MOTHER-DAUGHTER BONDS (MOTHERHOOD) IN AMY TAN’S NOVELS THE KITCHEN GOD’S WIFE AND THE JOY LUCK CLUB AND IN DOROTHY ALLISON’S NOVELS BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA AND CAVEDWELLER

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Abstract

In this study, the relationship between mothers and daughters, the abusive marriages which limit women’ roles as wives rather than being a mother, the effects of World War II on the lives of people especially on women, women’ dilemmas in classifying themselves as mothers or wive, the effects of cultural items on women’ lives are examined in terms of feminism and feminist literary criticism. Mother-daughter bonds or motherhood in a broader sense are emphasized through a deep analysis of feminism and feminist literary criticism. What’s more, domestic violence and and sexual abuse are important themes that dominate the novels as the basic sources of this study. In addition, it is obvious that the interaction between American and Chinese cultures is another important component of this study.

Key words: Feminism, Feministic Literary Criticism, motherhood, mother daughter bonds, domestic violence, sexual abuse, marriage, the effects of World War II.

Amy Tan’ın Mutfak Tanrısı ve Talih Kuşu; Dorothy Allison’ın Karolina’nın Pici ve Mağara Gezgini romanlarında Anne-Kız İlişkileri (Annelik)

Özet

Bu çalışma da, anne ve kızları arasındaki ilişkiler, kadınların rollerini anne ya da eş olmayla smurlayan sömürücü evlilikler, İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nın insanlar özellikle de kadınlardan üzerindeki etkisi, kadınların kendilerini anne veya eş olarak sınıflarken

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INTRODUCTION
The topic “women” is such a wide area of interest that there are lots of researches, essays, stories, novels and studies on it. Woman as the basis of the society, each detail related to woman plays an important role in both social and literary world. With the importance of modernism or modernity in literature, women writers’ existence becomes a turning point in shaping the new literary movements. Especially modern American women writers’ perspectives in writing attract attention of those who are interested in both past and present experiences. “Their plots at first sight strike one as inventive, even widely so; but it soon becomes evident that they merely achieve new combinations of old and familiar element” (Petter 397). For this study, Amy Tan and Dorothy Allison play an important role and in order to have a better understanding of their works, it will be useful to analyze the components that enrich their writings. Both Tan and Allison have close relations with womanish issues and the idea of feminism is their mainstay in their works. For Friedan, one of the most important leading voices of Feminism, the movement refers to a diverse variety of beliefs, ideas, movements, and agendas for action (Friedan 34). To Emin feminism, having French roots as a word, is used as the general name for all the woman thoughts and movements in the word (20). Both of them support feminist movement and want equal rights for women. Since,

Feminism as a concept seeks to better the lot of women who are perceived to be sidelined by men in the prevailing scheme of things in the society. It also views issues from the woman’s angle. Putting it in other words, feminism alleges that woman as “the other” of man, has (since the genesis of human beings) been at the receiving end of society’s injustices such as oppression and suppression. Feminism thus aims at to establish or assert equality between men and women in a world which it regards as male-oriented. (James 89)
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In these two writers’ works, it is easy to see the effects of feministic thought in the suffers and experiences of the main women characters of the novels. Not only feminism but also autobiographic items are the fundamental sources that shape the lives of the protagonists. Though their characters are imaginary, their experiences, suffers, abuses are not so different than the writers’ own true life experiences.

In this perspective, mother or motherhood are the dominant concepts that shape the novels in a realistic way. In these four different novels, it is possible to see different types of motherhood in different forms. Generally, all the women characters in the novels are really strong women whom take their strength from their motherhood and in this point it is possible to say that the tone of the novels is optimistic and realistic which leads the characters to grow up and to self-development.

**MOTHERHOOD IN AMY TAN’S *THE KITCHEN GOD’S WIFE***

An important and international bestseller *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, like many of Tan’s works, deals with Chinese-American female identity and some womanish issues such as motherhood. This novel just represents the relationship between a mother, Winnie Louie and a daughter, Pearl Louie Brandt. Sometimes we have great secrets though we love the people around us, and we can not tell them the truths. This situation is also true for the major characters of *The Kitchen God’s Wife*; Winnie, the protagonist, and her daughter, Pearl.

Winnie generally dominates the novel and her dialogues with Pearl give clear clues about the relation of two. Pearl describe her childhood as “anger and cynicism” (Tan 45), whereas her mother says, “That’s how she is. That is how I am. Always careful to be polite, always trying not to bump into each other, just like strangers” (Tan 82). Though they have secrets and have not got a close relation as mother-daughter, the situation changes through the novel. “Whenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we were already in the middle of an argument” (Tan 11). Raised according to Chinese customs, Pearl doesn’t feel herself belonged to that society and there’s a great gap between the two. “She looks at me as if I don’t belong here, which is how I feel” (Tan, 18). Pearl’s words describe their relation as “we both won and we both lost, and I’m still not sure what our battle was.” (Tan 46). When one day, Helen, Winnie’s friend, threats her to explain the hidden secrets, the relation between mother and daughter takes a different shape. “She wanted to expose
everything! – my past, my marriage to Wen Fu, everything I had worked so hard to forget” (Tan 79). In the course of time, Winnie is forced to tell all the realities about her past life in China, her abusive marriage to Wen Fu and the most striking reality about Pearl’s real father. Winnie starts telling her story as “I will say. I have to tell you something, can’t wait any longer. And then I will start to tell her, not what happened, but why it happened, how it could not be any other way” (Tan 86). She is so innocent and unprotected that she has to accept a man as charming as Wen Fu:

So how did I come to marry him. I had a good hearth, just like you. I was innocent, just like you. So maybe you can understand how your mother once was: a lonely girl, a girl with no expectations, wanting so much. And suddenly someone came knocking at my door – and he was charming, a reason to dream about a better life. What else could I do? I let him in. (Tan 130)

She summarizes all the dreadful memories saying: “And I lost my innocence, and always regretted what I lost. Because I lost so much, I remember so much” (Tan 164). Revealing all the secrets she’s afraid to tell her daughter, Winnie feels herself confronted with her past. Learning the terrible reality about her father makes Pearl shocked and surprised, whereas learning all the hidden facts between the mother and daughter starts a new page for them. Confronting with their hidden faces, both mother and daughter feels closer to each other, and they construct a new bond no one has the strength to break off.

MOTHERHOOD IN AMY TAN’S THE JOY LUCK CLUB

One of the important works of Tan, The Joy Luck Club focuses on four Chinese American immigrant families in San Fransisco. It contains sixteen interwoven stories which focus on the conflicts of the four Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-raised four daughters. The stories are told through the mothers and their daughters, which give clues about the relation between the mothers and daughters.

The novel is composed of four section, each of which includes four seperate narratives. In the first four stories the mothers tells their stories about the relationship with their mother. In the second part, the daughters mentions about the relation between them and their mothers. In the third section, the four daughters mentions their adult dilemmas, and in the last stories, the mothers try to help their daughters and offer solutions for their problems.
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In the stories, the effects of the time period can be observed clearly. Michael states that while analyzing women’s situation, it is necessary to learn and know the features of that era (14). Especially the influences of the World War II, and Japanese invasion of China has certain common points with the characters real life experiences. One of the mothers (Suyuan Woo) had to abandon her daughters as a result of bad conditions of the war and her daughter Jing-Mei (June) Woo learns this after her mother’s death. Her mother’s friends tell her mother’s desire to Jing-Mei:

> Your mother was a very strong woman, a good mother. She loved you very much, more than her own life. And that’s why you can understand why a mother like this could never forget her other daughters. She knew they were alive, and before she died she wanted to find her daughters in China. (Tan 29)

The hidden realities between mothers and their American-raised daughters make a secret bridge to hinder the affectionate love to each other. “It seemed my mother was always displeased with all her friends, with me, even with my father. Something was always missing. (Tan 19). When looking at the different sayings of different daughters, the gap between their mothers is clear to consider. Throughout the stories it is possible to see that the bonds of mothers and daughters are not very close, nevertheless this generally changes at the end of the each individual story. It will be useful to analyze a few different quotations from different characters of the stories. “I felt unlucky that she was my mother and unlucky that she had left us” (Tan 36). “My mother did not treat me this way because she didn’t love me” (Tan 45).

She feels the lack of her mother as a small girl and being far away from her mother makes her a bit depressed. In a different point of view, the dominant mothers affect the lives of their daughters differently. “And even though I know it’s hopeless—there’s absolutely nothing left to save—I’m afraid if I tell her that, she’ll still persuade me to try” (Tan 123) and “I used to believe everything my mother said, even when I didn’t know what she meant” (Tan 206).

When looking deep into the conditions of women in the history, the picture is not really very pleasant. Garraty states that with the entry of America to World War I, lots of great changes occured in the lives of the women (657). Not only World War I, but also World War II has great impacts on the lives of the characters in this novel and the scarred face of the war destroy the lives, hopes and most importantly purity of the war’s daughters.
In Neff and Ratcliff’s book (1995), Nick and Nancy Stinnett wrote about their search for strong families. To them, a strong family is one that creates a sense of positive family identity, promotes satisfying and fulfilling interaction among members, encourages the development of family group and individual members, and is able to deal effectively with stress and crisis (166). In this respect, “This is how a daughter honors her mother” (Tan 41) and “A mother is best. A mother knows what’s inside you” (Tan 210) are the positive quotations which reflect the close bond between them. The most striking common point of these stories is the positive and educational tone of the author. Tan tries to emphasise the maturity and self-confidence of the mothers and daughters via using the theme of motherhood.

**MOTHERHOOD IN DOROTHY ALLISON’S BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA**

*Bastard Out of Carolina* is partially an autobiographical novel based on Allison’s early childhood memories. Among these memories sexual abuses and rape by her stepfather take an important place in her novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* with the experiences of a young girl—Ruth Anne “Bone” Boatwright—illegitimate daughter of a fifteen-year-old unmarried, uneducated waitress, growing up in Greenville, South Carolina in 1950s. In this masterpiece, “Allison also presents as a major theme the human search for love and acceptance, a topic that many people can understand and appreciate” (Korb). In fact, at the very beginning, this is the novel of motherhood and through the end of the novel, it turns to be a story of motherhood dilemma. The novel mainly focuses on the Anney’s dilemmas and her relation with her daughters. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader sees the strong bound between her and her daughters;

*Who had Mama been, what had she wanted to be or do before I was born? Once I was born, her hopes had turned, and I had climbed up her life like a flower reaching for the sun. Fourteen and terrified, fifteen and a mother, just past twenty-one when she married Glen. Her life had folded into mine. What would I be like when I was fifteen, twenty, thirty? Would I be as strong as she had been, as hungry for love, as desperate, determined, and ashamed? (Allison 309)*

Bone’s description of her mother shows the reader the oppressive situation her mother tries to live in. Though she is not old enough to understand
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the events around her, she is aware of the facts that give direction to her mother’s life. Although Anney feels the lack of a man’s love, she also shows her deep love for her daughters as seen in; “My smart girls, my strong smart girls” (Allison 82).

*If I got a permanent, I would lose those hours on Mama’s lap sitting in the curve of her arm while she brushed and brushed and smoothed my hair and talked soft above me. I would have cut off my head before I let them cut my hair and lost the unspeakable pleasure of being drawn up onto Mama’s lap every evening. (Allison 30–31)*

In this passage, it is clear that Bone is aware of the close relation between herself and her mother. But the marriage changes everything. Anney spends more time with her husband, Glen, and Bone realizes that the close bonds between mother and daughter break off. This is stated by Deborah Horvitz as:

*Silence, fear, obsession, and trauma narratively structure *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and the text, like [Bone], is haunted and invaded by more than Glen’s viciousness. Anney’s need to camouflage her family’s secret proves almost fatal for Bone.(255)*

Horvitz’s finding is correct that Anney’s struggle to hide the abuses and domestic violence makes Anney to lose the connection between her and Bone. With the continual abuses and beating of Glen towards Bone, an inner conflict begins for Anney. She can not understand Bone’s ideas any more.

In the course of time, the affectionate father goes and there comes an abusive man who changes a small girl’s life into a hell. Bone is abused by her step-father Glen and all her hopes for help from her mother fade when her mother chooses Glen, her husband, instead of her unprotected small daughter. Bone feels helpless and hurt during these abuses. Christian Froula writes: “The abusive or seductive father does serious harm to the daughter’s mind as well as to her body, damaging her sense of her own identity and depriving her voice of authority and strength” (635). The rape incident not only harmed Bone but also Anney. Bone feels alone and helpless because she is abandoned by her mother because of a man who rapes and beats her own daughter, Anney accuses of herself for not being a good mother for her daughters. . “My Mama had abandoned me, and that was the only thing that mattered...“I hate her,” I whispered through torn lips. “I hate her.””(Allison 302). Anney’s decision to leave Bone and go with Glen shows the reader that Anney is not the caring mother reflected early in the novel. She leaves her daughter and chooses an
abusive man to leave with. Anney started to think and question her motherhood, and the dilemma she experiences becomes deeper and more complicated—should she live with the man he loves or with her daughter? Having doubt, guilt, and confusion, Anney obviously begins to believe that she does not deserve to be Bone’s mother and perhaps she is right.

**MOTHERHOOD IN DOROTHY ALLISON’S CAVEDWELLER**

Cavedweller is a great book from Dorothy Allison, possibly her best one. It tells the story of Delia Byrd, her struggle to take her children back, a life left behind, a life she gave up to rescue herself from an abusive marriage. Allison writes about the disorders of families and what some give up in order for others to have more.

The story is written about a Californian woman who returns to her small hometown in Georgia to face the life, and daughters, she left behind because of her abusive husband. “Death changes everything” (Allison 1). So begins Dorothy Allison's straking, ambitious, and deeply satisfying second novel, *Cavedweller*.

Story of a woman, Delia, whose life in California falls apart when the father of her daughter, Cissy, dies in a car accident. She decides to pack up their life and return home to Georgia where she left a husband she never divorced and two other daughters. Delia flee an abusive husband; Delia escapes physical danger but leaves her two small children behind. Once Cissy said “I hate you, and it was as if Delia’s three girls spoke in one voice” (Allison 4). In California, her abandoned daughters haunt her dreams and preoccupy her waking hours, even as she sings in Randall’s band and gives birth to another daughter, Cissy. Randall dies and Cissy accuses of her mother for this. “It’s your fault! He should have been with us. I hate you!” (Allison 3). Cissy screamed. “You killed him, you killed my daddy” (Allison 3).

After Randall’s death, Delia decides to change her life and says “I’m going home to get my babies back” (Allison 5). “I’m thinking Cissy, I’m thinking about all my girls. It’s what I should have done years ago. I don’t belong here. I never have. (Allison 6). The relation between Delia and Cissy is not a close one as a mother-daughter relationship. In Delia’s opinion Cissy feels herself alone in this wide world and tries to convince her that she is too important for her and she has a family to make her happy. “Cissy, please. All I have ever wanted you too know is that you are not alone in the world. Having
family, even sisters you’ve never met. It’s a blessing, Cissy. You’re part of something bigger than just yourself” (Allison 29). As a mother, Delia is sticked between her children. Cissy wants to stay in her life in Los Angeles which Delia, her mother, hates deadly, and Delia wants to move to Cayro and take her two girls and rejoin the family. “They are my babies still, she told herself” (Allison 72). Having lost her father and just having a mother as the only relative in the earth, Cissy doesn’t accept Delia’s daughters as her sisters saying; “Your daughters, not my sisters” (Allison 113)

Amanda and Dede, Delia’s girls, lead their lives with their grandmother and are raised by the philosophies of their grandma. “They were exactly as she imagined and nothing at all as she had hoped” (Allison 76). Haunted by all her bad memories in Cayro, she suffers for her daughters and tries to find way of solutions to regain them. “All I know is that we have an understanding. We made a bargain. A hell of bargain. He’s going to help me get Amanda Louise and Dede, and I’m going to take care of him till he dies” (Allison 110).

Suffering by the emptiness of her daughters, Delia explains all her emotions and love to her daughters open-heartedly. “And you’re everything to me. Everything. The three of you are all I want in the world. If you don’t love me, I’m not surprised. If you hate me, I can take that too. But you’re mine, all of you. You’re everything I am. And whatever else happens, I am going to take care of you” (Allison 120). These words come from Delia’s heart but all these sincere sayings are not enough to make her girls forgive her. In the course of time, the girls grow up and their relations with each other get closer. Although Delia starts a good relation with her girls, she questions her motherhood. “I’ve tried hard to be a good mother. I’ve stayed sober, I’ve taken care of you, but I’ve done something wrong. None of you seem to know who you are or how much I love you” (Allison 422). By the passing time the girls understand Delia and maybe for the first time Cissy says “I love you” (Allison 429) to Delia, after Delia tells Cissy all the reality about her family.

As a conclusion, this can be called as a happy-ending for the novel. Delia makes a mistake in her early years, but in time she understands that she can not do without her girls. She struggles hard to regain them back, and at the end she manages it. To Stinnett (1979), problem solving is enchanted by the free flow of information and ideas. Members of healthy families are flexible, creative and resilient; they bend, they change, they adopt. And when the storm is over they are still intact (178). Just as mentioned in the quotation, the family rejoin again

[243]
after the terrible past days. She builds a new life for them as she imagined ever. But at the end she feels herself “old as a rock” (Allison 434) and she feels “something’s always coming” (Allison 434).

**CONCLUSION**

Themes of mother-daughter relations, domestic violence, abandonment, cultural clashes between Chinese mothers and their American-raised daughters, women’ struggle and strength to prove themselves as individuals in the society and more are successfully reflected in two talented authors’ novels; one is American Dorothy Allison and the other is American-Chinese Amy Tan. The novels of each writer are rewarded novels which mirror the situation of women and their role as a mother in their society in a clear way.

*The Kitchen God’s Wife* and *The Joy Luck Club* by Chinese-American author Amy Tan opens the doors of a different culture for the readers. The most important themes of Tan’s works are mother-daughter bonds, Chinese-American female identity, the challenges of cultural translation, clash of cultures, sexism and, to me, one of the most important ones is the effect of World War II on the lives of the immigrant woman characters.

The other two novels, Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Cavedweller* are perfect examples of mother-daughter relationship and domestic violence in American society. *Cavedweller’s* protagonist Delia, and *Bastard Out Of Caroline*’s Bone are strong woman characters who stand against the abuses of men and pressure of the society they live in.

In general these two women writers mention the efforts of their women characters to gain their struggle against the dominant men in society and sometimes against the other women, and while doing this motherhood becomes their most important weapon.

To sum up, the pressure of the society on women in these four novels is remarkable. The loneliness, hopelessness, desperation, financial difficulties and sometimes depression are the main problems that women characters of these four novels face with. The strong women characters of the novels overcome all these troubles and reflect the themes of mother-daughter relations, domestic violence, cultural clashes between mothers and daughters and more in a very successful way. In a sense, their motherhood becomes the driving power to struggle against to all difficulties and, they survive in a society that
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underestimates the real values of women and they build a new life for themselves and their daughters.

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