# Immigration and Conflicted Motherhood: A Comparative Analysis of Mother-Daughter Relationships in the Memoirs of Immigrant Women

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Adrienne Rich writes, "This cathexis between mother and daughter—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between biologically alike bodies, one which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement."[1] For second-generation immigrant women in America, this "unwritten story" composed and conceived between their mothers and themselves, has remained largely absent from the focus of academic research. Their stories of separation, reconciliation, individuation, and fusion with their mothers become the overarching phenomena that persistently affect them throughout their lives. Their memoirs, psychologically and emotionally evocative, provide the readers a glimpse into this "cathexis" that had been disturbed or distorted by immigrating to the United States. This paper therefore, seeks to expound upon the nature of this complex bond as explored by women of Mexican, Rwandan, Vietnamese and Iranian origin in their memoirs and aims at demonstrating how these bonds, though differentiated by their cultural contexts, are united by the issues which reiterate themselves consistently in the mother-daughter relationships of immigrant women.

## THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US

Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* becomes a memoir which, while indicting immigration for the breakdown of the family, also finds the mother guilty of upending the lives of her children. America which is likened to La Llorona—the mystical power which takes away children and never returns them, and referred to as El Otro Lado or the Other Side, plays the role of the antagonist which purloins Grande's immigrant parents with its lures of prosperity and traps them in the snare of the elusive American dream.

The memoir opens with a crisis unfolding in the lives of Reyna and her siblings: that of their mother leaving them to join their father, who has been on the Other Side for eight years trying to earn enough to support the family. As their mother or *Mami* prepares to leave, it becomes increasingly evident to Reyna and her siblings that their *Mami's* departure would eventually amount to an ontological threat for them and would not be an act that would help alleviate their poverty. Since *Mami* had assumed the role of the primary and principal caregiver and nurturer in the absence of their father, with her crossing over to the Other Side, they realized that the last vestiges of security and stability would be wrested away from their world. Even as children, they read into their mother's departure a finality, which signaled to them the end of their relationship with her. Adrienne Rich writes "The institution of motherhood finds all mothers more or less guilty of having failed their children;"[2] and this memoir explicates the failure of the mother in being the nurturer to her children, especially to her daughters.

As their mother leaves for El Otro Lado, she appoints Mago (the oldest of the siblings) as Reyna and her brother's "little mother",[3] one who would step in to fulfill the role of the primary caregiver in the lives of the children. Though a mere child of eight herself, Mago more than willingly takes up a role that she would go on to fulfill throughout her life. Even though Abuela Evila, the grandmother,

refuses to treat them with the respect and love that they had expected, Mago, rather than detesting the role of the mother to her siblings, grows into it buoyed by her love for them. Throughout the memoir, Grande credits her sister's persistence in supporting them and writes "My mother had asked Mago to be our little mother, and she and my father would have been proud to see how bravely their older daughter had taken on that role . . . Mago was there when my father and mother were not".[4] However, despite Mago's consistent presence, Reyna continues searching for her biological mother, *Mami*. She tries to recreate the image of her mother through associations—in scents, perfumes, and colours, to simulate, in part, the sensations evoked by her mother's body. Jane Flax writes "The mother is, after all, the first love object for the girl as well as the boy. All of us carry the memory of the experience of our mother's body—her softness, smell, comfort. These experiences have an erotic aspect"[5] and soon enough, Grande found herself seeking the comfort of the body of her aunt, Tia Emperatriz, who dispensed, in part, the role of the motherly nurturer. Her yearning for her aunt's body and its comfort not only made her uncomfortable but also made her feel guilty for desiring another woman's body. Because Grande wanted to "snuggle next to her", and desperately wished to ". . . bury [her] face into her hair that smelled of roses"[6] she felt she was betraying her mother, or more importantly thwarting her mother's love. With her increased physical proximity to Tia Emperatriz, she gradually starts forgetting her mother's scent, sound and touch, and even her image and she confesses, "I was forgetting what she looked like, smelled like, felt like. I couldn't remember the sound of her voice, the way she laughed. Every time I closed my eyes to remember, I would hear Tia Emperatriz's laughter. If I took a breath, I would inhale the fragrance of Tia Emperatriz's shampoo that smelled of roses".[7] The fear of losing Tia Emperatriz (newfound mother) as well, prevents Grande from vocalizing her feelings for her and makes her skeptical of forming a bond that would require her emotional participation.

Ironically, it is only after she allows herself to love Tia Emperatriz that her biological mother reappears in their lives, increasing Reyna and her siblings' confusion about their maternal allegiance. When her mother takes her away, Reyna confesses that she had wanted to more than just thank Tia Emperatriz, but the fear of appearing unfaithful to her *Mami* made her walk away without expressing her love to Tia.

The return of their mother however did not restore to them the childhood of security and nurturance that they had missed. Instead, their fear of abandonment intensified with their mother leaving them frequently and repeatedly. Unaccustomed to poverty, *Mami* constantly looked for ways to escape her life—even if that meant abandoning her children. Reyna could sense her mother's desperate desire to leave her children behind, and the nine-year-old Reyna recalls looking at her *Mami* and realizing that "The woman standing there wasn't the same woman who left".[8] For *Mami* who was ". . . bitter, heartbroken and weighed down by the knowledge that she had four children to support and was on her own"[9] her only possible escape was another man, marrying whom would not only help her financially but would also allow her to vindicate herself as a woman. *Mami's* trysts with her boyfriends, for whom she would leave her children behind, only increased the children's revulsion for her. When she leaves for Acapulco, to accompany her wrestler boyfriend, Grande writes that she found herself ". . . running to catch up to [her] mother and beg her not to leave [her] for the second time in my [her] life".[10] By her fourth abandonment, Reyna had understood that their desire for their mother's presence was not their love for her, but their fear of being left untended for the rest of their lives. She writes, "We were as Hansel and Gretel. No matter how many times we were abandoned and left to fend for ourselves, we would always follow the crumbs back to Mami".[11] While their mother left them to fulfill her dreams, it was their maternal grandmother Abuela Chinta, who took care of them. Unlike Abuela Evila, she brought them up like her own children and it was in their time spent with her that Reyna

and her siblings located the happiest memories of their childhood.

The last of their mother's desertions was also marked by the replacement of their mother with their father. Even though their father had provided them with the opportunity to live in El Otro Lado, he starved them of the affection they so desperately needed. Alcoholic and abusive, he could hardly be the father that his children had idealized for eight years. Yet Reyna longed to be acknowledged by him and excused his abuse by crediting him for saving her from penury. According to Adrienne Rich, "The woman who has felt unmothered may seek mothers all her life—may even seek them in men"[12] and Reyna in her desperate bid to feel valued, makes her father the center of her life, loving him despite his faults. Her love however finds no reciprocation but ends with Reyna detesting the bond and with her eventually abandoning him. Their stepmother Mila too failed to be their mother. Troubled as she was in her relationships with her children, she never quite emotionally invested in the relationship with her stepchildren. Though not vicious, it was Mila's blatant indifference towards them that antagonized Reyna and her siblings. But Reyna still considered Mila to be a better mother than Mami; Mila did not abandon her own children and neither did she abandon them, although their biological mother had done so multiple times in favour of her boyfriends and other children.

It is only in Dr. Diana Savas, her English teacher in Pasadena College, that Reyna manages to find a real mother. Not only does she shelter Reyna when she had nowhere to go, but she also pushes her into realizing her potential as a writer. Rich opines, "As women we want mothers who want their freedom and ours . . . The quality of the mother's life however embattled and unprotected—is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to create a livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities do exist."[13] Dr. Diana Savas, thus, becomes the prototype of the ideal independent mother, as proposed by Rich, who by creating value

in her own life makes Reyna believe that a life without crippling dependency on men is a possibility. Though unmarried and childless she is the one who mothers Reyna into being a fully realized individual, capable of forging a way for herself. Under her tutelage Reyna becomes the first graduate from her family, breaking free from the vicious cycle of indigence perpetuated by the lack of proper education. This relationship marked by the undemanding gentleness of a mother-daughter bond and not by a precarious ambivalence, allows Reyna to achieve her dreams without emotionally crippling her. Therefore, while immigration to the United States denies Reyna the chance of being mothered by her own mother, it also becomes the phenomenon that helps her to gain a mother, whose nurture and care remain unhindered and unrestrained.

## THE GIRL WHO SMILED BEADS: A STORY OF WAR AND WHAT COMES AFTER

This search for the mother, however, remains inconclusive for Clemantine Wamariya, who in her memoir, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After* not only provides an unapologetically honest account of the Rwandan Civil War but also undertakes a probe into the psyche of a refugee's struggle for survival with her sister, as she is forced to leave behind all that she had known to be her own.

As the memoir opens Wamariya's recollection of her childhood begins with her description of her home in Kigali. Enveloped in nature, her memories about her home are tinged with a prelapsarian aura. She provides an almost impressionistic representation of her mother's garden which taught her to depend on nature and to seek nurturance from it. This garden which housed an exuberance of flowers and vegetables and provided her paradise-like sanctuary was the Eden of her mother, who herself was like Eve, beautiful and untainted. Clemantine writes "My mother was short and curvy

and regal and poised, with high cheekbones, like grandparents, and bright white teeth with gaps between them, which Rwandans consider beautiful"[14] and by doing so infuses her with the fascination of a child infatuated with her mother. Adrienne Rich comments in her book, "Yet I cannot help but feel that I came to love my own body through first having loved hers, that this was a profound matrilineal bequest"[15] and Wamariya too seems to have first encountered beauty and love in her mother's body and her mother's garden, both of which became to her symbols of fertility, beauty, care, and security.

However, it was not just her biological mother who made claims to her affection. Her nanny Mukamana whom she "loved and adored"[16] though appearing briefly in her life, remained one of the primary nurturers whose love she depended on long after she had left Kigali. Mukamana was her reservoir of unchecked affection, while her mother's affection had to be shared between the other siblings. The stories which Mukamana told her, and often sang to her, provided young Clemantine with a sense of belonging. It allowed her to make sense of the world, while infecting it with the charm of music and happiness. She also harboured a love for Mukamana's body as Mukamana's "long, curly hair"[17] which she wrapped in a "magnificent cloth"[18] captivated her and made her long for her motherly nurture. Since Mukamana fulfilled the role of the caregiver for the first six years of Clemantine's life, the primacy of her attachment with Mukamana became central to the consolidation of Clemantine's identity. Therefore, when Mukamana was replaced by Pascazia, Clemantine detested her simply because Pascazia could neither promise the security nor the fostering strength of Mukamana's stories. Thus, when she had to flee Kigali, she lost the motherly nurture of not one but two mothers.

Her grandmother's house in Butare that she fled to, was only a momentary refuge. Her grandmother, true to her maternal instincts, tried to protect Clemantine and her cousins and Wamariya writes "…my grandmother circled my cousins like a lion, livid, determined

to keep her pride safe and together",[19] adamant to shield the girls from an eventual carnage. But she could not do so for long as Clemantine and her elder sister Claire soon had to escape from Butare and in doing so, had to yield the safety of yet another maternal haven.

Clemantine's relationship with her sister however was marked by a sense of ambivalence. Only fifteen, Claire was forced to assume the role of the mother to Clemantine. While both of them needed to fuse and become a unit to survive in a world that was consistently hostile, Claire repeatedly desired autonomy and freedom from Clemantine, whom she often considered a burden. Wamariya confesses missing her mother several times as she read in Claire's refusal to help her, the rejection of her desire to be loved and nurtured. A fiercely independent woman, Claire could fend for herself and acquired enough autonomy to evade begging for favours. In Burundi, as they lived a sub-human life in refugee camps, only she was enterprising enough to trade and earn. As much as Clemantine admired Claire's resourcefulness, the same admiration often gave way to jealousy. While Claire constantly seemed to be moving forward, Clemantine remained mired in a web of self-pity, plagued by a constant hunger for nurturance and comfort. Clemantine reveals, "Nobody in my world was tender and protective of me anymore. Certainly not Claire"[20] and Claire's refusal to protect and nurture her would always prevent Clemantine from loving her sister completely. Adrienne Rich in her book hails independent mothers, but she acknowledges ". . . the irony that to fight for her daughter's survival the mother may have to be almost always absent from the child . . ."[21] and Claire too in her struggle to provide for herself and her sister had to be emotionally distant. Clemantine adds with bitterness, "Claire also didn't care if I was thirsty, exhausted, hungry, hot, despairing, confused or lonely"[22] and that she never expected Claire to "coddle [her]"[23] either.

Yet Clemantine continued searching for maternal figures and it was in Burundi itself that she found Musaza and Mucyechuru who taught her to find comfort in nature again. Mucyechuru which in

Kinyarwanda meant Grandmother, reminded her of her mother as Mucyechuru too demonstrated pride in her appearance by keeping a cloth wrapped around her head and by wearing an orange cape. Musaza or the Grandfather, reminded her of Mukamana as he told her tales which allowed her an escape from her immediate reality. Both of them together taught her how to use stories to soothe herself and how to draw from nature the nurturance which was otherwise denied to her. Since nature and her mother had always been inextricably bound to each other in her consciousness and because stories reminded her of Mukamana, she soon found herself beginning to admire and love Musaza and Mucyechuru. In fact, it was to them that the seven-year-old Clemantine turned when Claire suffered from a near-fatal episode of dysentery. While she wished for Claire to get better, she also subconsciously chose Mucyechuru and Musaza together, as the surrogate mother who would look after her if Claire passed away. When they had to leave Burundi after Claire married Rob, she could not bring herself to say goodbye to Mucyechuru and Musaza as she could not bear another separation from her newfound mother. Therefore, after Claire's marriage, Clemantine constantly felt displaced. Previously used to sleeping beside Claire and clinging on to her for life, Claire's removal to the bridal bed left Clemantine hollow. Consequently, when Claire gave birth to Mariette, Clemantine preoccupied herself with taking care of her in order to fulfill in part, her desire for nurturance and nurturing. Jane Flax in her essay writes, "The wish to have a baby is also a wish to have a mother . . . One wishes to regress to babyhood and redo the infantile development that is the ultimate source of one's troubles".[24] Sure enough, Wamariya says, "I assigned myself the role of Mariette's eight-year old mother. I carried her everywhere. I fed her whenever she made the slightest noise. I stared at her while she napped".[25] Thus, by caring for Mariette, Clemantine wanted to regress to her childhood and recreate the sense of security that she had lost. Constantly homeless and displaced in her life as a refugee,

Clemantine longed for the security of her haven. But her haven remained elusive as Claire never provided her emotional nurturance. While Clemantine respected Claire's fortitude, she also detested her indifference. Perhaps it was because of Claire's indifference towards her that Clemantine could not emotionally connect to her American mother when they finally arrived in the United States. She felt disconcerted by her American sponsors' propensity to hug and by their free expression of love. According to her, "Taking care of loved ones in [her] world was not based on affection. It was based on the fear of losing them".[26] Starved as she was of affection, she still could not bring herself to love her American mother, because ". . . Affection still made [her] flinch".[27] Even though her life with her American mother gave her a sense of belonging, it did not provide her with a sense of attachment. As she grew up, she remained suspicious of affection, never allowing herself to form bonds that required her to engage emotionally. Thus, when she was reconciled with her parents, she failed to reincarnate the connection with her mother that she had once lost. The indescribable chasm that had formed between them, variegated by years of separation and trauma, prevented both of them from reaffirming their mother-daughter bond. In place of the reverence that Clemantine had once felt for her mother, she now felt revolted by her dependence on religion. Upon their reconciliation she wanted to pamper her mother to reorder her childhood that had been unceremoniously jeopardized. By undertaking the act of mothering her mother she desired to recover the sense of safety and certainty that she had lost when she was just a child. However, Clemantine soon realized that perhaps the mother-daughter bond which she had been seeking was only a pipe dream which was not to be fulfilled. Even though she was disappointed in her failure to rekindle her relationship with her mother she was ". . . also old enough to know that when you lose a mother at age six, part of you always remains a child . . . yearning for her approval and for the false reassurance that she can protect you from the world."[28]

At the end of the memoir her desire to keep structuring her life, to keep track of her time in refugee camps, to codify the events of her life in understandable terms, all become her efforts at regaining the world of unrestrained love and dependability. Immigrating across seven countries until her final arrival in the United States had made her hunt for moorings throughout her life. The disruption of her relationship with her mother, followed by the loss of Mukamana and the consequent nonchalance of Claire towards her, made her desperate to find meaning in life so that she might protect herself from subsequent emotional disintegration.

## THE BEST WE COULD DO

Thi Bui in her memoir tries to avert this emotional disintegration caused by an emotionally absent mother. A memoir dealing with the intergenerational conflicts in immigrant families, *The Best We Could Do* delves deep into the psyche of the immigrant mother and the emotionally estranged second-generation Vietnamese American daughter trying to justify a motherless childhood.

Thi Bui's graphic memoir begins with Thi Bui's initiation into motherhood with the birth of her son. The first chapter of the memoir which presents a graphic, albeit discomfiting picture of childbirth introduces the readers to the central theme of the memoir: Bui trying to understand motherhood and the aporias inextricably associated with it. As Bui labours under the emotional and physical anticipation of bringing a child into the world, her mother remains absent, refusing to emotionally engage with her. The longing for her child coincides with the longing for her mother who tries to evade an emotional participation with her daughter in the act of birthing a child.

As she is made to prepare for the birth of her child, Bui is forced to relinquish control over her mind and body. With the epidural injected into her body and an episiotomy performed on her, she realizes for the

first time that she has to surrender her bodily autonomy to the needs of her child. Rather than perceiving this as the natural prerequisite for motherhood, Bui construes it as the decimation of her identity which would make her regress to an infantile consciousness scarred by an emotional disconnect with her mother. As she commences her own motherhood with a longing for a deliberately absent mother, she fears that her capitulation to medical exigencies would force upon her, the repressed desire to be mothered and nurtured herself. She writes, "But if I surrender I'll want a full retreat—to go all the way back to be the baby and not the mother"[29] and Flax purports that women often desire to return to their foetal states to recapture the sense of safety and warmth that they had experienced in their relationships with their mothers.[30] However as she assumes the role of the mother of her child, sympathy for her own mother replaces her longing and latent disappointment in her unavailability. She realizes that the responsibility of rearing a child is "immense"[31] and rather than holding her mother culpable she undertakes a search for reasons for her mother's detachment.

For Bui her relationship with her parents and especially her mother had been a "lonely place"[32] devoid of the warmth of real affection. Bui says that her mother's affection was always shown through her actions and never through her words as for her mother the words ". . . 'I love you' sticks in the throat".[33] As Bui starts navigating her mother's tumultuous past, she understands the reasons which render the articulation of love so taxing a task for her mother. Born in an affluent family, Bui's mother or *Ma* had grown up with a love for education and independence. Her French education had equipped her with a nationalist fervour which made her appreciate Viet Nam's independence from France. However, her zest for freedom was not implemented in her own life, as her marriage to her husband restricted her to a life of dependence. She had hoped for her husband's tuberculosis to eventually consume him leaving her a free widow, but his survival only pushed her into a life of inescapable responsibilities.

Fettered by her marriage, motherhood and its ineluctable demands altered her as a person.

The death of her firstborn became the central incident defining her subsequent relationships with the rest of her children. *Ma* was twenty-one years old when she lost her first child who "... lit up the skies with her smile."[34] Constantly apprehensive of incurring another loss, Bui's mother found it safer to remain distant from her children. Her second child Lan was meant to be a replacement for the child she lost. Bui too was a replacement for another child who was a stillborn. For *Ma* therefore, motherhood was treacherous and emotional proximity to her children meant the possibility of interminable disappointment and pain. Her inability to recover from the loss of two of her children caused her to deliberately disallow herself from expressing love and affection openly and vehemently. Rather she took comfort in maintaining a nuanced distance from her children, under the farce of geniality and good humour. Sara Ruddick opines, "If in the face of danger, disappointment, and unpredictability, mothers are liable to melancholy, they are also aware that a kind, resilient good humor is a virtue ... Mothers are tempted to denial simply by the insupportable difficulty of passionately loving a fragile creature in a physically threatening, socially violent, pervasively uncaring, competitive world"[35] and *Ma's* emotional unavailability became in effect, an effort in self-preservation.

However, after relocating to the United States as immigrants and refugees, it was *Ma* who took up the responsibility of providing for her family. In the absence of their mother, Bui along with her brother Tam, found themselves in the care of their father, who was anything but the nurturer and provider that they needed at the time. His offhanded manner of treating them coupled with his temper, only intensified the children's loneliness. Haunted by his own past of inescapable pain, he could never attach himself to the children. Throughout Bui's life, *Ma* remained ensconced in the safety of her

duties, escaping the demanding task of bonding with her children. This deliberate emotional reclusiveness continued into Bui's adulthood and Bui realized that her mother would perhaps always prefer keeping her at a distance. At the end of the memoir, Bui comes to terms with her mother's emotional abandonment. Her own experience of being a parent makes her empathize with her mother and comprehend the choices that she had to make. In fact, while nurturing her child, it was *Ma* whom she tried to emulate as she wished for her mother's raspy voice to soothe her child. When Bui almost lost her son, it was again *Ma* whom she sought out for comfort. The mutual recognition of the mother in each other allowed them to heal the rupture in their relationship. Adrienne Rich writes, "There was, is, in most of us a girl-child still longing for a woman's nurture, tenderness and approval, a woman's power exerted in our defense, a woman's smell, and touch and voice, a woman's strong arms around us in moments of fear and pain"[36] and thus it was her mother that she drew strength from for her own life of mothering.

Having found her mother through her own motherhood, Bui experienced the fear of losing her mother again and this time to old age and malady. Jane Flax claims that if the symbiotic relationship between the mother and the daughter had not been adequately nurturing, the girl child finds it difficult to individuate and separate, which continues even in their adulthood.[37] Thus Bui, who had never quite experienced nurturance from her mother, found it difficult to extricate herself from the longing for her mother. However, as her own motherhood gained precedence, she unlatched herself from her mother and began her journey of individuation.

Her memoir ends with her wish for her son to develop as a distinct entity from herself. Bui's memoir concludes not with an unfulfilled wish of being mothered but with her cognizance of the complexities and variations of motherhood and with the recognition of the mother as an entity with her own desires and difficulties.

## FUNNY IN FARSI: A MEMOIR OF GROWING UP IRANIAN IN AMERICA

While Thi Bui's memoir concludes with an assertion of the identity of the mother, Firoozeh Dumas in her memoir *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America,* relegates the mother to the sidelines dismissing her experience as an immigrant in favour of the predominant figure of the father.

A memoir thriving on its wittiness and humour, it does not undertake a serious exploration of motherhood, yet the stark absence of the mother necessitates a study of the character. Firoozeh's Iranian mother, Nazireh, is introduced to the readers as the woman who, because of cultural and societal norms, had been denied an education. Her dream of pursuing midwifery too had to be given up, as circumstances did not permit her the luxury. Married at the age of seventeen, she became a mother within a year and gave up all hopes of ever doing anything in her life which did not revolve around serving her family. When she immigrated to America with her family, she was forced to acclimatize herself to a culture which was vastly different from her own. While she tried to learn the social niceties, her Iranian roots made the process somewhat onerous. However, in the memoir, she is diminished to an entity who repeatedly embarrasses Dumas. Even though Dumas remains sympathetic to her mother's plight, her shortcomings are also used to supply the text with much of its humour. Dumas writes of an incident where her mother had accompanied her to school and had failed to identify Iran on the world map due to her lack of education and had undone the "positive impression",[38] that Dumas had made the previous day. Dumas had decided on that very day itself that in order to save herself from further embarrassment, "her mother would have to stay at home",[39] condemning Nazireh to the domestic sphere which Firoozeh perceived to be one of inactivity and idleness. Anne Morris opines, "When mothers' contributions to their children's lives are barely seen, let

alone valued, it is hardly surprising that other aspects of mothers' lives, which give mothers a presence as people in their own right and which provide a context for understanding their actions, are also invisible to sons and daughters"[40] and Firoozeh's refusal to fully flesh out her mother's character in her memoir stems in part, from the lack of acknowledgment of her mother's contribution to her life. Characterized by her Iranian accent, Nazireh's attempts at reducing her dependence on her daughter to communicate with Americans are also construed as failures. Even though she had tried to learn English from watching game shows on television to Firoozeh it was nothing but "useless information" that she had memorized. Dumas details how Nazireh's English sentences were constructed without verbs and "it" was used to refer to everything. Even if she did manage to speak grammatically coherent English her Persian accent made it obscure and impossible to understand. Her failure at communication, thus, not only made her a nonentity in the public sphere but also rendered her close to invisible in the life of Dumas, whose forays into the outer world were mainly with the aid of her father who had enjoyed the privilege of being educated in America. Praised for her cooking and portrayed as the mother who would watch her children develop from afar, unable to transgress the boundary of the home, Nazireh in the memoir remains the doubly-marginalized voiceless woman. Even though she supports Firoozeh in her marriage to Francois Dumas, her absence in the novel overwhelms this small assertion of her voice. Nazireh, therefore, does not enjoy an affirmation of her identify by her daughter, but the decimation of it, by a conscious denial of her agency.

Adrienne Rich writes, "We are, none of us, 'either' mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion and greater complexity, we are both"[41] and the paper explicates the variations in motherhood and mother-daughter relationships among immigrant women. In both *The Girl Who Smiled Beads and The Distance Between Us*, it

is the non-biological mothers who provide strength and courage to their daughters. For Clemantine, it is Claire who shoulders the responsibilities of the mother, but as an imperfect one, she forces Clemantine into a lifelong search for the mother. For Reyna, it is Mago and Dr. Diana Savas who willingly assume the role of the mother. Even though Mago herself remains entrenched in her longing for a mother it is Dr. Diana Savas, an established, independent woman who becomes the source of stability and nurturance that Reyna had craved throughout her life. On the other hand, in the memoirs of Thi Bui and Firoozeh Dumas, the relationship with the physically present mother becomes problematized. While Bui in her memoir, through the experience of her own motherhood identifies her mother as an individual, Dumas wrests away this identity from her own mother by disallowing her distinct voice and agency.

Texts written by immigrant women, therefore become important documents in understanding the psychological and emotional implications which immigration has on motherhood and daughterhood, as they explicate the essential sameness of these experiences across social and cultural milieus.

## NOTES

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27 Wamariya and Weil, *Girl Who Smiled Beads,* chap.4.
28 Wamariya and Weil, *Girl Who Smiled Beads,* chap. 21.
29 Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* (New York: Abrams, 2017), 4.
30 Flax, "Conflict", 175.
31 Bui, *Best We Could Do*, 22.
32 Bui, *Best We Could Do*, 39.
33 Bui, *Best We Could Do*, 38.
34 Bui, *Best We Could Do*, 52.
35 Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 2 (1980): 351, https://doi.org/10.2307/3177749.
36 Rich, "Motherhood and Daughterhood", 224.
37 Flax, "Conflict", 175-176.
38 Firoozeh Dumas, *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America,* (New York: Random House Trade Paperback, 2003), chap.1, Kindle.
39 Dumas, *Funny in Farsi*, chap.1.
40 Anne Morris, "Naming Maternal Alienation", in *Motherhood: Power & Oppression,* eds. Andrea O'Reilly, Marie Porter, and Patricia Short, (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 230.
41 Rich, "Motherhood and Daughterhood", 253.

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