
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Voice of Silent Toxic Mothers in Morrison's *A Mercy* and Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers*

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| ABSTRACT

This paper analytically compares Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) to Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers* (2006) to explore the maternal position in Western and Middle Eastern literatures and give the silent mothers voice. These novels depict rudimentary social systems predicated on deep inequalities of class and gender; they highlight the commonality of mothers' experiences regardless of their class, race, or nationality. In *A Mercy*, the black mother discards her daughter to protect her from a malevolent master, while in *Hend and the Soldiers*, the uneducated Arab mother arranges her daughter's marriage to free her from the domination of the patriarchal society. The daughters consider their mothers as toxic parents and relate all evil in their lives to them. These novels are narrated mainly from a daughter point of view, and they share the themes of the disintegrated mother-daughter relationship and search for identity. This type of narration foregrounds the daughterly perspectives and subordinates the maternal voice (Hirsch, 1989, p. 163). Applying the elements presented in Marianne Hirsch's *Mother/Daughter Plot* facilitates the deconstruction of the idea of silent toxic mothers and gives mothers the opportunity to speak for themselves. According to Hirsch, when daughters become mature enough to accept their problems and failures, they become not only real women but also part of their mothers' stories by listening carefully. Thus, I argue that mothers' voices are heard when their subjectivity is explored through their stories narrated in their daughters' memories, in the mothers' self-vindication, and by surrogate mothers.

| KEYWORDS

Daughterly perspectives, Identity, Maternal voice, Patriarchal society, Subjectivity

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1. Introduction

Toni Morrison and Badriah Albeshr's novels represent significantly different literature. The former was an African American novelist, essayist, book editor, and college professor who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. The latter is a Saudi novelist, essayist, TV commentator, and former assistant professor who won the prize for the best newspaper column at the Arabic Press Awards in 2011. In their works, the two novelists explore controversial issues in their societies and include themes such as freedom and independence, race, sexuality, disintegrating mother-daughter relationships, and search for identity, like Morrison's novels which create a "penetrating view of the Black motherhood"¹ (Nair, 2020, p. 57), Albeshr's open a window to motherhood in the Middle East. This paper analytically compares Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) to Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers* (2006), banned in Saudi Arabia and translated into English by Sanna Dhahir in 2017, to listen more closely to mothers' voices in the Western and Middle Eastern literatures. It aims to reveal the nature of daughters' resentment and hatred toward their mothers and to deconstruct the idea of the toxic mother through listening to the mothers' voices.

It is perceived that mothers share certain common experiences regardless of their class, race, or nationality. The complex mother-daughter relationship has become universal; "it is not just here or there, specifically localized; it is almost everywhere" (Morgenstern, 2014, p. 9). *A Mercy* and *Hend and the Soldiers* share the themes of motherhood, women repression, and silent mothers, although they represent different languages and cultures. The similarities between the novels prove that women in

general and mothers specifically are denied a voice in both Western and Middle Eastern literature. Making the unspeakable mothers in an African American novel and a Saudi one able to speak and be heard (Wang, 2015, p. 234) is a new locus of research that brings fresh insights into the work of Middle Eastern authors who write in similar veins as the Western ones. Consequently, this paper puts the central trope of mother/daughter and the dilemma of maternal silence within a new comparative perspective highlighting the commonality between Western and Middle Eastern literature.

2. Background

The underpinning approach of this paper is Marianne Hirsch's elements presented in *Mother/Daughter Plot*. Hirsch (1989) calls for giving silent mothers the opportunity to speak for themselves through exploring their subjectivity. She argues that novels narrated by daughters deny mothers voices; however, exploring the maternal discourse of identity gives mothers voice (p. 125). Comparing *A Mercy to Hend and the Soldiers* helps foreground the silenced mothers and understand the core of the highly ambivalent mother-daughter relationships. The purpose of this comparison is to magnify the voice of marginalized mothers by showing them as subjects of their own in both Western and Middle Eastern literatures, which depict mothers as objects in daughters' narratives. Giving mothers the opportunity "to speak ... as many of the daughters ... do" (Hirsch, 1989, p. 16) eliminates the complex tension between mothers and their daughters and formulates a different discourse of identity which "begins with the mother, not the [daughter]" (p. 5). Therefore, identifying mothers' voices in the two novels requires the examination of the role played by mothers in their societies and the ideological representation of maternal discourse.

Scholars define maternal discourse differently, yet they almost agree that the family and society take part in shaping women as silent mothers. Bakhtin (1981) states that people's everyday activities form their different discourses (p. 10), and Foucault (1982) argues that the structures of power in society shape the way people talk (p. 777). Chodorow (1978) agrees with Hirsch that mothers are objects in narratives accounted by daughters, and Andreu (1995) argues that maternal discourse flows from the power of the mother's knowledge and wisdom pervaded from all aspects of her behavior (p. 230). Also, Kitanovska-Ristoska (2020) states that close observation of mothers aside from male control gives them subjectivity and voice (p. 305). Since *A Mercy* and *Hind and the Soldiers* reflect the ideologies propagated in their societies, they represent the pressure these societies practise on mother-daughter relationships, erasing the mothers' voices.

Deconstructing the idea of silenced toxic mothers necessitates viewing mothers as individuals. To achieve this aim, the paper, first, traces the changing roles of mothers by examining the ideological contexts, as well as the literary conventions that govern the representation of the mothers in the two novels. In *Hind and the Soldiers*, the aphorisms that appear in the maternal discourse reveal the patriarchal ideology, while in *A Mercy*, the colonizer-colonized dialogue uncovers the ideology of self and other. These ideological contexts result in concealing the mothers' voice. Second, the paper discloses the stories between mothers and daughters to accentuate mothers as central figures in the novels. It explores the complexity of the black mother's experiences and the difficulties that the unlettered Arab mother faces. Finally, the paper deconstructs the erasure of the mother by revealing the vocal mother through listening to the voices of other female characters, including the daughters. Consequently, the predominance of mothers as central figures is achieved by exploring the worlds of the silenced mothers in an African American novel and a Middle Eastern one.

3. Mothers' Voices in *A Mercy* and *Hind and the Soldiers*

A Mercy and *Hind and the Soldiers* have non-linear and complex plots which reveal multiple stories and multiple voices. The novels begin with the first person point of view, as the daughters tell their stories. However, the first person and third-person points of view are interwoven, accentuating the individualized voices of the mothers and making them heard through the characters' perspectives. The daughters' and mothers' voices overlap as they speak of the same time and events. Despite their differences in language, culture, and writing style, the two novels justify the mothers from being toxic and make their voices heard through the stories told by other characters and in the memories of the daughters.

In Morrison's *A Mercy*, Florens, a slave girl, is rejected by her mother and given to Jacob Vaark, an Anglo-Dutch trader and adventurer, who takes the daughter in part payment for a bad debt from a plantation owner in Catholic Maryland. When Florens, first, tells her story as a young girl about 16, it is revealed that she has been living on this particular farm for eight years and that the novel is set as far back as the 17th century in America in the middle of the booming of the slave trade. Florens's feeling of desertion rules the rest of her life, and she never forgives her mother for discarding her because she does not know that her mother's motive is to give her to a kinder master who has morals to save her from racial and sexual oppression (Kim, 2019, p. 21). Florens can read and write, but her search for love makes her lack the ability to read people. She falls in love with the handsome blacksmith, a free African who abandons her because she is a slave. Her love is doomed to failure because of the inequality in status. Despite all the hardships she goes through, Florens ends up owning herself, compensating for the loss of her mother and lover; she writes her own story by carving the letters with a nail into the walls of her dead master's unfinished and abandoned

house. Hence, *A Mercy* is an ambivalent story of a mother who casts off her daughter in order to save her and a daughter who forgives her mother for that abandonment only when she is able to hear her mother's voice.

In Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers*, the protagonist Hend, a divorced mother in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, struggles to launch a new life and choose her own path. Since the time of her childhood, she has learned to live in "fear of the fury" her voice might incite in others (Albeshr, 2006, p. 2). Hend is regularly punished by her domineering mother to coerce conformity to social norms. Being a daughter of a military sergeant and failing in her arranged marriage to an army officer, Hend is imprisoned in the community of soldiers, fighting for her independence. As she grows older, she relates the cause of oppression to her mother's rigorous nature and the country's prohibitions. Raised in a society that teaches women to suppress their emotions, Hend's mother reacts unexpectedly when Hend sings for her a mother song. In a self-dialogue, Hend says, "I hoped my mother would throw her arms around me after she had heard the song.... Instead, she took the big spoon out of the pot and brought it to my face [saying] 'Get out of my way before I whack you on the head with this spoon'" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 21). After her divorce, Hend becomes increasingly conflicted, struggling between her desire for happiness and her fear of subjugation. She starts realizing how ideologies and social practices can be used to justify cruelty and impose pain on women by denying them a voice. Hend becomes a craving storyteller whose stories are all about women's oppression in a conservative society that denies women voice. Thus, *Hend and the Soldiers* is a striking story of a mother who is callous with her daughter to save her from social criticism, and a daughter who forgives her mother only when she turns to the family stories and folktales told by her mother and surrogate mother.

3.1 Daughters' Memories

The comparative analysis of Florens in *A Mercy* and Hend in *Hend and the Soldiers* challenge distorted views commonly associated with the Black American mother and uneducated Saudi mother extending notions of mothering. When daughters idealize their mothers, they realize themselves and other women. For the mother's voice to be heard, she must become a part of her daughter's story. Although the two novels develop the theme of rebellious daughters and are narrated mainly by the daughters, the mothers' voices can be heard through the stories in the daughters' memories, which challenges the view that the oppressed mothers are not heard.

Stories focusing on daughters and marginalizing mothers are the product of patriarchal ideologies. Natália Fontes de Oliveira (2015) argues that many American novels focus on daughters' experiences and ignore mothers' (p. 68). Also, Dalya Abudi (2011) states that "a daughter's rebellion against the family and her desperate struggle to gain autonomy by shaping her own destiny are predominant themes in Arab women's literature" (p. 34). Similarly, Hirsch (1989) confirms that focusing on the daughter's perspective and putting the mother in the object position are two elements of a patriarchal society (p. 163). Nevertheless, she adds that when the novel "recognizes maternity as *experience*," mothers are present as "function" and as "subjects" (p. 174).

These stages are found in *Hend and the Soldiers*, which starts with Hend talking about her mother, making her the center of the novel. Hend says, "My mother's voice urged little Mae, [Hend's daughter], to hurry up and get ready for school" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 1). The voice of Hend's mother always exists in the mother's stories as Hend recalls:

In my family, the art of story-telling is passed down from generation to generation, though I was the first to commit stories to paper, having fondly listened until I developed the art of spinning them myself. I sometimes published them under a pseudonym. Initially, it was a lack of confidence in my abilities that pre-vented me from using my real name, but later it was fear of the fury I was certain my stories would incite in my religious brother, Ibrahim, if he were to spot my real name in the papers.... The histories of this household's women are tales woven around coffee. Each woman has a story living in the heart of her cup. If not given to her by fate, the woman herself creates a story to sweeten the acrid taste of life, and she relishes her own narrative over the bitter coffee. (Albeshr, 2006, pp. 2-3)

This quote shows that oral stories have developed Hend's identity, and she becomes a writer. It also reveals how the patriarchal society forces Hend to write "under a pseudonym". It exposes the experience of both the daughter and the mother in a community that teaches through oral folklore. The first story that the mother tells Hend is "The Girl with the White Socks", in which the girl is raped and murdered, yet she is a hero because she scribbles the names of her attackers and hides the paper in her sock. By doing so, they are punished, and her honor is protected in a society that blames women even if they are victims. The mother's stories also warn the daughter against committing sins:

Mother used these stories, which other people also knew, to warn us about God's punishment, especially hellfire; she insisted that the flames of this world were nothing but tiny sparks of the colossal fire of hell, where God would melt our skin thousands of times, each time replacing the melted skin with a whole new one. (Albeshr, 2006, p. 13)

The mothers' voice is heard through a dialogue with the daughter about the superiority of men over women. Not knowing the rules of the patriarchal society, Hend always feels that her mother favors her brothers. Hend remembers:

When I asked her how I was any different from Fahad or Ibrahim, her answer was always the same: "They are men; you are a woman. Don't you u; youtand?"
 I didn't understand what "woman" meant.
 "Does this mean that a woman is a creature without a soul?"
 "That is the way it's always been; you'll have to accept it, as we have before you, whether you like it or not."
 (Albeshr, 2006, p. 76)

This dialogue between Hend and her mother shows that "they are the same person, speaking with two voices" (Hirsch, 1989, p. 199). From one generation to the other, women in the Arab world have the same dialogue. Ihab Syed Ahmed (2016) argues that a mother's love and sacred attachment to her children do not disappear from Arabic literature, whereas Muhammad Al-Abbas (2018) states that the mother's model is nearly absent from Saudi literature relating this narrative marginalization to the underestimation of mothers. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, the mother is a central figure despite not being the narrator; she is seen as evil, the other, by her daughter:

My mother grew quieter with age, having exhausted her voice yelling at us in our youth. She would hardly open her mouth except to denounce the younger generation living in what she felt were strange times or to pray for God's forgiveness. To us, she seemed as harsh as cut stone. (Albeshr, 2006, p. 11)

It is clear that Hend's judgement is made through the lens of the patriarchal society⁴ that neither understands the position of mothers nor views them as individuals. Hence, Hend's memories make the reader hear the voice of her mother, so the daughter's and the mother's voices are not only equally important but also dependent upon one another.

3.2 Mothers' Vindication of Themselves

In Morrison's *A Mercy*, shifting the narration point of view from the daughter to the mother gives the mother voice to vindicate herself. Unlike a filiation novel which situates itself in the position of the daughter and at a distance from the maternal (Caporale-Bizzini 82), a maternal novel focuses on "maternal subjectivity, [so] mothers would be able to speak for themselves.... [and] mother and daughter speak to one another (Hirsch, 1989, p. 179). Although *A Mercy* starts with the protagonist expressing her emotional conflict with her mother, it ends with the mother's vindication.

Not knowing the truth, Florens judges her mother through the lens of white men, who see black mothers as cruel and detached slaves. She cannot forgive her mother for begging Master Jacob Vaark to take her: "Please, Senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter" (Morrison, 2008, p. 26). The mother's behavior is understood in its context because the patriarchal constructs are responsible for women's oppression with respect to motherhood (Ruddick, 1994, p. 30). This patriarchy transfers the idea of the bad mother to the protagonist, making her think that her mother has offered her to Jacob out of a lack of love. The mother's first-person narrative makes her a central figure in the novel and changes the novel to a maternal one. After Florens tells the story of her disintegrating relationship with her mother, the mother's voice vents out her real reason that the little girl could not comprehend at an early age. The reader is left with the echo of the mother's influential and touching words begging Florens to "hear" her explaining:

Neither one will want your brother. I know their tastes. Breasts provide the pleasure more than simpler things. Yours are rising too soon and are becoming irritated by the cloth covering your little girl chest. And they see, and I see them see.... There was no protection. None. Certainly not with your vice for shoes. It was as though you were hurrying up your breasts and also hurrying the lips of an old married couple... When the tall man with yellow hair came to dine, I saw he hated the food, and I saw things in his eyes that said he did not trust Senhor, Senhora or their sons. His way, I thought, is another way.... There was no animal in his heart. He never looked at me the way Senhor does. He did not want.... I don't know who your father is. It was too dark to see any of them. They came at night and took we three, including Bess, to the curing shed... They said they were told to break we in. There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below. (Morrison, 2008, pp. 162-65)

The voice of Florens's mother makes it clear that she has been searching for protection and salvation for her little daughter. The mother is scared that her daughter, at the age of eight, could be abused or raped by Ortega or his men on the farm. Therefore, she favors victimizing her daughter and sending her to slavery with a man because she anticipates good deeds from his eyes. He has no taste in such trade, "Flesh was not his commodity" (Morrison, 2008, p. 25). The mother's voice brings her experience of sexual assault, which is similar to the rape in a marriage that Hend's mother at a very young age had experienced when her husband

"slept with her when he had tied her hands and feet and preyed on her like the frightening, mythical afrits that haunted the well in her village" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 52). The structural interweaving of the voices in both novels begins with the daughters' fragmentation and ends with the mothers' reconciliation and wholeness (Bystrov and Telegina, 2020, p. 298). Thus, in *A Mercy*, the mother's voice is heard, challenging the daughterly narratives and adopting maternal perspectives.

Similarly, In *Hend and the Soldiers*, the mother is shown as the true dynamo of the family, the real active force of the events, and her voice is heard as an echo of traditions supported by patriarchy and religion. To hear the voice of the mother, it is significant "to know the real mother, her real power, or the limits of her power" (Hirsch, 1989, p. 167). The mother's voice is sparse in the novel; she is either advising or scolding Hend for being nonconformist to social norms. The mother adopts the role of a powerful and dominant parent telling stories to warn and intimidate her daughter from men; her stories give her a kind of control in the shadow of a male society (Al-Sumairi, 2009, p. 289). She tells Hend the reason for refusing to allow her to marry the one she loves: "He won't marry you; you know that.... His family and ours are not compatible. If you did, your uncles would spill your blood" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 74). At that time, the mother's voice is heard, and Hend surrenders, saying, "I realized that my mother had won this battle against me, that my war with her would never end, and that I had to search for a space a little freer, a little easier and more merciful, a little less loud or obstinate than my mother's fierce warring" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 74). Thus, the voice of Hend's mother confirms the norms of patriarchy.

In addition to echoing the rules of the patriarchy, the voice of Hend's mother is a tool to spread traditional and religious principles. Later in the novel, the mother discourages Hend from getting divorced:

A sound mind is a gem, my daughter.... A wise woman would not have a different man every day. Your husband is your destiny, your good and evil, your happiness and sorrow. You settle for what Allah grants you. If He gives you a kind man, this is a blessing meriting gratitude; if He plagues you with a contrary man, this is an affliction requiring fortitude. (Albeshr, 2006, p. 73)

The voice of the patriarchal mother is heard through her dialogue with her daughter, in which she imposes pressure on her daughter, burdening the daughter with social restrictions. This dialogue reveals that the mother is powerful, which makes Hend say, "It seemed that my feeble father had surrendered all his weapons to my mother, who became the real soldier in [the] house." The mother tries to protect her daughter from the critique of the patriarchal society that refuses divorce.

The reconciliation between the mother and daughter in *Hend and the Soldiers* turns the novel into a maternal identity text. When Hend accepts her bonds with her mother and her community, she matures as a woman (Caporale-Bizzini, 2006, p. 91). Hend realizes that she and her mother are victims of a society that denies women freedom of choice, which results in a lack of familial understanding and love. Hend starts seeing her mother differently, realizing that she meant to teach her to be "a real Muslim" woman (Albeshr, 2006, p. 12). This realization makes Hend see her mother's intelligence and power; one day, she asks her mother, "How is it you can count and do addition when you never went to school?" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 33) Thus, in this novel, the mother's voice is heard when she is depicted as a subject, not an object, through listening to her stories.

3.3 The Stories of the Surrogate Mothers

In addition to allowing the mother to speak through the first point of view, giving space to other maternal voices to share their experiences can give mothers subjectivity and make their voices heard. The mother's voice can be heard through "listening to the stories that mothers have to tell" (Hirsch, 1989, p. 167). In the West, de Lauretis (1984) states that the patriarchal attitudes cause a split in the mother-daughter relationship, and the reconciliation necessitates collaboration between mothers to share their maternal experiences and engage themselves as subjects in social reality (p. 182). Similarly, in the Middle East, Al-Shahwani (2014) declares that women in Gulf female novels do not express their ideas because they are voiceless, so these women need integration into their society. Consequently, mothers' voices cannot be heard without the love and support of a community of women since mothers need other women to help them regain their daughters' love.

In *A Mercy*, Florens is eager for maternal love; she looks for a good mother. Lina recompensates Florens with love and care expected from a biological mother, and this experience makes Lina's voice heard. She describes Florens as a "quiet, timid version of [her]self" because both yearn for family ties. Arriving at Jacob's farm, Florens and Lina "slept together, bathed together, ate together, and Lina made clothes and tiny shoes from rabbit skin for Florens" (Morrison, 2008, p. 124). Years later, when the blacksmith came to the farm, Lina was worried about Florens because she did not want Florens to suffer from abuse in a relationship as she did. Lina forged a new familial bond and became close to Jacob, Rebekka, and Florens. While on an errand to get the blacksmith to save Jacob's wife from an illness, Florens longs for Lina's guidance: "I need Lina to say how to shelter in the wilderness" (Morrison, 2008, p. 42). As Florens's surrogate mother, Lina represents the mother's care, wisdom, knowledge, and love, so she listens to Lina's

warning when she says, "Sir has a clever way of getting without giving" (Morrison, 2008, p. 5). Thus, the mother's voice is heard through the experiences and stories of the surrogate mother.

Analogously, in *Hend and the Soldiers*, the female servant steps in to alleviate the daughter's suffering and strengthens the mother's voice. Women strengthen one another, and the single voice calls out "until all of the voices join again in one rich harmony made stronger by numbers but also by the variations of individuality" (Caillouet, 1997, p. 3). Understanding the mother's situation, the servant Ammousha plays the role of a surrogate mother, and when Hend complains about her mother's strictness, Ammousha defends the mother. She says: "Don't blame her, my daughter; life was hard on her, and made her hard. Still, she is to be pitied" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 12). To have Hend sympathize with her mother, Ammousha describes how Hend's mother has married off as a child, raped by Hend's father and beaten when she runs away, yet Hend continues to see her mother as a controlling tyrant. Hend recalls having a nightmare: "I wake up terrified, Ammousha's voice, not my mother's, coming to me through the darkness: "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim!⁵ What's wrong?" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 29). Also, when Hend gave her daughter birth, "Ammousha sat with [her] and administered all the traditional childbed". Hend confirms ", Ammousha was a reservoir of my family's narratives, including their secret stories. Without her, I would not have known much about my own people" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 11); "the stories she told me were the medicine my soul needed" (Albeshr, 2006, p. 31). Unlike the biological mother, who represents the other side of the social power controlled by the patriarchy, the surrogate mother is a source of love and comfort. The voices of biological and surrogate mothers complete each other speaking about the mother's social, sexual, and maternal experiences in a patriarchal society.

In the two novels, both mothers and daughters are subjects with different responses to cultural ideologies. Their voices are heard throughout their journey of search for identity. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, the illiterate mother goes to school, and she finds herself in learning and religion. Also, the rebellious daughter becomes a writer and finally dares to disclose her identity:

Once again, my writing won over my husband as it had over my mother. I was stronger than both of them. I was the one who always triumphed in the battle of my letters.... My name in the papers does not refer to a writer with a long family line who has distinguished herself by being creative; the name instead unveils the identity of a woman who has left her sheltered boudoir and exposed herself to the outside world. (Albeshr, 2006, p. 81)

Like Hend, whose success in writing and acceptance to her community make her reconcile with her mother, Florens's writing of her story and freeing herself from her one sided love facilitate her reconciliation with her mother. Florens discovers that freedom makes the blacksmith powerful even though he is black. She frees herself from his authority over her after he tells her that she is a slave and that he cannot live with her. He insults her, saying, "Own yourself, woman.... You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind" (Morrison, 2008, p. 139). She has transformed into her own person, and her new powerful voice declares: "I have become a wilderness, but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last" (Morrison, 2008, p. 159). Florens's mother finds herself telling her daughter what she wants her to know: "to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing" (Morrison, 2008, p. 167). Like Hend, Florens finds emotional balance in writing; she writes on the walls and floor of her master's unoccupied house. The mothers' voices in the novels are heard when their experiences are perceived by their daughters.

4. Conclusion

Under patriarchy, females are usually defined as mothers, while their identity as individuals is disregarded. Morrison's *A Mercy* and Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers* depict the stories of mothers and daughters, highlighting the mothers' absence in their daughters' lives as a consequence of the patriarchal systems. At the beginning of the novels, mothers feel confused about their identity, and they see the reflection of themselves in their daughters. This paper critically compares *A Mercy* to *Hend and the Soldiers* from the perspective of Hirsch's theory of mother/daughter plot to give the toxic mothers voice. Reading the novels from the mothers' perspectives makes their voices heard and reveals their experiences.

The comparative analysis of *A Mercy* and *Hend and the Soldiers* illustrates the two mothers' sacrifice of their daughters' love to protect them. The novels demonstrate that contemporary Western and Middle Eastern literature highlight the concept of mother-daughter dialogue in which mothers' voices are heard since they are subjects with experiences and perspectives. However, they are heard through their stories since the daughters go through stages to reach maturity. They first relay their failure to their mother, and in their journey of success, they accept themselves, their mothers, and the heritage of their communities.

The paper shows that the black mother in *A Mercy* exorcises her daughter to protect her from a malevolent master. However, the uneducated Arab mother in *Hend and the Soldiers* arrange her daughter's marriage to free her from the domination of the father and brothers, not realizing that she is widening the circle of domination in her patriarchal society. The ideological contexts that govern the representation of mothers are almost the same in the two novels, and these contexts try to suppress mothers, limiting

their roles to the biological in an attempt to silence them. Nevertheless, the mothers' voices are heard through telling their stories by themselves, their daughters, or other women.

Another finding is that mothers' voices are heard when daughters find themselves by moving toward sisterhood to become part of the community. The mothers' voices are not heard when they are denied by their daughters, who do not accept themselves and their community. When daughters are supported by other women, such as surrogate mothers, they forgive and accept their mothers. When mothers fail both to raise their daughters and to gain their love, other mothers can step in to save the daughters; doing so, they save the mothers and give them voices. Thus, in the Western and Middle Eastern novels, the voices of the mothers are heard when they become individuals and when their daughters write their stories that their mothers are part of.

This paper is limited to two novels depicting mothers who are denied voices under patriarchy. Its scope is restricted to exploring the disintegrated mother-daughter relationship in these two novels applying a Western literary theory. This restricted scope resulted from the lack of literary theories in Middle Eastern literature and the scarce of academic research in the area of women subjectivity. It is recommended that future researchers should broaden the scope of the comparison and cover more Gulf and American novels. Also, more research is required to highlight the universality of the mother-daughter predicament and explore the identity of females as independent souls to deconstruct the patriarchy.

Notes

- ¹ See Craddock, Karen T., editor. *Black Motherhood(s)*. Demeter Press, 2015. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1rrd90f. Accessed 9 Jan. 2021.
- ² See O'Reilly, Andrea, editor. *Feminist Mothering*. Albany: State University of New York. 2008.
- ³ See Burck, Frances Wells. *Mothers Talking: Sharing the Secret*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.
- ⁴ See Coward, Rosalind. *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- ⁵ A phrase said by Muslims before reciting the Qur'an or embarking on any significant endeavor.

Bio

Najlaa Aldeeb is a PhD candidate at Swansea University, Wales, UK. Her dissertation is entitled "Traces of Ideologies in Four English Translations of the Qur'an: A Comparative Study of Authorized and Unauthorized Versions." Mrs. Aldeeb has twenty years of experience in teaching English as a second language (ESL). In 2017, she received a master's degree in Translation Studies—literary translation—from Effat University, Saudi Arabia. She also received an MA in English Language and Literature from Indira Gandhi National Open University in 2008. Mrs. Aldeeb is a DELTA holder whose research interests include literary translation, feminist literary criticism, and college writing. On 21 April 2019, her research paper entitled "Ecofeminism in Doris Lessing's *Mara and Dann: An Adventure*" was listed on SSRN's Top Ten download list for WGSRN: Gender & Nature—Feminist Ecology & Sustainability (Sub-Topic). Mrs. Aldeeb has participated in national and international conferences, including the International Conference on Medieval and Early Modern Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, May 6-9, 2021.

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