

**“The**

**Way**

**Things**

**Are”**

## INTRODUCTION

**MY GRANDMOTHER'S BULLHEADEDNESS**

Our relationship was always complicated, but I did not know that people and situations outside of our personal life would be crucial factors in this grandmother-granddaughter relationship. I always thought that the cause of our complicated relationship was the intergenerational miscommunication and my grandmother's bullheadedness. I read books about feminism trying to justify my anger towards her in an attempt to comfort myself, only to slowly realize and confirm that women's lives are in fact complicated. I have come to also realize that my grandmother's bullheadedness was not hers originally to start with. It was planned and designed. 'Feminine creatures' are bound to accept and carry their 'embattled childhood and embattled motherhood' throughout their lives as if it is something ordinary, just because it is part of civilization's history. According to Susan Griffin's text on 'Feminism and Motherhood',

**"Sacrifice and suffering are the definition of womanliness in our culture."<sup>1</sup>**

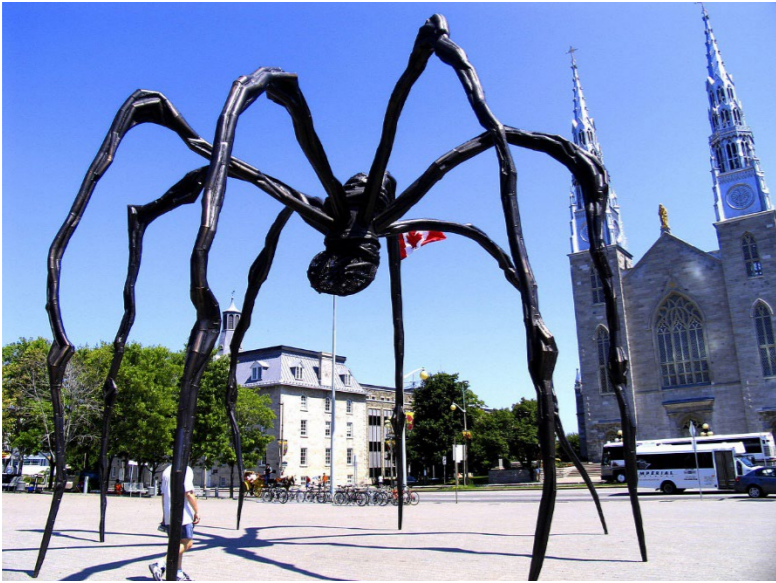
To put the cherry on top of the cake, Jacqueline Rose in her book 'Mothers' mentions,

**"But the mother must be noble and her agony redemptive..."<sup>2</sup>**

These words sum up my grandmother's essence (existence) but I cannot help but think of what she would say. 'That's the way things are.' I've spent a lot of years listening to her life 'motto' that part of me is used to it. However, at times she gets these bursts of energy where she shares her opinions and they still surprise me. In my 20's, I finally understand that her feminist side comes and goes in these short bursts of energy. I try to talk to her about feminism but it seems that she cannot comprehend the concept but she is curious to know more about it. When I ask her about her childhood and teenage years, she describes to me a submissive rebel.

## THE BUBBLE AND THE SACRIFICE OF THE MOTHER

At times I would find myself daunted and intimidated by my grandmother's frame of mind and at other times she would alleviate my problems and uncertainties with her care and love, but that is precisely what made our relationship so complicated. I find relief knowing that other artists feel a similar roller coaster of emotions with their own mothers.



**“The Spider is an ode to my mother. She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. My family was in the business of tapestry restoration, and my mother was in charge of the workshop. Like a spider, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother.”<sup>4</sup> - Louise Bourgeois**

For instance, Louise Bourgeois's 'Maman' (which translates to 'Mommy' in French) is a gigantic spider sculpture that captures her mother's essence in an extraordinary way, and allows the spectator to experience multiple feelings about motherhood at once. **“The spider is a recurring theme in the works Bourgeois made in the 1990s. Both predator and protector, a sinister threat and an industrious repairer, the spider is an eloquent representation of the mother.”<sup>5</sup>** Furthermore, the spider's eerie and uncanny connection to a mother seems to be conflicting with the 'embodied nurturing, protection and weaving' nature that the insect has to offer which is visualized by the addition of the 32 marble eggs guarded safely inside the spider's sac.

<sup>3</sup> Talbot, J. (2007). [Maman near the Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica. National Gallery of Canada]. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maman\\_\(sculpture\)#/media/File:Giant\\_spider\\_strikes\\_again!.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maman_(sculpture)#/media/File:Giant_spider_strikes_again!.jpg)

<sup>4</sup> Home To Maman: getting to know the mother of all sculptures in the Ottawa landscape. (n.d.). Mike Bruneau Health - Media - Art - Education. Retrieved December 22, 2021, from <http://michaelbruneau.blogspot.com/2011/01/home-to-maman.html>

<sup>5</sup> Tate. (n.d.). Louise Bourgeois: Room 8. Retrieved December 22, 2021, from <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/louise-bourgeois/room-guide/louise-bourgeois-room-8>



However, in this way, Bourgeois through her emotional outburst creates balance and a more realistic version of a mother rather than the faux version that society advertises. Together with the emergence of feminism in the 1970's it gave a chance to continue to further pragmatize the women's movement to a great extent. However, what I resonate with the most is her later series of 'Cells' (Choisy) more specifically 'Spider 1997', which are partly composed of domestic objects, furniture, and clothing. They can be perceived as solitary confinement or a private thinking space or even a bedroom. Impulsively, I perceive it as the bubble that my own grandmother restrained me in.

I recall fragments from my childhood years of when my grandmother used to look after me and my little sisters. Some of those memories make me feel nostalgic, a lot of them make me feel furious, and at others I simply cringe. My sisters often tell me not to dwell in the past but what they cannot fully understand is that being the oldest (grand)daughter often means being raised by trial and error. I cannot exactly say, 'it's all water under the bridge' when every now and then when I recall those painful memories, I feel like a child who wants to point fingers and pin a big part of the blame on my grandmother. A specific memory comes to mind, one which has been engraved in my memory for the long run. When I was 11 years old my grandmother and I were on a mission to buy the groceries needed to cook lunch at her house. On our way back from the village's small (and only) convenience store I noticed four boys around my age joyfully playing football in the primary school's yard. After trying to keep my excitement under control and carefully formulating my words, I asked my grandmother if I could join them for some time only to be lectured that it is dangerous and reckless

<sup>6</sup> Lobato, R. (1997). Spider (The Cell series) by Louise Bourgeois [Sculpture]. Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/louise-bourgeois/room-guide/louise-bourgeois-room-8>

for little girls to play with boys and that I should keep her company in the kitchen instead as I have always done. I felt disappointment and a bit of guilt, but I was not surprised by her response. See, I was used to being refused to step out of my 'bubble' even though it was created out of love, care, and genuine concern. Because for my γιαγιά (grandmother) living in a bubble was the only place she knew from experience that was safe. I'm realizing now that it was a sad sunny afternoon for both of us that day. I missed my opportunity to make new friends. At the same time, maybe she also felt that she could be losing me as a friend since I do not remember her meeting often with other grandmothers. In her excerpt from 'On Being a grandmother', Margaret Mead mentions that,

**"In many primitive societies grandparents and grandchildren are aligned together...The tag that grandparents and grandchildren get along so well because they have a common enemy is explicitly faced in many societies."**<sup>7</sup>

This often results in the grandparent's exclusion from society by isolating them into their own 'faction' together with their grandchildren. I do acknowledge though the fact that she would often guilt trip me. I know she did it out of care, but I felt the consequences later in life when I had to start acting like an adult. Griffin discusses how,

**"The sacrifice of the mother which is supposed to be for the child's benefit can destroy the child... her love devours the child."**<sup>8</sup>

Time and again I would feel that kind of love deprived me of my individuality leaving me with doubts and a lack of confidence. That love would often translate in the form of restrictions placed upon me. She continues by saying,

**"Her value becomes repression, her protection dominance."**<sup>9</sup>

But here's the thing... Her dominance, just like her bullheadedness was something that she inherited and she should not take the fall for it (at least not all of it). Her doings were a mere reflection of HER deprived past as a child. I can understand that growing up in a household that society has brainwashed can shape behaviors that are hard to rub off.

<sup>7</sup> Mead, M. (2001). On Being a Grandmother from Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years (1972). In *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood* (1st ed., p. 27). Seven Stories Press.

<sup>8</sup> Davey, M., & Griffin, S. (2001). Feminism and Motherhood. In *Mother reader: Essential writings on motherhood* (p. 37). essay, Seven Stories Press.

<sup>9</sup> Davey, M., & Griffin, S. (2001). Feminism and Motherhood. In *Mother reader: Essential writings on motherhood* (p. 37). essay, Seven Stories Press.

According to Griffin,

**"We always blame the individual and not the social structure. That we see failure in discrete lives and do not question "the way things are."**<sup>10</sup>

Blaming my grandmother feels wrong and misplaced. I try to visualize the direction of my confused index finger changing. Federici, in a very direct and gutsy way with words, unmask and goes into detail about how capital tries to deprive girls of their individuality from a very young age, and forces them to play 'little housewives' until they are ready for their real housewife duty. Federici writes,

**"But unfortunately it is almost impossible to enjoy any freedom if from the earliest days of life, you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent and most important to sacrifice yourself and even to get pleasure from it. If you don't like it, it is your problem, your failure, your guilt, your abnormality."**<sup>11</sup>

Unlearning feeling dependent and under someone's thumb is not impossible, but it is a slow process that involves a lot of forgiveness, self-healing, and embracing the change (your chance to find oneself). I will start by bursting my own bubble created by the capital. By doing so, I can no longer ignore the traces of society's history and biased beliefs repeating the same mistakes that are bound to backfire on women by this repeated 'natural romanticized sacrifice'.

<sup>10</sup> Davey, M., & Griffin, S. (2001). Feminism and Motherhood. In *Mother reader: Essential writings on motherhood* (p. 39). essay, Seven Stories Press.

<sup>11</sup> Federici, S. (1975). *Wages Against Household* (1st ed.)(p.3). Power of Women Collective and the Falling Wall Press.

## THE WASP NEST

Jacqueline Rose in her essay 'Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty' brings to attention a concerning matter that needs to be addressed repeatedly until women are released from this eternal prison of blame.

**"Why are these mothers so hated? Why are mothers so often held accountable for the ills of the world, the breakdown in the social fabric, the threat to welfare, to the health of the nation..."<sup>12</sup>**

I am not sure how this nonsensical ideology became concrete but it created disastrous consequences not only for mothers but for all of us. It became mainstream (maybe even a trend?) to point fingers to the point where before we have any sort of evidence, we immediately condemn mothers for everything that goes wrong...

**"It is a perfect atmosphere for picking on mothers, for branding them as uniquely responsible for both securing and jeopardizing this impossible future."<sup>13</sup>**

However, why are we blaming women if we live in a patriarchal society? When does patriarchy take responsibility for the recurring mess it creates? If mothers are supposed to 'repair and provide a safe space' does that not mean that the current social-political structure is not working for us? If mothers are the 'truest form of nurturing' for this world, why do we not listen to them instead??? Even Bell Hooks in her book 'Theory from Margin to Center' mentions that

**"Dictionary definitions of the word "father" relate its meaning to accepting responsibility with no mention of words like tenderness and affection..."<sup>14</sup>**

Something that really frustrated me and still does is when my grandmother claims that girls are naturally more mature than boys because we reach puberty before them and consequently, I should always be the mature one (that's the way things are). But how can we learn to share responsibilities when at the end of the day, it is all up to the mature girl to fix up or be in control of? This brings to mind a sad memory of when I was 7 and my boy cousin (who is 2 years younger than me) were outside playing and exploring my grandmother's front yard. 'Mother nature' (such a cliché) seemed exciting and an opportunity for pretend play.

<sup>12</sup> Rose, J. (2019). Social Punishment [E-book]. In *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (Reprint ed., p. 3). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, J. (2019). Social punishment. In *Mothers: An essay on Love and cruelty* (p. 6). essay, Faber & Faber.

<sup>14</sup> Hooks, B. (1984). Revolutionary parenting. In *Feminist theory: from Margin to Center* (1st ed., p. 136). South End Press.

What we did not anticipate however was my cousin jumping with excitement underneath a wasp nest causing it to de-attach from the tree and fall down right next to our feet. After witnessing the swarm of wasps emerging from the now destroyed nest, my body's immediate reaction was to run, something that my cousin was unable to do because of fear. In the heat of the moment, I did not realize that I left him behind. Shortly after hiding in my grandmother's cluttered small bedroom, I heard her footsteps heading towards me. In my childish mind, I was expecting her to comfort me with hugs and kisses and to tell me that I am safe in her arms (because that was what I learned from watching American family-friendly movies) but instead, what I received was a beating and her constantly yelling at me that my cousin was stung and it was solely my fault (maybe she felt that it was her fault and took it out on me?) I remember feeling confused, scared, and angry all at once. Why did my cousin not run? Why is he not also getting yelled at? Why am I the only one taking the responsibility when it was not even my fault or intention for this to happen in the first place? Was I supposed to act like a mother because I was a girl or because I was two years older? Or both? I had all these questions in my mind but for 'some reason'

I chose to keep to myself.

**A LABOUR OF LOVE**

**“The difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character.”<sup>15</sup>**

In her text ‘Wages against Housework’, Sylvia Federici throws light upon the unfairness of the unwaged work that takes place in a household. More importantly, she focuses on the failure to stop the discrimination against mothers (women) whose work was ‘bound/fated to be unwaged’, by trying to convince them that it was part of their female nature to carry out this burden. The capital even had the audacity to make the women who took a stand against this look nonsensical. Federici also mentions,

**“We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle.”<sup>16</sup>**

My grandmother’s way of showing love wasn’t a

**“...soothing presence, her gentle and watchful care...”<sup>17</sup>**

as Bell Hooks describes a mother’s essence, but it was proved far too many times by her patience and hard work (sacrifice) over the years, which was visible from her prominent wrinkles and scars. Her life’s (only) priority was always to provide for the family. While she worked long hours away from home as a house cleaner, and at the same time worked in the fields as a farmer, she also had a vital job at home as a mother. A vital job that was not acknowledged nor appreciated by society as it should have been. On the contrary, my grandfather never felt the responsibility on his shoulders to keep a consistent job, leaving the fate of the family in my grandmother’s hands. He was a happy-go-lucky sort of man who was often fired or quit because he simply was not fulfilled with any job.

<sup>15</sup> Federici, S. (1975). *Wages Against Household* (1st ed.)(p.2). Power of Women Collective and the Falling Wall Press.

<sup>16</sup> Federici, S. (1975). *Wages Against Household* (1st ed.)(p.3). Power of Women Collective and the Falling Wall Press.

<sup>17</sup> Hooks, B. (2015). Homeplace a site of resistance. In *Yearning* (p. 385). Routledge.

In Sylvia Plath’s book ‘Letters Home’, her mother Aurelia Schober Plath mentions something that made me feel interestingly bitter since I never had a close relationship with my own grandfather. 11

**“While Otto did not take an active part in tending to or playing with his children, he loved them dearly and took great pride in their attractiveness and progress.”<sup>18</sup>**

She speaks lovingly and with great respect for her husband while as a father he doesn’t contribute to raising the children, but instead admires them from a distance and treats them as precious possessions. It is frustrating to watch a woman hide the unjust reality of being a mother; the frustration, the exhaustion, the exploitation, the selflessness, and the sacrifice. To put on an act and

**“... to suggest that women are inherently life-affirming nurturers.”<sup>19</sup>**

as Bell Hooks mentions in her book ‘Feminist theory: from Margin to Center’. Similarly, my grandfather’s lack of responsibilities and his inability to be a proper parental role model only made my grandmother’s role as a parent (and grandmother) more complicated as she had to fill both of these polar-opposite roles.

However, what I truly want to understand is why Sylvia’s mother chooses to be so passive towards the lack of support of her husband. It makes me question whether she shared ‘my’ grandmother’s bullheadedness on ‘the way things are’. Why else would she so happily portray their family without complaining or being bitter about the fact that she solely raised their children? This fake facade of a happy family and this very dangerous behavior only leads to what hooks later writes;

**“Some female parents who raise their children without mutual care of fathers feel their own positions are undermined when they meet occasionally with male parents who may provide a good time but be totally unengaged in day-to-day parenting. They sometimes have to cope with children valuing the male parent more because he is male (and sexist ideology teaches them that his attentions are more valuable than female care).”<sup>20</sup>**

Is this meant to be part of the joys of motherhood? Or is it the ‘errors and omissions excepted’ part that comes with it? Either way, these patterns of behaviors and social structures will never speak in favor of mothers.

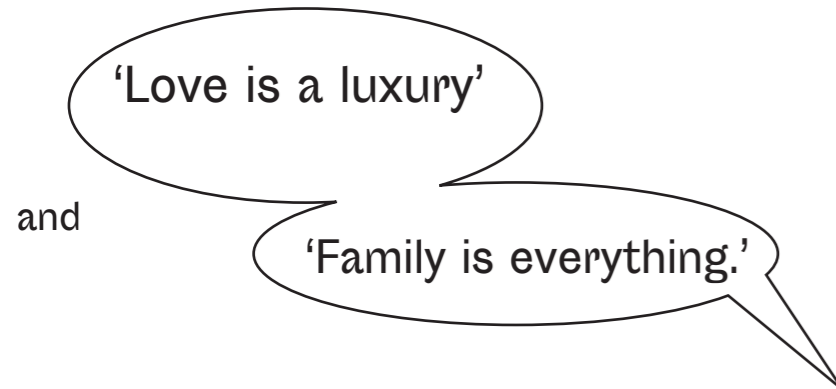
<sup>18</sup> Plath, S. (2011). In *Letters home* (p. xxxii). essay, Faber & Faber.

<sup>19</sup> Hooks, B. (1984). Revolutionary parenting. In *Feminist theory: from Margin to Center* (1st ed., p. 135). South End Press.

<sup>20</sup> Hooks, B. (1984). Revolutionary parenting. In *Feminist theory: from Margin to Center* (1st ed., p. 142). South End Press.

## LOVE IS A LUXURY

There are these two famous contradicting sayings my grandmother loved to preach;



I never questioned why she never put love and family together in the same sentence because at the time I thought it was implied. When I was a teenager, my grandmother would ask daily if I was a good student at school or if I finished my homework on time. She never graduated from primary school, therefore she could not understand how annoying those questions were for a teenager at the time. I recall her saying;

You are not allowed to have a boyfriend!!! It is a waste of time!!! You are far too young to know what love is let alone experience it!!! You should be studying instead!!!

I did not realize until my 20s that my grandmother was never actually in love with my grandfather, they just shared a family together and that was all the love she needed according to her. She was even proud to state that their marriage was not arranged since most stereotypical Cypriot marriages were at the time (the 1920s-1950s). She was 18 when she was engaged and by the time she was 27, she already had 3 children. Even though I knew from a young age that they were sleeping in different rooms, I never thought much of it mostly because she would always share her bed with me when I stayed overnight. During those nights I always looked forward to her stories about saints -those were the only stories she knew- and I found my grandfather's presence at the time an inconvenience. His presence (his weaponized incompetence) would often imply demands for food or to run an errand and that would put a hold on our storytimes. That is why talking to my grandmother about love makes me icky. Asking her more questions about the concept of love in her perception feels like I am asking questions to get answers that I do not necessarily want to hear, but for the sake of our relationship, I should. It is always sad to hear the reality of most Cypriot weddings of the past which is why she was proud to say that my grandfather fell in love, without feeling the need for that love to be mutual from her side as well.

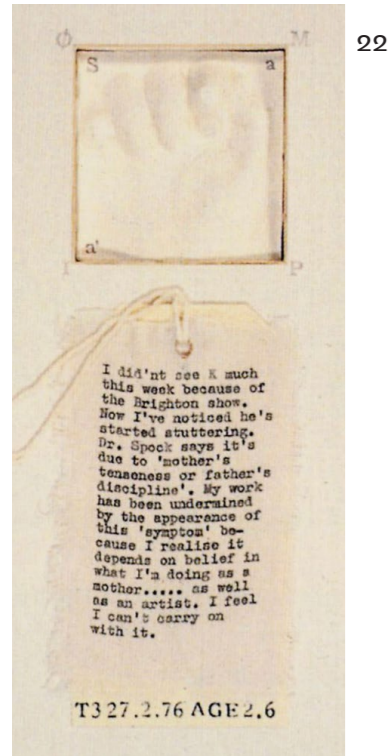
“I only knew that to have a child was to assume adult womanhood to the full, to prove myself, to be “like other women”.”<sup>21</sup>

I concluded that choosing who to be in love with was never an option or a priority for my grandmother. During our (first) attempt at feminist discussions last year, for the first time ever she confessed to me that a young doctor came to temporarily work in her village when she was in her 20s and he took an interest in her. She purposely avoided admitting that she liked him back, but I did not want to insist on it. It did not seem like a light-hearted conversation to force out an answer that could potentially make her feel sad. Even if my grandmother was interested, their love story was doomed before it could even begin. You see, my grandmother ‘belonged’ in the lowest poor social class which meant that marrying a promising successful young doctor was something his mother would never approve of. But even if by a miracle his mother was compassionate of their love, society would not have accepted it. It was expected from him to find a young woman from the same class, she tried to say to me lightheartedly but I know when my grandmother puts on a fake smile. Afterall, fake smiles hiding pain was part of my heritage from her.

<sup>21</sup> Rich, A. (1995). Anger and Tenderness. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (p.25) W.W. Norton & Company.

## HER INTERGENERATIONAL GIFT

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In a review about Mary Kelly's revolutionary feminist work, Kathy Noble perfectly describes the content of her work as;

**“One day she woke up and looked down at her breasts and realized they had lost their independence.”<sup>23</sup>**

Kelly throughout her personal yet relevant conceptual works conveys and emphasizes how women's psychology throughout the centuries had been greatly affected by the biased social-political structure. In an interview with 'Frieze' when asked about the difficulties of being a female artist Kelly states the following;

**“Until the 1970s, the artist, by definition, was assumed to be a man. He could incorporate the feminine as a transgressive gesture, but to be an artist and a woman was like a double negative. Difference subverted the universal category of greatness and that was the biggest hurdle we had to overcome because it was psychological: the belief that there never had been, and never could be, great women artists.”<sup>24</sup>**

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, M. (1997). *Mary Kelly (Phaidon Contemporary Artist Series)* (1st ed.)(p.45). Phaidon Press.

<sup>23</sup> Noble, K. (2011, June 1). *Mary Kelly*. Frieze. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.frieze.com/article/mary-kelly>

<sup>24</sup> Kelly, M. (2018, February 2). *Women in the Arts: Mary Kelly Interview*. Frieze. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.frieze.com/article/women-arts-mary-kelly>

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What strikes me the most is how I can understand the frustration and strongly empathize with this 'double negative' characterization in 2021. Even though my generation's stigma is supposed to be less cruel and severe, it still feels like a permanent marking tracked on women, therefore it makes it hard for me to 'appreciate' that at least I was not born in the earlier generation. Especially since millions of women are still living in obscurity, teaching younger women the same regressive values that they were taught - maybe because they do not know; as humans we tend to be scared of the unknown - rejecting their rightful position in the social-political structure, an equal division of labor and an opportunity for self-discovery (our individuality which is not justified by our gender).

Kelly mentions,

**“Today, there are two generations of feminists who have been mentors for younger women and there is so much cross-generational engagement within institutions, across institutions and outside of them.”<sup>25</sup>**

In my 20s, I finally asked her why she was unable to finish primary school and she looked at me with an awkward yet concerned smile and said that when she was in the third grade in her primary school, 2 adult women (χωριανές) approached her and started making fun of her pubescent breasts, that were apparently bigger than the normal for her age. As if as soon as a child starts showing her feminine built and traits, it diminishes her value. She was convinced from a very young age that a woman's body was embarrassing and vulnerable and that was enough for her to take this unfair decision to quit school. As if puberty was not enough to figure out, why did those women feel the need to weaponize it against her? Puberty gives nourishment to insecurities and doubt which in years will be passed down to me as an intergenerational gift from her. In fact, in her very words (and my translation), she said, 'I wish my father would have slapped some sense in me when I told him that I would stop going to school'. My grandmother regrets her decision to this day which is why women should support women and not make them feel ashamed and discouraged for existing. She continued by saying that she used to hide among the goats pretending to milk one every time she would spot her teacher passing by their house. When he did see her, he would shout and almost beg her to return back to school, but even after promising that her absences would not be taken into consideration, it was too late to change her mind.

<sup>25</sup> Noble, K. (2011, June 1). *Mary Kelly*. Frieze. Retrieved December 23, 2021, from <https://www.frieze.com/article/mary-kelly>



## MY FEAR OF BECOMING LIKE THEM

Quinn Latimer in her essay 'My Mother, My Other; Or, Some Sort of Influence' expresses,

"... It was something to do, I suppose. I suppose I had been doing it my whole life: reading the books my mother read, watching the films she watched, trying on the politics she wore, sometimes embodied. Feeling her sensibilities cross my face. What that felt like. Trying on her intelligence, her seriousness, her ambition, wit, anger, grief, skepticism, mania, ardor. It was a look."<sup>26</sup>

One of my biggest fears growing up was that I would eventually end up becoming just like those stereotypical grandmothers I used to make faces at when I was forced to attend church with my family. Being 17 years old and not being able to understand a single word of the psalms prompted me to observe everything else that took place inside the church instead. I found those old paintings boring and the seating arrangement sexist. Why do men get to sit at the front benches while women are always forced to sit at the back? Why are women only allowed to enter the chancel when it is time for cleaning? Why are those women the same elderly women who proudly share their seats on the benches at the back with their grandchildren for a chance to show them off? Is it because they think that they represent an extension of themselves? These women-mothers-grandmothers all dress alike (always in black), wearing the same (only) gold earrings to prove that they are capable of dressing formally, and of course, they never wear a trace of makeup.

"Conscious and wary of the mother influence: it's a gift and burden."<sup>27</sup>

These submissive women without individuality became feisty and confrontational only between themselves, fighting over the church's cleaning duties. My grandmother was not any exception. However, now she seems to be tired of the pointless drama of who is in charge of cleaning what, and on which day. I believe these petty fights are inevitable from happening since they were all cleaning autonomously at church the same way they were cleaning their own houses. These women weren't 'designed' to follow a schedule or rely on teamwork to clean their homes.

They only relied on themselves.

<sup>26</sup> Latimer, Quinn. "My Mother, My Other; Or, Some Sort of Influence." *Stationary 1*, HongKong, Spring Workshop, Spring 工作室, 2015, p. 10  
<sup>27</sup> Latimer, Quinn. "My Mother, My Other; Or, Some Sort of Influence." *Stationary 1*, HongKong, Spring Workshop, Spring 工作室, 2015, p. 14

## MY FREEDOM AND THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US



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Recently I watched the 'No Home Movie' directed and filmed by Chantal Ackerman in 2015. Even though this documentary is a still life study of the last years of her elderly mother Natalia Ackerman -a Polish immigrant and survivor of Auschwitz- my mind immediately focuses on the kitchen's setting in her mother's Brussels flat. Something about a mother and a daughter sharing meals and exchanging random yet substantial conversations without the need for conventional storytelling allows me to feel a sense of comfort and security. Without any sort of premeditation, throughout the movie, Ackerman keeps positioning her digital camera in particular and uncommon places around the house, offering new insights and different perspectives that make the movie so intimate and precious. As viewers, we are focusing on things unsaid and unseen, experiencing a lot of different emotions from these scenes. For instance, we are facing Ackerman's back while they are eating in the kitchen compelling us to focus on their hand movements instead; we are listening to their conversation about potatoes and the scratching sound of the fork and knife against their plate; we are observing the decorated house focusing on (un)important objects that are situated in the space. 'No Home Movie' was Ackerman's last work before she took her own life shortly after her mother's death, however it should not be viewed as a sad film about death. Instead, it should be about embracing the simplest and yet the most complicated thing in the world which is the relationship between a mother and a daughter. Their video call sessions, especially the awkward yet cherished close-up moments bring memories of the distanced relationship between me and my grandmother over the last years.

<sup>28</sup> Strauss, F. (2020). *Claire Atherton, editor: "No Home Movie" is not a sad film about death* [Photograph]. Téléràma. <https://www.telerama.fr/cinema/claire-atherton-monteuse-no-home-movie-n-est-pas-un-film-triste-sur-la-mort,138676.php>

During an interview in 2020 with Ackerman's editor Claire Atherton she expresses that,

**"Sometimes we are close when we are far away, sometimes we are far when we are close."<sup>29</sup>**

After watching Ackerman's film, I've been contemplating my own decisions over the past 6 years of my life. During these years I have only been able to see my grandmother for a few days in the months of summer when I return to Cyprus for vacation. Perhaps once per month, my father would visit my grandmother and video call me for a short time while he was there using this 'complicated modern technology' that she refuses to understand. It is interesting how in order for our intergenerational conversations to take place my father's presence (the middle generation) is required. This distance greatly affected our relationship in many ways. My grandmother became less concerned about my image and my life choices. She only wishes happiness for me;

**"Πάντα ευτυχία να έσσιεις στην ζωή σου κόρη μου...  
Να έσσιεις την ευκη μου."**

Maybe the distance alienated our relationship throughout the years? In her book 'My Mother Laughs', Ackerman mentions,

**"And I don't know why or how but she's letting me be. My mess doesn't seem to bother her anymore. She doesn't seem to notice it. She accepts it. She accepts the way I am. It wasn't like that before but since her brush with death, she pulled through, she changed. She knows what matters and what doesn't and she accepts me".<sup>30</sup>**

It is true that our bond is not suffocating me anymore, but on the other hand, I would lie if I denied feeling guilty about this well-deserved freedom that I finally started obtaining. Adrienne Rich in her book 'Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution' explains why I feel this way;

**"You will do this because I know what is good for you" is difficult to distinguish from "You will do this because I can make you."<sup>31</sup>**

<sup>29</sup> Strauss, F. (2020b, December 8). Claire Atherton, editor: "No Home Movie' is not a sad film about death" Interview. Télérama. Retrieved December 23, 2021

from <https://www.telerama.fr/cinema/claire-atherton-monteuse-no-home-movie-n-est-pas-un-film-triste-sur-la-mort,138676.php>

<sup>30</sup> Ackerman, C. (2019). *My Mother Laughs* (p. 2). Silver Press.

<sup>31</sup> Rich, A. (1995). Anger and Tenderness. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (p.38) W.W. Norton & Company.

I let her control my life against my own better judgment for most of my life. That is how confusing this suffocating love can become once the child begins to lose their chance to express their individuality. Hence why I am finally bursting my bubble in my 20s. Rich's saying,

**"I was haunted by the stereotype of the mother whose love is "unconditional", and by the visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity"<sup>32</sup>**

resonates perfectly with my state of mind at the time.

Because of the distance, it often felt like I was taking away from her the only thing she knew how to provide for me. I felt guilty for not wanting that, however coming back home in the summers means that she is more interested in listening to my life experiences away from home more than lecturing me about not going to church, and I find that precious.

<sup>32</sup> Rich, A. (1995). Anger and Tenderness. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (p.23) W.W. Norton & Company.

## (WOMEN AND MEN MUST REVOLUTIONIZE THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS)

Once I started understanding more about the chain reaction of what society led by men created for women, it is hard for me not to be confrontational. It is hard not to want to expose those 'errors and omissions excepted' patriarchal laws imposed on mothers with no regard to their well-being. I have decided I will no longer keep to myself like did when I was younger but instead, I want to take action. hooks offers different solutions towards a step further to equal parenting. However, this can only happen by a massive change in the mental outlook worldwide. Bell Hooks in her book 'In Feminist theory: from Margin to Center' says,

"...women and men must revolutionize their consciousness."<sup>33</sup>

Before anything else, women need to stop being primarily responsible for child care, which would gradually eliminate sexism and the problem of men participating unequally or not at all in child care. Another solution would be by re-introducing communal child care, or taking a detour and determining what works best for the benefit of society as a whole, rather than thinking what would be best for a single individual household. I am uncertain if I would ever want to have a daughter (or a child in general) but if I ever were to become a mother, I would start from as Hooks said,

"Women need to know that it is important to discuss child care with men before children are conceived or born... Most women and men do not discuss the nature of childrearing before children are born because it is simply assumed that women will be caretakers."<sup>34</sup>

If I ever were to become a mother,  
I would like her to be her own **DESIGN**.  
To make critical decisions for **HERSELF**.

(It does sound cliché even though it still feels like an unrealistic wish)

<sup>33</sup> Hooks, B. (1984). Revolutionary parenting. In *Feminist theory: from Margin to Center* (1st ed., p. 146). South End Press.

<sup>34</sup> Hooks, B. (1984). Revolutionary parenting. In *Feminist theory: from Margin to Center* (1st ed., p. 141). South End Press.

My grandmother shares the same wishful thinking as Susan Griffin stated in her essay,

"I wanted her life to be perfect... how I wanted her to suffer nothing that I suffered."<sup>35</sup>

I cannot speak for mothers since I am not one but that is precisely the bullseye of this problematic thought. We need to let go of the stigma that only mothers can truly take care of children. I do not need to be a mother in order to mother. There is no need for any more sacrifices and there is definitely no need for things to stay the way they are. In addition, I would like to replace the word 'perfect' that Griffin used with the word 'hers' since my individuality was partly deprived from me as a granddaughter myself, I can see that not knowing who you are and being told what you should be has not been a solution but has in fact only exposed more individuality problems. Let's deconstruct this old fashioned non-functional state of mind in order to rebuild society as a caring community where parenting is not exclusive. Just like my grandmother would say,

"Καθε δεντρο εσχει την χαρη του."

Παναγιώτα Μηνά Αριστοδήμου

<sup>35</sup> Griffin, S. (2001). Feminism and Motherhood. In M. Davey (Ed.), *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood* (1st ed., p. 39). Seven Stories Press.

## TRANSLATION (CYPRIOT DIALECT TO ENGLISH)

Γιαγιά = Grandmother

Χωριανές = Female villagers

Πάντα ευτυχία να έσσιεις στην ζωή σου κόρη μου = I wish you eternal happiness

Να έσσιεις την ευκιή μου = You have my blessing

Κάθε δέντρο έσχει την χάρη του = Every tree has its own trait/blessing

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