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Matrilineal Inheritance: Unearthing Subjugated Knowledge and Construction of Self in Paule Marshall's Daughters

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The transmission of knowledge and the formation of selfhood within matrilineal structures represent a fecund yet underexplored nexus in feminist epistemology and postcolonial studies. This study posits that Paule Marshall's *Daughters* offers a compelling literary terrain for excavating the epistemological significance of matrilineal inheritance, particularly concerning the unearthing of subjugated knowledge and their profound influence on the construction of female subjectivity. While existing scholarship has illuminated various facets of Marshall's work, a focused philosophical examination of the epistemological weight of intergenerational matrilineal connections and their impact on self-formation within the specific sociopolitical context of the novel remains a desideratum. The central problem is that matrilineal inheritance, as depicted in the novel under consideration, functions as a crucial epistemological framework through which subjugated knowledge, often obscured by patriarchal and neocolonial forces are transmitted, thereby fundamentally shaping the protagonists' understanding of themselves and their world. This engenders the ensuing pivotal interrogative: How do the intergenerational transmissions of matrilineal narratives, experiences, and wisdom in *Daughters* serve as epistemic pathways for the acquisition of knowledge and the subsequent construction of a resilient and nuanced sense of selfhood for the female characters? The objective of this study is to explicate the epistemological role of matrilineal inheritance in *Daughters*. This implies both identifying the specific forms of knowledge transmitted (historical, cultural, emotional, political) and analysing their influence on the protagonists' evolving identities. To achieve this, it is relevant to adopt a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, drawing upon feminist epistemologies and postcolonial theory to interpret the narrative's imbricated layers of personal experience, familial history, and sociopolitical context. This approach is pertinent as it allows for a nuanced understanding of how lived experiences and embodied knowledge, often marginalised within dominant epistemological frameworks, contribute to the formation of selfhood. However, its inherent interpretative feature requires a rigorous reflexivity to mitigate researcher bias, and its focus on individual or textual experience may preclude broader quantitative generalisations. To conduct the current investigation, two major axes

will be considered. The former examines the transmission of subjugated knowledge through matrilineal lines. This involves analysing the narrative instances where ancestral stories, cultural practices, and embodied wisdom are shared between mothers, daughters, and grandmothers, and how those transmissions challenge dominant historical narratives and epistemological paradigms. The latter focuses on the agency of the female characters in appropriating and integrating this inherited knowledge into their own self-construction. It also shows how the protagonists navigate the complexities of their identities in relation to their matrilineal heritage and the broader sociopolitical forces that seek to define them.

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INTRODUCTION

The intricate relationship between knowledge acquisition, its transmission across generations, and the formation of individual and collective identities has long occupied a central position within philosophical and critical thought.

Within the specific context of marginalised communities, particularly those shaped by the enduring legacies of colonialism and patriarchy, the pathways through which subjugated knowledge and experiences are preserved and disseminated take on profound epistemological significance. To contextualise the current study, Paule Marshall's *Daughters*, published in 1991, serves as a compelling literary terrain. Set primarily in the fictional Caribbean island of Triunion and the United States, the novel intricately weaves the story of Ursa Mackenzie, a young Black American woman navigating her identity against the backdrop of her mother, Estelle's, enigmatic past and the

enduring legacies of colonialism. The narrative's exploration of intergenerational relationships among women and the transmission of their experiences underscores the significance of matrilineal connections as vital sources of knowledge and cultural continuity, making it a particularly fertile ground for looking into the epistemology of inherited wisdom within marginalised communities.

To go ahead with this exegesis, it is sufficient to traverse the existing scholarly landscape, identifying key critical engagements that, while not exclusively focused on this precise intersection, offer foundational insights into its constituent elements. In an essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1981), Audre Lorde articulates the inherent limitations of using dominant frameworks to analyse and dismantle systems of oppression, implicitly underscoring the necessity of recognizing and valuing alternative epistemologies rooted in the

lived experiences of marginalised groups, including the embodied knowledge often transmitted within female kinship networks. Further, Bell Hooks, in the *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), elaborates on the significance of centring the perspectives and experiences of Black women in feminist thought, advocating for an epistemology grounded in the specificities of their historical and social realities, a perspective that resonates with the exploration of matrilineal knowledge in Marshall's work.

Moving into literary criticism, Carole Boyce Davies's *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994) provides a crucial framework that helps to understand how Black women writers engage with issues of identity formation and the complexities of historical and cultural displacement. Her analysis of oral traditions and storytelling as forms of counter-discourse illuminates the epistemological power inherent in the narratives shared within matrilineal lines, a theme central to the study of *Daughters*. Similarly, Mae G. Henderson's *Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition* (1991) highlights the dialogic and intertextual nature of Black women's writing. This essay suggests a lineage of shared experiences and knowledge that inform individual narratives, a concept applicable to the intergenerational transmission within Marshall's novel. However, while those studies acknowledge the significance of female narratives, they do not explicitly foreground a focused epistemological analysis of matrilineal inheritance.

More recently, studies have continued to explore the intersections of gender, race, and epistemology in African Diasporic literature. For instance, Jennifer E. Obidah, Karen Manheim Teel, and Susan L. Lytle's *Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools* (2000) examines the role of cultural knowledge and intergenerational communication in shaping the educational

experiences and identities of Black youth, offering insights into the enduring impact of familial knowledge transmission, albeit within a specific educational context. Better still, Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995), in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, focuses on the importance of black women's education. This enables women to learn and teach history or other significant experiences to their descendants. To Guy-Sheftall, "a strong advocate for black women's liberation, Cooper was especially concerned about the accessibility of higher education for black women. She also felt that elevating the status of black women could uplift the entire black race" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 8).

Clearly, in *Daughters* education provides the young women, particularly Ursa Mackenzie, with the tools for intellectual growth, critical thinking, and the development of their own perspectives. This enables them to transcend the traditional roles and expectations that might otherwise confine them and foster a sense of self-reliance and the ability to define their own identities in a complex world. Ursa's education in the United States contrasts with the more traditional environment of Triunion. This exposes her to different ways of thinking and being, ultimately fueling her struggle for self-definition.

Furthermore, contemporary studies in postcolonial ecofeminism, such as Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari's *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences* (1996), highlight how women in marginalised communities possess unique ecological knowledge passed down through generations, often intertwined with broader cultural and historical understandings. While not directly focused on *Daughters*, this work underscores the epistemological significance of intergenerational female knowledge within specific socioenvironmental contexts. It also hints at broader patterns of knowledge transmission. Exactly alike, Stanlie Myrise James and Abena Pokua Adompim

Busia (2013) directly address the complexities of matrilineal structures in African Diasporic communities in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*. They emphasise their role in shaping kinship patterns, resource distribution, and the transmission of cultural values, providing a crucial theoretical lens for analysing the familial dynamics in Marshall's novel, though its epistemological implications warrant further exploration.

Alongside the above theoretical works, various other critical studies devoted to Paule Marshall's *Daughters* help to comprehend her literary project. Among them, are Moira Ferguson, V. Madhavi, and Silvia Castro Borrego. Respectively, Ferguson's "Of Bears & Bearings: Paule Marshall's *Diverse Daughters*" (1999) examines the double exposures, namely "discontinuous" and "multiple." According to Ferguson, "Ursa uses this photographic term, double exposures, to characterise diverse corruptions played out in the United States and Triunion" (Ferguson, 1999, p. 177). Madhavi's article, "Empowerment and Identity: Exploring the Complexities of Black Women's Experiences in Paule Marshall's *Daughters*" (2020) reveals that Marshall's fiction thematizes "the complexities of post-colonial mentality in the island of Triunion and its intriguing reflection in American urban cities" (Madhavi, 2020, p. 4454). Silvia Castro Borrego (2022), in "The Expanding of Consciousness, Integral Consciousness, and Conscious Evolution in Paule Marshall's Fiction", interrogates the cultural scope of the journeys of Marshall's characters. In accordance with Castro Borrego's work.

Involvement with the journey takes a deeper meaning in each character's center, for it reveals an introspective journey back to their true selves. Their inner journey becomes empowering when it focuses on centering, rooting, and finding what Merle Hodge calls 'one's true-true name' (Castro Borrego, 2022, p. 114).

Despite those valuable contributions, a focused philosophical reflection that specifically delves into the epistemological function of matrilineal inheritance in Paule Marshall's *Daughters* as a site for the transmission of subjugated knowledge and its constitutive role in the formation of female subjectivity remains an area warranting deeper investigation. This study posits that the intergenerational exchange of narratives, experiences, and embodied wisdom within the matrilineal lineage depicted in *Daughters* constitutes a critical epistemological framework that challenges dominant, often patriarchal and neocolonial, modes of knowing and being. The main research question that guides this study is: How does the matrilineal transmission of subjugated knowledge in Paule Marshall's *Daughters* serve as a vital epistemological pathway for the construction of selfhood and agency among female characters?

To address the above question, this critical reflection proposes to adopt a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, drawing upon feminist epistemology and postcolonial theory. This approach is particularly substantial as it allows for a nuanced interpretation of the lived experiences and embodied knowledge articulated within the narrative, moving beyond purely structural or thematic analyses to engage with the subjective dimensions of knowledge acquisition and identity formation. The hermeneutic aspect involves a close reading of the text, paying attention to recurring motifs, narrative structures, and characters' interactions, while the phenomenological dimension focuses on the lived experiences and perceptions of the female characters as they navigate their socio-cultural realities and engage with their matrilineal inheritance. The relevance of this methodology lies in its capacity to illuminate the often-occluded epistemological contributions of marginalised voices and to comprehend how knowledge is not merely abstract but is profoundly

embedded in lived experiences and intergenerational relationships.

In terms of structure, this analytical exercise unfolds along two lines of research: “Transmission of subjugated knowledge” and “agentic appropriation”. The former explores the specific forms of knowledge, historical narratives, cultural practices, emotional wisdom, and survival skills that are transmitted across generations within the matrilineal framework of the novel. It analyses the modes of this transmission, such as oral storytelling, embodied practices, and affective communication, and their significance in preserving and disseminating knowledge that challenge dominant epistemological paradigms.

The latter digs into how the female characters, particularly Ursa Mackenzie, actively engage with, interpret, and integrate the inherited knowledge into the construction of their subjectivities. It explores the dynamic interplay between received wisdom and individual agency, showing how those women negotiate their identities within complex sociopolitical landscapes, drawing strength and insight from their matrilineal heritage while simultaneously forging their unique paths.

TRANSMISSION OF SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGE

The inaugural axis of this epistemological study scrutinises the intricate mechanisms by which subjugated knowledge and experiences are transmitted across generations within the matrilineal framework depicted in Paule Marshall’s *Daughters*. It also indicates that the intergenerational relay of narratives, experiences, and embodied wisdom among the female characters is a vital epistemic conduit. This challenges dominant patriarchal and neocolonial epistemologies that often marginalise the lived realities and intellectual contributions of women, particularly those situated within marginalised communities.

One of the salient modes of knowledge transmission within the matrilineal lineage of *Daughters* is the oral tradition of storytelling. In his article, “Writing Is a Technology that Restructures Thought” (1986) Walter J. Ong asserts: “Primary oral culture also keeps its thinking close to the human life world, personalising things and issues, and storing knowledge in stories” (Ong, 1986, p. 25). In other words, through storytelling, Ursa received knowledge. Indeed, analysing the substantial roles played by Marshall’s female characters, Madhavi maintains, “Estelle instills in Ursa a strong sense of community and historical resistance, taking her to pay respects to the statues of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe” (Madhavi, 2020, p. 4456). The novel *Daughters* depicts a number of instances where mothers, grandmothers, and other female figures recount personal histories, familial sagas, and cultural lore, thereby preserving and disseminating knowledge that is often absent from official historical records or dominant cultural narratives. The passage below is illustrative of Ursa’s connection with her ancestral past:

See if you can touch her toes, Ursa-Bea! Reach all the way up and try and touch her toes! (...) Stretch all the way up and touch Congo Jane’s toes, Ursa-Bea. Go ahead. Stretch! I’m not going to let you fall! With her feet planted on Estelle’s narrow shoulders and her ankles in Estelle’s tight grip, with her arm straining out of its socket, she had reached all the way up until she could just touch the toes on the giant foot thrust forward from the edge of the base. And make sure to touch Will Cudjoe’s toes while you’re at it. You can’t leave him out ... She did as she was told, leaning dangerously over to her left to get the other colossal pair of feet. Warmed by the sun, their toes had left as alive as her own (Marshall, 1991, p. 14).

By urging Ursa-Bea to touch Congo Jane’s toes, Estelle implicitly contributes to creating a cultural and ancestral connection between the latter and her

Caribbean past. Interpreting Estelle's deeds in *Daughters*, Joyce Owens Pettis asserts,

Visiting the movement assumes ritualistic qualities when Estelle takes young Ursa there to touch Congo Jane's toes. Ursa, in turn, brings [back her] American friend, Viney, so that she and her might pay homage to the couple. They provide impetus for Ursa's personal resistance, she chooses to privilege the communal over the personal. (Owens Pettis, 1995, p. 67)

Noticeably, the fragmented yet potent memories and anecdotes shared by Estelle Beatrice Harrison Mackenzie with her daughter, Ursa, serve as crucial epistemic fragments. They offer glimpses into the complexities of Barbadian history, the resilience of its people in the face of colonial oppression, and the intricate social dynamics that have shaped their lives. As Carole Boyce Davies argues in *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), such oral narratives function as counter-discourses that resist the homogenising tendencies of dominant historical narratives. Boyce Davies puts it as follows:

We therefore have to insist consistently that non-Westernised African peoples negotiate the terms of their identities in ways other than only 'representing' Blackness, even within the umbrella of a homogeneous 'African' identity. Blackness or Africanness, then, in operational term, has more to do with a sometimes essentialized, tactical assertion as a counterpoint to overwhelming 'whiteness' or Eurocentricity, which tries to pose itself as unmarked but is historically linked to technologies of destruction (Boyce Davies, 2022, p. 8).

This reflection offers alternative epistemologies rooted in lived experiences and collective memory. The texture of those recounted experiences, often imbued with emotional resonance and sensory details, transcends mere factual transmission and embodies a form of tacit knowledge; a knowing

embedded in practice and relationality, as theorized by Michael Polanyi in *The Tacit Dimension* (1967). This embodied knowledge, passed down through generations of women navigating similar socio-political terrains, provides Ursa with an intuitive significance of her heritage and place within a continuum of female experience.

Furthermore, the transmission of practical and survival skills is another crucial dimension of matrilineal knowledge transfer. The novel *Daughters* subtly reveals how women in the family have historically acquired and passed down strategies for navigating economic hardship, social constraints, and political instability. Estelle avows, "(...) the movement, I love it! I'm going to send Ursa-Bea to take my place at the barricades as soon as she's old enough. Nobody here knows it, but I've already got her in training" (Marshall, 1991, p. 223). Obviously, those skills, ranging from resourcefulness in managing households under duress to cultivating supportive networks within the community, represent a form of situated knowledge, as stated by Donna Haraway in *Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988).

This knowledge is not abstract or universal but deeply embedded in the specific historical and material conditions of their lives. Ursa's observations of her mother's pragmatic approach to life in both Barbados and the United States, her ability to negotiate complex social situations, and her unwavering commitment to her family, all contribute to Ursa's own developing comprehension of resilience and agency within constrained circumstances. The intergenerational sharing of such practical wisdom equips her with a *repertoire* of strategies for navigating her own challenges as a Black woman in a predominantly white, patriarchal society.

Beyond oral narratives and practical skills, the matrilineal line also serves as a *conduit* for the

transmission of emotional and psychological insights. The shared experiences of love, loss, resilience, and resistance among the women in the family create a space for the intergenerational transfer of emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms. The unspoken understandings and empathetic connections between mothers and daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters, facilitate the transmission of a particular kind of affective knowledge; a knowing rooted in shared feelings and emotional histories. As Elizabeth Brown-Guillory puts it,

While Ursa is the sum of all of the women in her life –the grandmother for whom she was named, Celestine Marie-Claire Bellegrade who helped to raise her, even her father’s keep-miss –she is indeed her mother’s daughter, guilty of stasis only with men that she respects and loves despite their weaknesses. In addition to her roles of mother, teacher, historian, and mentor, Estelle Harrison is also a cheerleader, cheering her daughter along on her transformative journey (Brown-Guillory, 2006, p. 110).

This emotional inheritance provided by Estelle (mother) to Ursa (daughter) helps her have a sense of belonging, validation, and strength. This anchors her and consolidates her position in a lineage of women who have navigated similar emotional landscapes. As argued in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), the sharing of such emotional truths within marginalised communities is a powerful form of resistance against the dehumanising effects of systemic oppression. This fosters solidarity and collective healing. Indeed, the nuanced emotional understanding that Ursa gradually develops is not solely derived from formal education, but it is profoundly intertwined with the emotional legacies passed down through her matrilineal connections: “It was the way Celestine, who had helped raise her, always wore her hair” (Marshall, 1991, p. 48).

Daughters underscore the significance of those transmission modes. Ursa’s persistent yearning to learn about her mother’s past and her grandmother’s history highlights the epistemic hunger for those subjugated narratives. The recurring motifs of shared meals, intimate conversations, and the passing down of family heirlooms serve as symbolic representations of that intergenerational knowledge transfer. For instance, the significance attributed to certain objects or recipes within the family can be interpreted as embodying layers of historical, cultural, and emotional knowledge. They act as mnemonic devices that connect Ursa to her matrilineal past.

In addition, the novel’s narrative structure often interweaves past and present; it mirrors the cyclical nature of matrilineal connections and reinforces the idea that knowledge is not simply linear, but it is also constantly being revisited, reinterpreted, and passed on. The ensuing textual clues are representative of the process whereby Ursa is provided with knowledge:

Ke’ram. Ke’ram. Ke’ram. Seated on the bed, eyes closed and spine held straight to allow the energy to flow, Ursa silently repeats Ke’ram. Ke’ram that is nothing more than a sound designed to quiet the mind and suspend all thought. Peace; be still. Ke’ram, that when it’s working, takes her in her head down to Triunion and a beach there that’s her [favourite] in the world (Marshall, 1991, pp. 16-17).

The interplay between those various forms of transmitted knowledge (oral narratives, language, practical skills, and emotional insights), creates a rich and complex epistemological inheritance for Ursa. Delving into the educative and cultural scope of language, “language is not only an instrument, but also a repository and a form of thought. A “repository”, because the experience and knowledge of past generations accumulate precisely in the language through which they are passed on to

future generations¹” (Schaff, 1969, p. 18). This inheritance provides her with a multifaceted comprehension of her identity, history, and potential for agency in a world that often seeks to marginalise her. The matrilineal line, therefore, functions not merely as a biological connection but as a vital epistemic lifeline that offers alternative ways of knowing and being that challenge dominant epistemological frameworks. The strength and resilience that Ursa ultimately embodies can be directly attributed to that inheritance of subjugated knowledge, passed down through the enduring bonds of her matrilineal lineage.

Shortly, the exploration of the transmission of subjugated knowledge lays the groundwork for understanding the second crucial aspect of this epistemological study: the active role of the female characters in appropriating and integrating this inherited knowledge into their self-construction. The ensuing section is interested in the agentic appropriation; it delves into how Ursa, informed by the epistemic legacy of her matrilineal forebears, exercises agentic appropriation, actively engaging with, interpreting, and ultimately shaping her own identity and her place in the world.

AGENTIC APPROPRIATION

This stage is interested in the concept of agentic appropriation. This section goes beyond the passive reception of inherited wisdom to explore the dynamic interplay between received knowledge and individual action; it demonstrates how those women negotiate their identities in complex socio-political landscapes, drawing strength and insight from their matrilineal heritage while forging their own paths.

To begin with, Ursa Mackenzie’s persistence in interrogating the relationship between bondmen and women is relevant. Indeed, during her stay in the United States, she is scandalized by the social inequalities and discrimination prevailing between Whites and Blacks, and between men and women. To learn more about that dark past, she decides to delve into it. She believes this would enable her to pinpoint the origins of this social evil. The results of such research are multi-faceted; they enable Ursa not only to complete her academic career and obtain her degree but also to solve an enigmatic problem. In other words, this epistemological curiosity is not merely about acquiring information; it is a crucial step in Ursa’s own self-discovery. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1988), the act of reclaiming and understanding the histories of marginalised women is a vital aspect of decolonising knowledge production and fostering a sense of agency. This vision is apparently voiced in her words:

Male violence must be theorised and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as to effectively organise to change it. Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis (Mohanty, 1988, 339).

Ursa’s insistence on knowing her past, even when met with her advisor’s resistance or evasiveness, underscores her active role in shaping her vision or comprehension of female experience and resilience. The fragmented narratives she pieces together become crucial building blocks in her own evolving sense of self. Further, Ursa’s involvement in the

¹ “La langue est non seulement un instrument, mais aussi un dépôt et une forme de la pensée. Un “dépôt”, car l’expérience et le savoir des générations passées s’accumulent précisément

dans la langue grâce à laquelle ils sont transmis aux générations suivantes” (Schaff, 1969, p. 18).

cultural and political realities of both Barbados and the United States corroborates an active appropriation of the situated knowledge passed down through her matrilineal line. Her awareness of the historical legacies of colonialism and racism, subtly woven into the fabric of her family's narratives, informs her critical perspective on contemporary social injustices. Ursa's desire to learn the relationship between enslaved men and women, as stated in the project below, is significant:

A neglected area in the study of the social life of New World slave communities has been the general nature of gender roles and relationships. This paper examines the relatively egalitarian, mutually supportive relations that existed between the bondmen and the women and their significance for and contribution to the various forms of resistance to enslavement found in the United States and the Caribbean (Marshall, 1991, p. 11).

Ursa's involvement in political activism in the United States, though fraught with its own complexities and disillusionments, signifies an attempt to translate inherited understandings of resistance and struggle into concrete action. This active involvement with the political sphere, informed by the historical consciousness passed down through her family, showcases her agency in applying subjugated knowledge to navigate and challenge dominant power structures. As Patricia Hill Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), black women's knowledge often emerges from their lived experiences of intersecting oppressions, providing unique insights and perspectives that can fuel transformative action. Addressing black women's issues, Collins avers,

Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas not only in the United States, but in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, and other places where Black women now live, has been critical in maintaining social inequalities. Black women engaged in reclaiming and constructing Black women's [knowledge] often point to the politics of suppression that affect their projects (Collins, 2000, p. 3).

Ursa's political awakening can be seen as an agentic appropriation of that critical consciousness. The novel under investigation also discloses how Ursa actively interprets and reinterprets the emotional and psychological legacies of her matrilineal ancestors. The burdens and traumas experienced by her mother and grandmother, though not always explicitly articulated, resonate with Ursa, prompting her to grapple with her emotional vulnerabilities and strengths. Her attempts to comprehend Estelle's emotional complexities and her grandmother's stoicism in the face of hardship represent an active engagement with the affective knowledge transmitted through her lineage. As Vincent Jouve puts it in his book, *Poétique des valeurs* [Poetics of Values], "the codification of the look responds to quite specific criteria"² (Jouve, 2001, p. 19). In *Daughters*, Ursa's "loving look" is advantageous for her, for this provides her with the necessary attention and guidance from her parents. She is now able to pave her way and assert herself as a liberated, responsible woman.

Rather than passively inheriting those emotional patterns, Ursa actively reflects upon them, seeking to apprehend their origins and their influence on her emotional landscape. This process of critical reflection helps her forge her own emotional responses and to develop a more nuanced

² "La codification du regard répond à des critères assez spécifiques" (Jouve, 2001, p. 19).

understanding of female resilience and vulnerability. In *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1981), Audre Lorde examines the exploration of inner, often suppressed, emotions is a crucial aspect of self-empowerment and the dismantling of oppressive structures. To Lorde, "For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that their real power is rediscovered" (Lorde, 1981, pp. 88-89). Ursa's introspective journey exemplifies her agentic appropriation of affective knowledge.

Moreover, Ursa's choices regarding her relationships and career path can be viewed as acts of agentic appropriation; they are informed by the experiences and wisdom of her matrilineal forebears but ultimately determined by her desires and aspirations:

Go away; Said almost gently. The voice inside her is almost gentle. She's long ceased being annoyed by Lowell's ritual with the phone. And by all his other irritating little rituals and habits. Just go away. Please. *Vas-y, t'en prie* –pleading with him in the Creole she learned from Celestine (Marshall, 1991, pp. 19-20).

While she is undoubtedly influenced by the stories and experiences of the women who came before her, she does not simply replicate their lives. Instead, she actively weighs her options, makes conscious decisions, and navigates her own path, demonstrating her agency in applying inherited knowledge to her own unique circumstances. Her intellectual pursuits and her eventual return to Barbados signify a deliberate attempt to integrate her heritage with her own aspirations for self-fulfilment. She finds it necessary to take her fate into her own hands:

I'm not sure that you understand what you mean, Viney. I'm gonna tell you. The woods are on fire here, my granddaddy used to say, and we need

everybody that can tote a bust of water come running. He used to say that all the time, talking about the situation of Black folks in this country, you know, and the need for all of us to stand up and be counted (Marshall, 1991, p. 102).

This active shaping of her life trajectory, informed but not dictated by her matrilineal inheritance, underscores the dynamic interplay between received knowledge and individual agency. Briefly, the concept of agentic appropriation provides a crucial lens through which to comprehend the dynamic relationship between the female characters in *Daughters* and the subjugated knowledge transmitted through their matrilineal lineage. Ursa Mackenzie's journey, in particular, exemplifies a continuous process of actively engaging with, interpreting, and integrating inherited narratives, skills, and emotional insights into the construction of her own multifaceted identity.

CONCLUSION

This study embarked on a philosophical exploration into the epistemology of matrilineal inheritance within Paule Marshall's *Daughters*, with the central objective of showing how the intergenerational transmission of subjugated knowledge shapes the construction of selfhood and agency among the female characters.

By using a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology, drawing upon feminist epistemology and postcolonial theory, this critical reflection sought to move beyond thematic readings to comprehend the lived experiences and embodied wisdom conveyed through matrilineal lines as vital epistemic pathways. The first axis, "transmission of subjugated knowledge" revealed the multifaceted ways in which historical narratives, cultural practices, emotional intelligence, and survival skills are passed down across generations of women in the novel. The textual analysis demonstrated the significance of oral storytelling as a counter-discourse to dominant narratives, the embodied

nature of practical skills learned through observation and participation, and the profound impact of shared emotional histories on individual understanding. This axis considered the matrilineal lineage not merely as a familial structure but as a crucial conduit for preserving and disseminating knowledge, often marginalised by patriarchal and neocolonial epistemologies.

The second axis, “agentic appropriation,” demonstrated how the female characters, such as Ursa Mackenzie, actively engage with, interpret and integrate this inherited knowledge into their self-construction. The present study underscored Ursa’s active questioning and seeking of her mother’s history, her application of inherited critical consciousness to political engagement, and her reflective engagement with the emotional legacies of her forebears. This axis disclosed that the reception of matrilineal knowledge is not passive but an active process of interpretation and application, leading to the development of agency and a nuanced sense of self within complex socio-political realities.

The hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology proved particularly efficacious in illuminating the subjective dimensions of knowledge acquisition and identity formation within the novel. Its strengths lay in its capacity to delve into the lived experiences and embodied knowledge articulated by the characters, providing a more profound understanding than purely structural or thematic analyses could offer. However, a potential limitation lies in the inherent interpretative nature of the methodology, where the researcher’s own situatedness inevitably influences the analysis. Furthermore, while the study drew upon relevant theoretical frameworks, a more extensive engagement with specific philosophical concepts of memory and intergenerational trauma could have further enriched the analysis.

Despite those limitations, this research offers significant insights into the epistemological significance of matrilineal inheritance in *Daughters*. It demonstrates how subjugated knowledge, transmitted through familial bonds of women, serves as crucial resources for self-understanding, resilience, and agency in the face of historical and ongoing marginalisation. This study underscores the importance of recognising and valuing those alternative epistemologies that often remain unacknowledged within dominant knowledge systems. Building upon those findings, several new perspectives and research topics emerge. Future studies could explore the specific linguistic nuances and narrative strategies used in the transmission of matrilineal knowledge in *Daughters*. Those critical reflections could examine the way language itself embodies and conveys cultural and historical understanding. A comparative study of matrilineal knowledge transmission in other African Diasporic literary works could further illuminate the diverse ways in which those epistemological frameworks operate across different cultural contexts.

Additionally, research could investigate the intersection of matrilineal inheritance and ecological knowledge in *Daughters* and explore how women’s relationships with the land and their environment are diffused and inform their identities. Finally, a more in-depth philosophical study of the concept of affective inheritance within the matrilineal context could provide a deeper comprehension of how emotions and traumas are transmitted across generations and shape individual subjectivities.

Conflicts of Interests

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