

Motherhood as resistance

Literature



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Response Paper and Summary Stephanie Li's essay 'Motherhood as Resistance' specifically considers the articulation of motherhood in Harriet Jacob's novel 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl'. In this context of recognition the article begins by recognizing that for slave's motherhood was an almost non-existent concept as the child became the property of the slave master. This then problematizes the very notion of the female gender. The article considers parts of Jacob's novel where the narrator affirms her motherhood; in this way the article claims that the novel eschews traditional perspectives that hold slave motherhood as non-existent. The article argues that the novel specifically resists these perspectives, as it constructs a narrative identity that is almost entirely contingent on the motherhood. The article then goes on to consider specific details of the novel. In the section 'Maternity: A Rhetoric of Resistance,' Li considers that the novel establishes how human bondage and the family unit are diametrically opposed. In addition to positioning motherhood as the antithesis of slavery, Li's essay advances a feminist critique. In this way she argues that Jacobs represents, "represents a significant counterforce to a deeply patriarchal and male-dominated institution" (Li, p. 18). In addition to these feminist points, Li's essay considers the notion of identity. In this way the notion of motherhood as identity unto itself is advanced. Still, Li additionally considers that this may be too limiting a concept. Later in the essay she considers more complex notions of identity in Jacob's novel. She argues towards broader ranging concepts, such that motherhood is the choice towards freedom, or an entirely self-less position.

There are a number of prominent considerations regarding Stephanie Li's essay. The centrality of the Jacob's novel to motherhood is undeniable. In <https://assignbuster.com/motherhood-as-resistance/>

this way one considers the instances where Jacob's directly embraces her children's humanity, outside of the traditional master/slave context (Jacobs). In terms of the master/save narrative, there is the consideration of the North Carolina Supreme Court's decision in *State v. Mann*. In this instance, Mann had beaten a slave; while he had been convicted of assault this decision was overturned by the North Carolina Supreme Court (North Carolina Supreme Court, p. 130). The court ruled that the slave was actually the property of Mann. This decision is directly parallel to contentions in Li's essay that slaves were removed from traditional considerations as mothers and instead viewed as property. Contrasting these narratives one recognizes the strong emphasis on motherly nursing in Mary Seacole's, through her experiences in the Crimean War (Seacole). Still, perhaps more contrasting is Sojourner Truth's story, wherein Truth escaped with her daughter to freedom (Truth, p. 245). In this way Truth affirms motherly connections, in the same way that Jacobs affirms these bonds of motherhood in her own narrative. Still, there is also the consideration that Li's emphasis on motherhood ignores broader ranging human concerns that are negated through the process of human bondage. Ultimately, however, Li's essay highlights the importance of the way Jacob establishes motherhood; however, it must be recognized this is not an entirely isolated incident.

References

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