and lasting female relationship. It is a bond that forms part of nearly every woman’s life. All women are daughters, most women become mothers” (Abudi, 2011, p. 5). In fact, writing about the bond that ties mothers and daughters serves the “purpose of amending the lacuna in male-defined history and at the same time contributing to consciousness raising in society about how women’s lives are shaped and influenced by their interaction with other women especially other women in the family” (Abudi,2011,p. 6).

The mother-daughter dyad must be considered in the specific context of family, culture and society in which it is rooted. Through the lens of the mother-daughter relationship, it is possible to examine larger issues concerning Arab women, such as their role in social reproduction and in the preservation of the status quo. Unmistakably, the broad changes spreading in different parts of the Arab world due to modernization roughly affect the status and life style of Arab women and the ties between mothers and daughters. Such changes serve as an indicator of the fluctuating rhythm of life in Arab societies shaped by socioeconomic transformations, the ongoing confrontations with new and opposing value systems and the struggle for freedom and independence.

Accordingly, family dynamics shape mother-daughter relationships and are affected by it. Abudi notes that the traditional Arab family often implies “Arab society in miniature” (p.8) for the reason that the same structure, values and sets of relationships prevail both within the familial and societal spheres. In this regard, Abudi (2011) affirms, “the patriarchal social order, the Islamic belief system, Arab values, customs, and traditions, as well as psychodynamic forces within the family all play a role in the shaping the mother-daughter relationship. Additional factors such as setting ... class, occupation, age, generation and education, further affect the interaction between mothers and daughters”(p. 7). Consequently, the mother-daughter relationship faces many contradictory and incongruous patterns which reflect the intense and complex nature of this bond.

In Hanan Al- Shaykh’s (2009) as in Kincaid (1997), mother-daughter relationships are depicted as oscillating between a variety of opposite poles, namely; “ love and hate, blame and guilt, tenderness and anger, intimacy and estrangement, solidarity and animosity, harmony and conflict, bonding and separation , devotion and betrayal, oppression and empowerment, sacrifice and exploitation”(Abudi, 2011, p. 7). These conflicting attitudes reveal that the

mother-daughter relationship is problematic and far from the idealized image portrayed in folktales.

Depending on the stages and circumstances of their lives, mother and daughter play vital roles in the relationship, interchangeably being active and passive. Abudi clarifies:

Although it is usually the mother who serves as a role model for the daughter, it is not uncommon for the daughter, once she has an independent adult, to introduce her mother to new ways, concepts and values. The interdependence and reciprocity that characterize this relationship imply that the mother can be the key to the daughter's liberation and vice versa. (8)

Within the domain of traditional Arab Muslim milieus, women are always in the company of other women of friends and family members. Furthermore, they rely heavily on other women to reduce their isolation and develop a support system. Abudi (2011) clarifies that "elaborate network of friendship and kinship provide them not only with an avenue for social activities but also with a source of help in times of need" (p. 11).

The aforementioned theoretical peregrination pertains to the discussion of Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Locust and the Bird* (2009). Generally, Al-Shaykh uses her past experience in Lebanon for inspiration. Yet for years, she intentionally avoided writing on behalf of her mother. In the same vein of Xuela whose mother abandoned her by dying during her birth, Al-Shaykh could not forget that her mother abandoned her two children to marry the man she loved. The mother did not even fight for the custody of her two children during her divorce. What Al-Shaykh remembers about her mother was distressing and injurious; thus, she was not eager to dedicate herself to recounting it. Lorien Kaye (2014) states that Kamila wanted her daughter to tell her life story, and "nagged her ... until she agreed to write down. This is the compelling result, told by Al-Shaykh in her mother's voice" (p.1). In her turn, Al-Shaykh (2010) writes "I grew accustomed to my mother's pleas, each time a new novel or even a major short story of mine came out. "Why don't you write my life story?" she'd say. "It might be more beautiful or more magical than whatever you have just had published" (*TLTB*, 2009, p. 11).

Like Kincaid, the act of writing becomes important to Al-Shaykh. When Al-Shaykh invited her mother to the book signing of her novel, *Only in London* (2001), her mother asked her what the novel was about. As Al-Shaykh started to describe to her the book's theme of Arab women negotiating contemporary London and that things are not as they seemed, she was cut short by her mother's reprimand: "Why are you still nibbling from other people's dishes?" (*TLTB*, p. 11) It was only after she finally agreed to write her mother's story that Al-Shaykh was able to uncover the truths she had never known. She writes, "I was scratching at old scars. Why, in London of all places, had the war inside me erupted? I had been confident that I had released my mother from that box inside my mind; and that marrying and having children had mended the rupture between us" (*TLTB*, p. 14).

In *TLTB* (2009), Al-Shaykh writes a heart-wrenching account of her mother Kamila in Kamila's voice. Unlike most memories, Al-Shaykh is filled with mixed emotions about the protagonist, sharing and hearing this story initially against her will. Because her mother abandoned her at an early age, Al-Shaykh states that, "I wasn't ready. I was afraid that she would seduce me, as powerfully as the ocean tempts someone to plunge into its cool on a hot day. I feared that she would weave her charm around me, creating a web made from sugar. I would succumb like so many before me: old, young women and men" (*TLTB*, p. 16). It takes decades for her to open herself up to her mother's plight and to learn why her mother let her go. In an Interview with Laurel Rhame (2009), Al-Shaykh says, "In writing my mother's story, I had discovered my tangled emotions, the pain I must have felt of feeling abandoned when I was only six or seven years old, and my confusion about our deception while she was living two-lives with us and her lover Muhammad" (p. 2). In fact, autobiographical writing historically excluded women and the marginalized, people of colour, and the oppressed. For this reason, they write themselves into history through writing autobiography.

TLTB (2009) begins with Al-Shaykh's memories of her childhood, and the bitterness she felt towards the mother who abandoned her, running away with a lover with eyes "the colour of quince jam." The rest is told in Kamila's own words. Al-Shaykh declares:

It's hard to remember that this is a vicarious confession. The myriad details-the songs, movies, food, the texture of everyday life in Arab society, family closeness that went side by side with vicious cruelty, the utter helplessness of women, the poetry and happy days brilliant as rainbows-have the visceral force of personal experience. (Langley, 2014, p. 1)

However, reminiscences are repossessed in long conversations between an ageing mother and a daughter trying to let go of her own bitterness and set down the story of a woman she recognized by the end as a heroine.

Indeed, the layers of Kamila's story are complicated since her memoir is written by her daughter but told in her own voice after her death. Armed with her gift as a storyteller, Al-Shaykh rises to the challenge when she agrees to tell her mother's story not only to explore her own memories, but to finally grant her mother the recognition and the voice she

desired all her life. Such endeavors have brought about *The Locust and the Bird*. In the Epilogue, she writes:

The minute I gathered all the papers of our conversations and sessions together, ready to work, my mother became alive, not in Beirut, or in the mountains, or in the south, but this time in my flat in London. She was living her life again for me. I saw her for the first time as a child, a teenager, a young woman, then middle-aged, and finally an old lady. I travelled into another world of emotions, stories, metaphors, and anecdotes, sometimes reduced to tears and sometimes roaring with laughter. I was humbled by her frankness, by the courage as she spilled out what was hidden, as if she had lifted the lid of a deep, deep well. When I became too distressed over a certain episode in her life I couldn't go on, my mother's photo, which I had stuck on one of the notebooks, would cheer me up. (*TLTB*, p. 301-302)

Elaborating on her inauguration of writing the memoir, she goes further and adds:

The day I started to write her memoir...I caught myself muttering, 'And here is Hanan, writing about her mother, who loved and suffered, who ran away, who raised her fist against the rules and traditions of the world into which she was born, and who transformed her lies into a lifetime of naked honesty. (*TLTB*, p.301)

When she opens her first chapter, she visualizes her mother and brother running after the grandfather. Al- Shaykh comments, "I heard her voice insisting that she wanted the beat of her own heart, her anxieties and laughter, her dreams and nightmares. She wanted to go back to the beginning. She was ecstatic that at long last she could tell her story." (*TLTB*, p.301) She assumes that her mother wrote this book and that "She is the one who spread her wings. I just blew the wind that took her on her long journey back in time" (*TLTB*, p. 301).

Al- Shaykh divulges more about Kamila's distinguishing ambiances as exceptional and unconventional in her opening words. In her Interview with Rhame (2009), Al- Shaykh remarks, "Because my mother was totally illiterate, she had sharpened all her senses and had to memorize proverbs, dialogues of films and people around her... she was so sharp and obsessed by saving every word she heard" (p.4). She was a liar, a thief and a cheat yet these were her ways to satiate her desire to embrace life and satisfy her wonders. She counters all these harsh judgments with a childish enthusiasm. Kaye identifies her as a storyteller who "created startling images, invented song, contrived plots worth of movies she covertly adored. And all without being able to read and write" (p.1). Kamila is forced to marry her late sister's husband, Abu-Hussein, who is eighteen years older than her. Hanan Al- Shaykh is her second child and is the one who undertakes the mission of unravelling a compelling tale of Kamila's life experience.

With respect to Kamila's father, he abandoned his wife and two young children, forcing upon them a life of utter poverty in southern Lebanon. Unable to earn a living, her mother sends nine-year-old Kamila and her brother to Beirut in the hope of a better life with her extended family. Stories, poems and films become the young Kamila's passion; albeit, she has never learned to read and write. She wished to go to school and become educated but such ideas are rejected by the family. Moreover, hard work and domestic servitude suppress her romantic soul as a coming of age girl. Eventually, Kamila is apprenticed to Fatme, the seamstress. At the age of thirteen, Kamila meets Muhammad who epitomizes love. She relays her first impression on capturing a glimpse of her lover, "I... saw a young man sitting by the edge of the fountain, as though a genie had conjured him" (*TLTB*, p. 61). It is a scene picked from the movies that constituted her only escape from drudgery. Muhammad, just a few years older shares Kamila's love of poetry and cinema. She recollects her conversations with him:

I would tell [Muhammad] that the cinema had become my school, teaching me about life, history and geography. I learned about a continent called Europe and saw scenes from the war. The cinema taught me how to dress. It took me inside splendid houses and hovels, and introduced me to the people who lived in them. (*TLTB*, p. 117)

Muhammad who comes from a wealthy family with lofty connections sought to share hopes of a brilliant future with Kamila, and the minutest details of Kamila's life outlined a vision they pursued and endeavored to nourish.

The lovers are separated when Kamila is forced to marry the widower of her half-sister and become step-mother to his children. Her new husband, Abu-Hussein, forces himself on his child bride and a daughter is conceived. Therefore, the wedding night has predictable horrors that Kamila recollects, "My husband straddled me like I was a little donkey, and I'd bitten my own arm down to the bone" (*TLTB*, p.100). She is aware of her child reaction to the birth of her little girl; "My baby was the toy I'd never hugged" (*TLTB*, p. 99).

Furthermore, Abu Hussein is neither vicious nor brutal. On the contrary, he is pious, serious, conservative and cautious with his money. Yet, he is not a proper match for the young and aspiring Kamila because of two reasons; firstly, his parochial outlook on life; secondly, his child bride is frivolous, fun loving, mischievous and greedy to experience the

adventures and joy of all what life has to offer. Sarah Vine (2009) says that Kamila's voice, frank and uncompromising, is one of the delights of this book. She adds; "Whatever else she may be – victim, heroine, a tragic child of her time- she is also loudly and undeniably real" (p. 1). Additionally, she is not only a wife, mother and domestic drudge but she is also vibrant and dashing. Her head is "full of all the petulance, romance and downright fury common to all teenage girls. She loves the movies, hankers after trinkets, jewelry, pretty dresses and sweets" (p. 1).

Regarding Kamila's passion for Muhammad, it is at the core of the text. Unhappy years go by until the two star-crossed lovers meet once again. Their love affair and freedom, choice and personal happiness it represents exemplify the nature and disposition of Kamila. Her attraction to him is based "not only on his youth and physical beauty, but his culture, education and intellect. He provides such a strong contrast with her brutish, zealous husband, for whom art, beauty and love are no more than fripperies, luxuries not to be enjoyed by the likes of them" (Vine, 2009, p. 2). Significantly, Kamila's trials are of all women who sought liberation. She states:

Each month, when I went to collect my benefits, I was struck by the similarities between my complaints and those of other widows. We all shared stories of how people took advantage of us, exploiting our situation and our loss. So I decided to found the Widow's Club. It quickly grew to include divorcees, like my poor friend Fadila, We allowed unmarried women to join as well. It became a club for women who felt they were in the way of their married and a burden to their families. I was astonished at how many widows and unmarried women were in Beirut, and how many men there were seeking their affections! (*TLTB*, p. 244)

Kamila begins a clandestine love affair with Muhammad. She risks the loss of family and children; in choosing to follow her heart, she must leave behind her two young daughters. Hanan Al- Shaykh was just seven years old when her mother left her father to live with Muhammad. Abu-Hussein embraced his young daughters. In an interview with Pat Lancaster (2009), Al- Shaykh recalls that "he stayed much closer to God than to my sister and me,' but concedes he was a loving father" (p. 70).

Accordingly, Al- Shaykh's life trajectory exhibits some of the wanderlust of her mother. Reaching her teenage years, she longed to escape the confines of the family. She used a religious argument to persuade her father to allow her to travel to Cairo to study. In her interview with Lancaster, she remarks:

To raise money I persuaded the editors of literary magazines and newspapers to give me the chance to interview politicians about their first love, showing them the articles I had written in student newspapers... Two months later, I showed him (Abu-Hussein) the money and recited the Prophet's Hadith: 'Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave: and seek knowledge even if you have to go to China'. Egypt was much closer than China. (p. 70)

Al- Shaykh never lived in her father's home again. While they did not always see eye to eye, she says of her father: "His tears were tears of love- he couldn't bear to think of me rotting in hell because of my refusal to pray, cover my hair or wear long sleeves"(Lancaster, 2009, p. 71).

Al- Shaykh's relationship with her estranged mother is in every way more complex. Years of anger and confusion pass during which she manages to detach emotionally from her mother. Eventually, she deals with her resentment and alienation from her mother, and achieves reconciliation. As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that whatever pains the young Hanan suffered at being abandoned by her mother at the tender age of seven, she never ceased to love and admire Kamila and, finally to forgive her. Meanwhile, Kamila implored repeatedly her now famous writer -daughter to record her turbulent life experience. She insists that it would prove far more interesting than anything else she had committed to paper. In her interview with Lancaster (2009), Al- Shaykh recalls, "I believed I already knew everything about my mother. She was forced to marry my father, fell in love with another man, and left out home. That was it" (p. 71). Unquestionably, there was more to learn about her mother. To be abandoned by one's mother is surely one of the most problematic challenges a child encounters. It is noted that children whose mothers die through accident or illness frequently harbor feelings of anger and resentment against them for dying, an act beyond all human control. How much more painful then to live with the reality of having been deserted by the person who should love and care more than anyone else in the world. Al- Shaykh recollects:

I could cope with the neighborhood children's taunts about my absent mother... I was like a magician: I told stories and did funny imitations. I could make them laugh. I could show them how little I cared about my mother's desertion. But her absence was a kind of presence, like a photograph that fell down and shattered into a million pieces, leaving its dusty contours etched forever on the wall where it had hung. (Lancaster, 2009, p. 71)

Indeed the text is preoccupied with telling and writing stories. In conclusion, it becomes obvious that Kincaid's

TAOMM and Al-Shaykh's *TLTB* are revolutionary in their continuous rejection of conventional labels and the female marginalization in the patriarchal society. Both autobiographical texts underscore the need to voice, write and expose layers of intense stories about daughters-mothers' emotional relationships. Hence, the figure of the mother pervades the texts, yet the dynamics of mother-daughter relationships are manifested in different ways. Kincaid's obsession with her mother and the dominating mother figure assumes a distinctly disparate form in Al-Shaykh's *TLTB* in which telling her mother's story is instrumental in learning to appreciate the sufferings of many Arab women in their bid of freedom.

Kincaid emerges as the daughter-writer who publicly exposes shameful family secrets, and memory works as a defensive mechanism to assert her independence from her controlling mother. However, for Al-Shaykh, the disclosure of memories of the past and the writing her mother's story have a favorable and beneficial effect. In *TLTB*, writing about the mother as well as writing back to the mother constitute an act of solace and self-rescue as well as an act of self-fashioning. On the other hand, *TAOMM* is an experimental text in which an evasive narrative negates itself at every turn: it presents itself as a memoir yet it is a work of fiction; it is an auto-biography yet an autre-biography. It concerns a mother but one who never allows herself to bear children. Everything about Xuela is a negation: from childhood to maturity. Kincaid describes what the experience of being colonized has done to the soul of a people and to a single woman who seeks to write an account of her own life, the life of her mother and her grandmother. In fact, *TAOMM* represents an example of writing that breaks through the objective linearity of tradition. Kincaid's voice is that of a woman and an Afro-Caribbean/American and a postmodern subject at the same time.

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