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**EMPIRICAL REJECTION OF MATERNAL
RATIONALISM AND WISDOM IN ‘MY MOTHER
SAID I NEVER SHOULD’ BY CHARLOTTE
KEATLEY**

Ayşe İŞKEN

**Thesis Advisor
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**MASTER’S THESIS
DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURE
DIVISION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma Charlotte Keatley’nin *My Mother Said I Never Should* adlı oyununda maternal rasyonalizmi ve bilgeliğiyle ilgili geleneksel kabullerin ampirik olarak reddedilmesini ve sorgulanmasını ele almaktadır. Çalışma, her kuşağın geleneksel annelik mirasını reddettiğini ve bu reddin bireylerin özgürleşme ile kimlik oluşturma süreçlerinde nasıl bir rol oynadığını inceleyerek, bu sorgulamanın kuşaklararası çatışmalar ve toplumsal cinsiyet normları ile ilişkisini ve kadın kimliklerinin oluşumundaki etkilerini detaylı bir şekilde analiz etmektedir. 1920-1987 yılları arasında dört farklı kuşağı temsil eden oyunun karakterleri aracılığıyla, toplumsal yapıların bireylerin kimliklerini nasıl şekillendirdiği feminist bir bakış açısıyla değerlendirilmektedir. Doris, geleneksel değerleri ve kadının ev içindeki rolünü somutlaştırırken; Margaret, değişen toplumsal normların etkisiyle modern kadınlık ve annelik anlayışına yönelir. Jackie, bu değişimi kendi döneminin özgürleşme hareketleriyle daha ileri taşır ve eylemleri, değişen toplumsal beklentiler karşısında kimliğini ve arzularını şekillendirirken, geleneksel normların belirgin bir şekilde reddedilişini yansıtır. Rosie ise, kuşaklararası değişimlerin bireysel kimlik üzerindeki etkilerini en yoğun biçimde deneyimler ve kişisel özerklik ile miras alınan roller arasındaki çatışmayı sorgulayarak görünür kılar. Bu çalışma, maternal rasyonelizmin reddini, sadece bireysel bir direniş değil, aynı zamanda kadın rollerini belirleyen geniş toplumsal normlarla olan yüzleşmeleri olarak ele alınır ve kadınların özerklik taleplerinin, feminist bir kimlik inşasına nasıl evrildiğini tartışmakta ve bu sürecin tarihi, kültürel ve sosyal değişimlere bağlı olarak kişilik oluşturmada nasıl önemli olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu tez, gelecekteki feminist drama ve edebiyat çalışmalarında, maternal rollerin toplumsal ve kültürel bağlamlarda daha kapsamlı bir şekilde sorgulanması ve ele alınması için yeni yaklaşımlar ve öneriler sunmaktadır.

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EMPIRICAL REJECTION OF MATERNAL RATIONALISM AND WISDOM IN ‘MY
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the theme of empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom in Charlotte Keatley’s play *My Mother Said I Never Should*. It examines how each generation rejects the traditional legacy of motherhood and explores the role this rejection plays in individuals’ processes of navigating personal autonomy and identity formation. This thesis provides a detailed analysis of how this questioning relates to intergenerational conflicts, gender norms, and their impact on the construction of female identities. Through the characters representing four different generations between 1920 and 1987, this study evaluates, from a feminist perspective, how social structures shape individuals’ identities. Doris embodies traditional values and the woman’s role within the household, while Margaret turns towards modern understandings of womanhood and motherhood under the influence of shifting social norms. Jackie takes this transformation further, propelled by the liberation movements of her time, and her actions reflect a stark rejection of traditional norms as she shapes her identity and desires amidst evolving societal expectations. Rosie, in turn, experiences the effects of intergenerational changes most intensely, questioning the conflict between personal autonomy and inherited roles, thus making this struggle visible. This thesis concludes that this rejection of maternal rationalism is not merely an act of individual resistance but as a reconciliation with broader societal norms that define women’s roles. It discusses how women’s demands for autonomy have evolved into the construction of feminist identities, demonstrating how this process has been crucial in the formation of personal autonomy in connection with historical, cultural, and social changes. The study proposes new approaches and recommendations for future feminist drama and literature studies, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive questioning and examination of maternal roles within social and cultural contexts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sayfa

ÖZET.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPIRICAL REJECTION OF MATERNAL RATIONALISM: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE	13
3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	33
4. <i>MY MOTHER SAID I NEVER SHOULD</i> AS A PLATFORM FOR MOTHER- DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP	37
4.1. Character Analysis.....	48
4.2. Thematic Analysis	56
4.3. Structural Analysis	57
5. DISCUSSION.....	63
6. CONCLUSION.....	69
REFERENCES.....	85
Primary Texts.....	85
Secondary Texts.....	85
CURRICULUM VITAE	93

1. INTRODUCTION

Generational differences have consistently been a subject of study throughout history, characterized by variations in social behaviour, values, and perspectives between age groups. These differences are shaped by a range of factors, including cultural shifts, economic conditions, religious diversity, technological advancements, and psychological maturation. Such intergenerational dynamics often reflect the challenges and opportunities unique to each cohort, shaped by their historical and social contexts. The negotiation of authority, wisdom, and rationality frequently emerges as a central theme in these relationships, particularly within familial contexts. Younger generations may resist or critique the conventional norms and guidance of their parents in the search for their autonomy and their own way of contemporary ideals. This tension is especially evident in mother-daughter relationships, where traditional maternal inheritance may conflict with the daughter's pursuit of personal agency and modern values. Understanding these intergenerational tensions necessitates exploring their root causes, including disparities in communication styles, expectations, and societal norms. Moreover, finding out the reasons behind these tensions and conflicts requires a deep understanding of intergenerational dynamics between individuals or families and the environment they live in to build a mutual dialog and respect. By recognizing the value of both inherited wisdom and contemporary perspectives, families and societies can bridge generational divides, improving and benefiting to create an environment where the young can get wisdom from the older generations. Ultimately, such efforts underline the importance of balancing tradition with innovation, enabling meaningful intergenerational connections while respecting individual autonomy and change.

The exploration of familial relationships, particularly between mothers and their children, provides a fundamental ground for understanding societal norms and personal identities. This perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing both positive and negative aspects of family dynamics to foster healthier connections. Furthermore, addressing these tensions requires a focus on empathy and dialogue, fostering environments where generational differences can be acknowledged and navigated constructively. Von Humboldt et al. (2021: 122, 127) notes that both supportive and conflictual dimensions characterize the ambivalence inherent in

intergenerational relationships. Similarly, Sutor et al. (2017: 1056) emphasize that perceptions of maternal disfavoritism or disparities can significantly impact the psychological well-being of children, further illustrating the tension inherent in such relationships.

The phenomenon of intergenerational rejection, where older generations display disagreement or resistance towards younger minds, is a multifaceted issue rooted in several different factors. Among these factors, cultural and societal norms, psychological projection, differences in values and priorities, communication gaps, and economic and social disparities can foster resentment and a sense of inadequacy, leading to rejection or criticism. Younger generations often tend to bring new lifestyles or ideas, points of view, and innovations that can challenge the existing values of the elder generation. Older individuals may assess these differences as a threat to their control mechanisms or authority. This perceived threat can create a sense of resistance and insecurity, manifesting as critique or rejection of younger individuals who are seen as the subjects of realizing the change. A comprehensive understanding of key concepts and theories relevant to the study's focus on this young mind's empirical rejection of maternal rationalism is portrayed in in this study within the generational and sociocultural context. In the play *My Mother Said I Never Should* by Charlotte Keatley, a narrative framework analysis, examining the portrayal of women in theatrical constructs, feminist discourse within societal contexts, and the use of symbolism, imagery, and theatrical techniques, justify the points regarding these differences between younger and older generations. This disparity can be analysed using key concepts related to rationalism, maternal rationalism, maternal wisdom, and the empiricism of young minds.

Under a general overview of the mother-daughter relationships, it has been stated by many scholars that such relationships are crucial in shaping the psychological and emotional well-being of the determined subjects (Batra and Kohli 2019: 557; Goslin and Koons-Beauchamp, 2023: 128; Guha and Beri, 2024: 1). Guha and Beri (2024: 1, 5) noted the importance of mother-daughter relationships in shaping psychological immunity, coping strategies, and emotional well-being, emphasizing their crucial role in adolescent development and mental health. According to Ogden and Steward (2000: 3), these relationships often involve complex interactions that influence personal

development, added by complicated family dynamics. By analysing these relationships Ogden and Steward (2000: 10) identified the impact concerns demonstrating the interaction between mother and daughter as critical, apart from being recognized for the modelling of behaviour. As such, these relationships have an intricate nature in influencing both psychological and physical health that demands wider introspection. While understanding the mother-daughter relationships, scholars like Mosavel, Simon, and Van Stade (2006: 6,9) referred to the disagreements of opinions between mothers and daughters as elements reflecting generational differences and evolving personal identities. As for Mosavel et al. (2006: 6,9), these disagreements can serve as opportunities for mutual health promotion and advice exchange, fostering intergenerational learning and support. Batra and Kohli (2019: 552-558) emphasized that the generational differences and evolving identities of mothers and daughters contribute to relational dynamics, often reflected in disagreements and emotional negotiations. These conflicts are approached through themes such as transition to friendship and adaptable conflict resolution, shaping their bond across life stages. This, in turn, indicates the need for understanding the factors leading to such conflicts, which can also serve as a platform for enhancing communication and understanding. On the other hand, Biederman et al. (2010: 397) noted that generational conflicts between mothers and daughters are common as they navigate shifts in autonomy, roles, and relational dynamics. According to Biederman et al. (2010: 394), these conflicts manifest in maternal navigational strategies, which can lead to the thread of understanding societal dynamics for improving health promotional strategies tailored to familial and cultural contexts. In this context, Goslin and Koons-Beauchamp (2023: 128) emphasized the importance of examining the mother-daughter relationship and these kinds of conflicts for addressing the needs of different generations and the development of positive body image and its implications for emotional and psychological well-being within both societal and family contexts. On a specific note, when it comes to cultural and societal improvements in terms of mother-daughter relationships, Guha and Beri (2024: 1) referred to the need for fostering greater mutual respect and collaboration. In this context, these relationships evolve, and differences are marked as the consequences of different generational pairs. As daughters mature into adulthood, the mother-daughter relationship transitions toward a more egalitarian structure, marked by mutual recognition of autonomy and shared experiences

(Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, & Kaufman, 2011: 469). This transformation is often characterized by mutual support, shared understanding, and a shift from an asymmetrical parent-child dynamic to a reciprocal friendship-like bond. As such, the scope for improvements reflects broader societal changes that are responsible for promoting egalitarian and supportive family dynamics (Guha and Beri, 2024: 5) as a critical matter of discussion. Finally, balancing family and work-life concerns under the shadow of mother-daughter relationships has been marked as a significant challenge that is influenced by societal expectations and roles played by the respective individuals (Batra and Kohli, 2019: 554). Critically, Ogden and Steward (2000: 10) evaluated the interaction between family responsibilities and career demands as core factors that impact mother-daughter relationships. By highlighting the need for strategies that address these challenges, Ogden and Steward (2000: 10) marked the need for effective management approaches for maintaining both family well-being and personal satisfaction in these relations. By analysing feminist perspectives and comparing the insights in the play (referred to as *My Mother* hereafter), this study explores the experiences of women and their societal roles as evolving across generations. This study shall add relevance to the act of balancing family and work-life concerns and will focus on cultural and societal improvements, which are essential for advancing gender equality and social justice. The study also remains engaged in addressing the influence of matrilineal inheritance within patriarchal norms and the need for shifting societal expectations to support women's evolving roles better. It focuses on the fundamental concepts of rationalism and empiricism, exploring their theoretical implications and applications. Within this framework, the thesis examines the theoretical background of maternal rationalism and wisdom and empirical rejection as core areas of investigation. This play is analysed through the lens of these philosophical concepts, providing a deeper understanding of its themes and dynamics which in turn highlight and give a new way to understand and improve the relationship and offer a new way to understand and improve the relationships between generations. By examining *My Mother* through the frameworks of rationalism and empiricism, the complex interplay of generational expectations, maternal guidance, and individual autonomy can be better understood.

Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother* presents maternal rationalism and wisdom primarily as empirically rejected. The play's eight scenes span many years, alternating between

the present and the past, starting with the youngest characters. The play stages the relationships between mothers and daughters in such a way that preconceptions of how these characters should be interpreted, in terms of age or generation gaps, are challenged. Despite the fact that their perspectives and how they view each other are very different, the audience sees mothers, daughters, and grandmothers struggling equally with the social constraints and real-life situations they are faced with.

The play was written in 1985, proving to be the first by a woman to be commissioned and performed by the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester for the first time in 1987. The play is about the relationships between mothers and daughters and explores the themes of independence, growing up and secrets. It addresses the issues of teenage pregnancy, career prioritization, and single motherhood. It is also about how different generations break free from their parents' traditions and culture. Still popular and performed to this day, *My Mother* embodies ideas, themes, and a challenge to maternal roles and mother-daughter relationships quite relevant and pressing for Western women. Mother-daughter relationships and the complexities within that relationship are at the heart of the play. Widely addressing perceptions and feelings often held by women, levels of experience and understanding are presented and acknowledged that people deny but know to be true. Markedly, at the same time, these perceptions and feelings are, on the whole, rejected by the mothers and their respective daughters. Running parallel to the mother-daughter relationships are the notions of maternal roles, which are embodied, and the rejection and challenge of those roles. The initial innocent and naive maternal roles and expectations develop into complex and often negative feelings about mothers, motherhood, and maternal roles. In addressing the play's core ideas and issues, the overarching maternal role, 'having a choice,' and the rationalism and wisdom associated with that are broadly outlined. Then the rejection of those notions is dealt with, ranging from naivety to embracing a new paradigm of maternal role and acceptance of responsibility, agency, and depth of understanding of the sentence and loss embraced.

Historically, the concept of maternal rationalism has been deeply entrenched in Western culture, often rooted in religious and philosophical traditions that idealize motherhood and associate it with innate wisdom and selflessness. This idealized image, often referred to as the "Madonna" archetype, has persisted in various forms

throughout history, influencing societal expectations and representations of mothers in literature and other cultural mediums. Thurer (1994: 69) examined the historical variability in the perceptions of motherhood, with cultural archetypes often shaping societal expectations and representations. However, the 20th century witnessed significant shifts in feminist rights and thoughts, and it caused emergence of critical perspectives on motherhood. Feminist writers and scholars started to challenge the traditional norms and notions of maternal wisdom, presenting the contradictions and complexities inherent in the experiences of mothers. This shift opened a new era for a more realistic and nuanced portrayal of motherhood in literature, challenging the monolithic image of the “perfect mother.” The play *My Mother* presents a ‘new’ perspective on maternal rationalism and wisdom. Fallibility, ignorance, and unawareness are made the norm for all mothers who ‘instinctively’ believe they know what is best for their daughters. Consequently, this ‘wisdom’ becomes questionable, and it is made fearsome, so there appears a search for a challenge to it so that daughters are free and mothers lose control of a social status they have enacted throughout time. Years of careful nurturing and attention produce women with completely contradictory ambitions: the mother longingly pursues a claim to the outside world, an escape from the dutiful domesticity where she has been locked away by time and tradition. At the same time, the daughter has been carefully raised for that very confinement. The outcome is a trauma of misunderstanding where a daughter can no longer see a mother for what she is. If a daughter cannot understand her mother, then nor can a mother understand her daughter, for the challenge to any traditional designation of maternal instinct is at the core of this misunderstanding. Ultimately, a daughter loses both her mother and her position on the inside. Some key events or milestones that have influenced the study area of “Empirical Rejection of Maternal Rationalism and Wisdom in *My Mother* by Charlotte Keatley” include the feminist movement, which highlights the limitations and stereotypes of traditional maternal roles. Davis (2012: 207) examines how societal changes and feminist activism in the 20th century encouraged a more critical assessment of motherhood’s role within the family and society. These movements have paved the way for a more nuanced and realistic depiction of motherhood, one that acknowledges the challenges, contradictions, and complexities inherent in the maternal experience. The play is examined through the lens of empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom frameworks, a growing

area of research in maternal philosophies. It presents a good artefact for exploration due to the number of characters involved, diversity of age perspectives, within a feminine centered context. In the play, the absence of male characters on stage allows for an in-depth and focused exploration of the inner world of women, providing a nuanced and detailed examination of their thoughts, emotions, and experiences.

Many people widely believe mothers possess an inherent sense of wisdom and deep understanding when it comes to their daughters. However, it is important to note that this notion lacks substantial evidence to support its validity. The characters in the play confront the limitations of their mothers' personal experiences and the influence of societal conventions on their understanding of motherhood. They question the validity of their mother's advice and reject their guidance as well as ignoring the traditional expectations and constitute their own way of life, displaying a readiness to create their own trajectories and establish their own sense of self. Layland et al. (2018: 3) describe how emerging adults use leisure as a context for identity exploration and self-focus. These experiences foster self-discovery, enabling individuals to break away from societal and familial pressures while building a stronger sense of personal autonomy and self-identity. This rejection of maternal wisdom is not merely an act of defiance but rather a complex process of balancing personal agency and societal constraints.

The idea of motherhood is still heavily critiqued and scrutinized within modern society. The tension between traditional expectations and the diverse experiences of women navigating the complexities of parenting in the 21st century is palpable. Contemporary literature often reflects these complexities, exploring the challenges faced by mothers in balancing personal aspirations with societal expectations. *My Mother* remains relevant today as it deals with the complexities of mother-daughter relationships and the passing down through generations of certain values and expectations. With reference to the family constraints and cultural challenges the characters face, this study sets out to explore the feminist rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom in and through the voice of the unsecured and overly attached characters. In a contemporary society where motherly advice and wisdom are being slaughtered as choices are no longer relevant and replicable, life trajectories can go wrong, and family relationships crack, 'the mother' can no longer be taken as the 'rational and wise' being. With the ambition of finding a guiding mother figure for the

insecure daughter, the distressed maternal emotions and worries of Rosie cannot unequivocally guarantee her emotional fulfilment but become the source of a painful family life. From the (dis)empowerment of characters as mothers in the play, the question of whether fulfilment can be guaranteed through mothering is posed. Moreover, in its exploration of family separation, emotional distancing, and the deconstruction of family bonds, the play suggests the impact of the rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom upon family relationships.

Regarding the identification of the problem, this study examines how the play challenges the traditional perception of mothers as inherently rational and wise beings and how this rejection contributes to the intricacies of the mother-daughter relationships that are portrayed. The play presents a generational divide in values and beliefs by depicting a sequence of instances in which daughters question, defy, or outright deny the advice and guidance of their mothers. This rejection of maternal wisdom is not merely a result of generational conflict or youthful rebellion. It is rooted in a deeper inquiry into the validity and relevance of conventional maternal roles and expectations. The play's characters in the play are confronted with the constraints of their mothers' experiences and the ways in which societal norms have influenced their comprehension of motherhood.

The scope of this study focuses on analysing a deeper character development, thematic elements, and narrative techniques applied by the play to challenge and subvert the traditional notion of motherhood. The analysis through this study is limited to two plays and does not include other works by the same authors or similar plays by different authors. Thus, this limited focus may limit the applicability of the results to other texts or broader literary contexts. Additionally, the interpretation and analysis of the plays are influenced by the subjective interpretation of the text, which may include personal biases and prejudices. Different analyses and interpretations may provide alternative insights and conclusions. Furthermore, the play is set through a specific time period and cultural and historical context, which may limit the relevance of findings to other different time periods or cultural settings. The study does not explore the potential variations on how these themes may differ in other varying socio-cultural environments. Moreover, regarding the theoretical framework, the study analyses specific theories, maternal rationalism, and wisdom, along with empirical rejection.

Other theoretical frameworks could provide a different interpretation of the play and different insights.

The objective of this thesis is to explore how the empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom is portrayed in the play *My Mother*. It seeks to analyse the ways in which younger generations, particularly daughters, challenge and reject maternal authority and guidance. Additionally, this study explores the impact of such rejection on mother-daughter relationships while also addressing the broader implications for literature and society's interpretive frameworks regarding maternal roles, expectations, and the shifting dynamics of generational conflict. Specific aims of this study are to define instances in which maternal guidance is empirically rejected in the play, to analyse the reasons for and repercussions of these rejections, to identify the influence of these rejections on the growth of the female characters and their interactions with their mothers, investigate the play's depiction of maternity in the context of broader social and cultural implications, to explore how these forms of rejections shape the identity and relations with mothers for all female characters as they grow up, while also fighting conflicting values in mother-daughter relationships, to discuss the subject of mothering in a wider social and cultural context, including references to how this depiction would likely reinforce as well as challenge prevailing societal norms and discourses surrounding maternal identity.

The core research questions for this study are: How does *My Mother Said I Never Should* critique and challenge traditional notions of maternal wisdom and rationalism? In what ways are these challenges expressed through the empirical rejection by different characters, and how do they shape the complexities and conflicts within mother-daughter relationships? What are the implications of portraying mothers and daughters as marginalized figures within the play? How does this depiction influence the younger generation's perception of, and reaction to, traditional maternal roles and expectations? How does the rejection of traditional maternal roles in the play reflect broader societal and cultural shifts regarding motherhood, female agency, and intergenerational dynamics? What insights does this offer into evolving perspectives on familial relationships and gender roles?

Empirical evidence for the rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom in the play serves as a central theme by showcasing the daughters' struggle to assert their

autonomy while navigating generational and societal conflicts. This rejection displays the limitations of traditional motherhood in addressing contemporary notions of female agency. In this regard, the play presents how maternal rationalism, once considered a guiding force, becomes a source of tension as the daughters struggle to redefine themselves and their lives. This rejection can be understood through several interconnected dimensions. At this point, this study presents two hypotheses; first, the daughters' rejection of maternal rationalism reflects their pursuit of independence and self-identity. By resisting their mothers' guidance, they break free from the expectations imposed upon them, asserting their individuality. This defiance symbolizes a desire to escape the shadow of maternal authority and create their own paths. Second, the rejection stems from generational conflicts and the shifting societal values that shape the daughters' realities. The maternal figures' wisdom and rationality, rooted in traditional norms, often clash with the evolving cultural and social contexts of the daughters' lives. As these norms change, the guidance offered by the maternal figures loses its relevance, further facing the daughter's resistance.

The play challenges the societal expectations placed upon mothers and exposes the limitations of traditional maternal roles in empowering daughters. By rejecting their mothers' rationality and wisdom, the daughters confront the inadequacies of traditional family structures and seek for a reimagining of motherhood that supports modern female agency and independence. Through these perspectives, the play illuminates the complex dynamics of mother-daughter relationships, emphasizing how the rejection of maternal wisdom becomes a means of asserting autonomy, questioning tradition, and redefining identity in a contemporary context. Three female characters, the maternal Doris, Granny Margaret, and the daughter-in-the-middle Jackie, are revealed to be actors that influence maternal rationalism or wisdom, and irrigation wrongdoing. As a consequence of their choices and intentions, one girl, Jackie, becomes pregnant while another, Rosie, individual, the daughter-in-the-middle, Margaret, is sent to a manor where she is artificially educated in the upper-middle family. Since their interrelationship is also important to make sense of the plot, contrasting the rationality or wisdom with the irrationality or unreasonableness of the mothers, the reconciliation of the two is also a key conceptual feature of the exploration.

The primary goal of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive understanding of key concepts and theories relevant to the study's focus on feminist perspectives within the sociocultural context. Sources include scholarly articles, books, and theoretical frameworks that explore maternal rationalism, wisdom, empiricism and empirical rejection within the framework of phases of feminism, especially generational feminism and intersectional feminism, as well as sociocultural effects like matrilineal inheritance and decision-making dynamics. The scope encompasses a narrative framework analysis, examining the portrayal of women in theatrical constructs, feminist discourse within societal contexts, and the use of symbolism, imagery, and theatrical techniques. Thus, the literature review aims to identify research gaps and areas for further exploration, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of feminist studies. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the critical evaluation of maternal rationalism and wisdom under the reflections of radical feminism and intersectional feminism, and also empiricism and empirical rejection of younger generations. These theoretical endeavours are enhanced by the sociocultural effects in terms of matrilineal inheritance and decision-making space for working mothers across generations. Under this framework, the social and cultural landscape and challenges faced by women through the generations, as well as their consequences across different generations, are analysed in the play. Additionally, a detailed feminist critique is provided, identifying the factors that have led to the socio-economic and ethnocultural status of women, restricting their ability to become empowered and advocate for equitable social dignity. This field has a paramount importance in that it challenges the traditional stereotypes and societal expectations of maternal roles and responsibilities in order to construct evolving perception of motherhood within society. It is also significant to understand the mother-daughter relationships and how it affects the younger generations' behaviours. These insights into generational dynamics offer a unique lens through which the play explores the shifting paradigms of femininity and motherhood. The intergenerational discourse within the narrative not only emphasizes the persistent struggles but also the subtle transformations that occur over time. By tracing the lineage of female characters, the play illustrates the complex interplay between personal aspirations and societal constraints. This exploration deepens the understanding of how historical and cultural contexts shape and are shaped by women's experiences, leading to a richer interpretation of their roles in both the family

and the wider community. Thus, the narrative serves as a profound reflection on the enduring impact of maternal legacies and their influence on the emancipation and identity formation of women across generations.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPIRICAL REJECTION OF MATERNAL RATIONALISM: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Sociology comprises features that are highlighted through four much-determined principles. These principles are noted as the continuous use of sociological imagination, the process of adopting multiple paradigms, adequate openness to heuristic interdisciplinarity, and the means of encouragement for reflexivity on various levels Serpa and Ferreira (2019: 121). According to them, the emphasis on social analysis must adopt a sociological perspective, which should be rooted in theoretical pluralism. This essence of pluralism aims to connect macro-social dynamics with local processes that eventually bridge subjective meanings and practices and focus on the interactions between systems and actors, followed by structures and practices (Ferreira & Serpa, 2019: 121). Moreover, in this context, Hartman (2017: 3) advised that the divisions between macro-level perspectives on society and culture should be followed by the micro-level of organizations and groups and the micro-level positioning of individual identity, cognition and motives. When these distinctions are analysed in relevance to maternal rationalism and wisdom, the responsibilities of sociological inspections get involved in various dimensions and layers of society. According to Gougherty and Puentes (2024: 27), “Sociologists working at the micro level study small groups and individual interactions. Micro-level analysis places a strong emphasis on context, meaning-making, and interactions. Macro-level analysis looks at trends among and between institutions and societies and emphasizes the influence of structures, institutions, and systems” (2024: 28). Together, both levels of analysis are integral to understanding the complexities of social phenomena within broader societal frameworks. These distinct levels of analysis show the necessity of contextualizing social phenomena within both localized and broader societal frameworks. Thus, it is significant to note that the macro level is about the individual specification, and the micro-level study is responsible for exploring the conversational norms within different groups, especially smaller groups in the societal arena. In this thesis, the controversial concept is about the justifications related to maternal rationalism and wisdom concerning workplace realities, whereby the personal choices of the characters are found to be challenged by societal pressures. This can be reflected in the case of Margaret and Jackie, which holds micro-level detection of the consistent pressure of societal expectations on the state of perceiving motherhood and the choices of the

characters towards their careers. Further, macro-level interpretations can be attained from the ways the family dynamics and gender roles were narrated in the play in terms of dealing with the identified controversial concept of maternal wisdom against career choices. However, before we analyse the identified text, it is significant to understand the key concepts related to rationalism, maternal rationalism, and maternal wisdom as well as empiricism and empirical rejection.

The theory of rationalism and the concept of *a priori* knowledge both hold an interest in maternal wisdom. Rationalism's premise that knowledge is formed from reason and *a priori* knowledge is particularly relevant to this type of wisdom. The knowledge that is handed down through generations is said to be innate, and its existence is reliant on the belief that if something is not learned, it is forgotten. Maternal wisdom theory supports this by saying that motherly knowledge is timeless and relevant until it is obsolete, at which point, through generational transition, it has been forgotten. Although the other form of rationalist knowledge, *a posteriori*, is through experiences, both types of knowledge are learned and willingly passed on or, in some cases, without realization. Additionally, this type of knowledge, as it is discussable in many cases, is a precursor to the truth, sometimes being realized at a later date. An example is a mother warning her child when it becomes sharp. Although a form of mild prediction, this can be considered wisdom, saying that what is wise is to consider doing the right thing in the future. This idea is firmly held in rationalism. Descartes (1995/2022: 2), in his discourse on method, during the search for certain knowledge, advises building from the ground up to secure a solid foundation. This means that the best course of action now is the one that is the most logical and will yield the best results in the future. All experience and knowledge that will be supposed to direct or help us in the future is a form of wisdom, and it is reasonable to try to find the best solution for whatever the problem may be. Stepping into the future is always a trial to improve circumstances to a better state, and knowing the outcome of future action is the goal to know what will be wise to do. This is a fundamental concept for all knowledge that is said to be wise and is particularly relevant to the ideas of motherly advice. Both the child and the mother wish to better the future state of the child. *A priori* knowledge is another of these ideas. However, one that is not practical for *a priori* is said to be known without experience, and it is arguable that maternal wisdom necessarily meets a point. (Baldwin, 2021)

As distinctively stated in the Routledge *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Borchert, 2006: 48), the concept of ‘rationalism’ asserts reason as the primary source of knowledge; rather than sense experience, institutional authority, or divine revelation. For Enlightenment scholars, such as Descartes (1995/2022: 6), argued for the reliability of reason in discovering universal truths, while empiricists like Locke, as stated in Ezebuilo’s discussion on empiricism, highlighted the role of sensory input in understanding the world (Ezebuilo, 2020: 92-93). According to Ezebuilo (2020: 85), “Empiricism is the view that all knowledge originates in experience, that all knowledge are about or applicable to things that can be experienced, or the belief that all rationally acceptable beliefs or propositions are justifiable or knowable only through experience.” On a typical note, rationalism is contrasted with empiricism, which posits that sense experience is the primary foundation for knowledge. On a more specific note, the concept of understanding rationalism in terms of maternal involvement becomes critical to attaining an insight into the construct of parental rationalism. It is at this point that the theoretical advent of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) by Albert Ellis (1962: 35-37) illuminated the complicated interplay between the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural relational belief systems. Ellis and Joffe Ellis (2019: 146) describe rational beliefs as flexible, reality-based, and logically consistent, leading to healthy emotional and behavioural outcomes. These beliefs allow individuals to respond effectively to life’s challenges by fostering adaptability and constructive thinking. In contrast, irrational beliefs are characterized by rigidity, extremity, and a disconnect from reality. These beliefs often lead to unhealthy emotions, such as anxiety and depression, and maladaptive behaviours by exaggerating or distorting reality (Ellis & Joffe Ellis, 2019: 146–147). The principles of REBT outlined by Ellis and Joffe Ellis suggest that rational beliefs can positively influence parenting behaviours, and help parents set realistic expectations and foster supportive interactions with their children, promoting emotional and behavioural well-being. Conversely, irrational beliefs can disrupt familial harmony and contribute to negative emotional patterns and dysfunction within family dynamics (146-147). Terjesen and Kurasaki’s (2009: 6-7) contributions, along with others, have created the fundamental tenets of REBT in the area of understanding how parenting fits into it. These scholars examined the impact of rational as well as irrational beliefs as maintained by parent-child relationships and identified the delineated impacts of

parental beliefs on these relationships. There is also the discovery of a parental consultation approach grounded in REBT principles and the purpose of this approach is to enhance parental engagement through the scope of fostering rational thought processes in the parent and child relationship. The correlation between the irrational beliefs of the parents and the behaviours of the children detected by Hamamci and Bagci (2017: 79-87) is marked as the contributing factor towards an unhealthy familial environment, followed by the development of behavioral issues among the children. In this context, Warren et al. (2018: 3) noted that the irrational beliefs in parents are subject to be associated with the authoritative and demanding nature of the parent, which can impede academic success and perpetuate dysfunctional mental status in children. Some researchers who have used REBT have also found that the key to understanding the idea of parental rationalism is to understand the problems that irrational thoughts cause (Warren & Hale, 2020: 154; Lin, Yang, Xie & Li, 2023: 2-4). These scholars also emphasized the provision of promoting rational thinking in the parents, which must be cultivated through positive behaviours and healthy emotional responses. According to Lin et al. (2023: 2-4), it is advisable for parental practitioners to remain encouraged in their activities and promote reasoned guidance in the early stages of the learning of their children. Applying authoritative parenting styles found the underlying mechanisms of parenting in the early skill development years of children. The results showed that parental involvement is important and crucial in connecting parents with their children's academic skills, especially in science. Considering these findings, this study derives that exploration of the behavioural and rational status of motherhood is significant in bridging the gap between parenting approaches and the early learning abilities of a child. In this context, the justifications for understanding maternal rationalism become very important, as it appears to be the subject to enrich the realm of understanding parenting dynamics, especially in determining the career-oriented development of the child.

Despite the lack of specific declarations regarding the definition of the term “maternal rationalism,” it is still possible to infer from Borchert's (2006: 10-11) reflection on the rationalism concept that maternal rationalism can be interpreted as applying logical reasoning and structured understanding in caregiving and decision-making processes. However, this understanding is based on claims made by a mother who used reason. Against the sense of experience in a mother, any kind of institutionalized authoritative

declaration, or her divine revelation, the concept of maternal rationalism is about gaining a primary source of maternal knowledge and wisdom through motherhood. It is hereby liable to emphasize the role of rational thought in understanding and navigating the complexities of motherhood. This is reflected in the confidence in the intellectual abilities of mothers to make informed decisions. This perspective contrasts with views that rely on intuition, societal stereotypes, traditional practices, or any kind of external authority. Thus, maternal rationalism as a concept is about promoting a rational approach to maternal responsibilities and interactions identified as a process, which is consistently changing throughout each generation. Buskens (2001: 76) identifies maternal nurture as a counterforce to the dominant modern value systems of rational efficiency and liberal individualism. Within the discourse on maternal care and its environmental development, she critiques the conservative framing of motherhood as the 'natural' role of women. Buskens argues that this perception situates mothers in a paradoxical position, where they embody tradition amidst the upheavals of modernity, covertly preserving the past within the present (Buskens, 2001: 76-78). As such, across the generations, the maternal identity of being a caregiver has developed as a contrastive individualistic identity to modern professional lives. The image of being a caregiver for a maternal identity made the consistent shift in stark contrast to the prevailing individualistic ethos of the constantly changing societal structure (Vogel, 1986: 17-47). Paradoxically, Felski (1995: 37-38) marked that the maternal caregiving role started getting counterbalanced to the periphery of managing self-interest in the mother, which often started getting dictated and regulated by the notions of "natural" mothering. Further, Bowlby (1973: 25-27) discussed the foundational development of attachment theory, particularly its focus on the critical role of bonding between a mother and child. Emerging during the 1950s, this theory emphasized the importance of secure attachment in fostering emotional development and resilience in children. The main focus of these ideologies of this age was to support the development of a strong connection between mothers and their children, emphasizing the indispensable role of biological mothers in close physical proximity to their children. On a critical note, Buskens (2001: 76-78) specified that societal pressures impose traditional mothering styles on women despite the fragmented and unsupportive contexts of modern society. She highlights the "cultural contradiction" faced by mothers, where they are expected to perform intensive caregiving that is both

isolated and shaped by outdated norms (Buskens, 2001: 78). It is this juxtaposition that is creating turmoil in the way of increasing the participation of women in professional lives, where it is expected that the mothers should adhere to the traditional practice of caregiving and, at the same time, navigate the demands of professional responsibilities. Ljung-Baruth (2019: 134) referred to the process of re-evaluating the models of maternal existence that emerged with the modern transformation of motherhood. In the context of understanding maternal parenting practices amidst modern life, Ljung-Baruth identified three potential models. The foremost model identified unidimensional maternal parenting, where the behaviours of the mother get categorically structured under the distinctive domains of either - “good or bad,” “sensitive or insensitive,” or “engaged or unengaged.” This perspective aligns with the societal imagery for maternal behaviour based on qualities like goodness, sensitivity, warmth, or adequacy. The second model identified by Ljung-Baruth (2019: 136-137) proposes a multifaceted approach that stands to acknowledge parenting as an admixture of “authoritarian,” “authoritative,” “neglectful,” or “permissive” representations of interactive sessions between the mother and the child. This model also tried to specify the distinctive image of the mother being the core person to take care of the overall growth of the child. However, it is the third model that revolutionized the concept of maternal responsibilities, as it added a sense of rationalism to it. Ljung-Baruth (2019: 138) referred to the third model as the hybrid model, whereby the mother seeks to address all her shortcomings and thereby conceptualizes her parenting based on factors that identify the complexities in the relationship with her child. This model integrated the complexities of motherhood into both personal and public domains, advocating societal support for individual maternal authenticity and collective welfare (Ljung-Baruth, 2019: 138-140). It is important to note that there is concern about the credibility of modern mothers’ portrayals of motherhood’s wisdom as the developmental process of structuring maternal rationalism attains consistent shifts across generations.

Roles and responsibilities of women vary significantly across communities and social contexts. From the standpoint of motherhood, it is evident that women derive wisdom through their experiences, shaped by the sociocultural constraints of their environment, the ethnic practices they observe, and the class to which they belong. These factors collectively influence their understanding and application of wisdom in

their roles as mothers. Davis (2012: 2, 11) identified the essence of modern motherhood by initiating research in England from 1945 to 2000, analysing the evolving societal expectations and roles of mothers. She discusses maternal wisdom as a sociocultural construct closely linked to the lived experiences of motherhood, shaped by societal expectations and cultural contexts. Her research highlights how mothers adapted to caregiving responsibilities while balancing professional ambitions and identifying key cultural, social, and economic factors influencing modern maternal practices and wisdom. It is this solidarity that is the root cause of developing wisdom in a mother and is the source that fosters personal growth in the woman after being a mother. The bond with the child, the exchanged experiences and knowledge with the child are the core aspects of gaining maternal wisdom and this wisdom is practically advocated for the interest of the child and collective development of the socio-cultural entity of the respective society.

The construct of wisdom in a mother is rooted in the evolving structure of the family, where new challenges for children get identified by the mother as the primary caregiver. The objective is to add security to the child and hence the mother needs to develop specialised ways to protect the child from any mishap. Through this process, as the mother communicates with her child, there comes the need for wise dialogues, which leads to the development of wisdom in the child. These dynamics remain relevant even for modern women, allowing them to connect with generational wisdom passed down through eras while navigating contemporary parenting challenges. Eventually, mothers, in particular, navigate uncharted territory without any determined kind of guidance but through inherited experience, which becomes the base for maternal wisdom. The elements of constructing wisdom in a mother have been identified by various scholars in varied ways. The core elements were identified as age, education, experience, hardship pressures, work-life balance, balancing family concerns, and societal discourse. As specified by Lim and Yu (2015: 1), age brings a cumulative amount of life experience, along with maturity and a grown-up perspective in a woman. This development with age further enhances the decision-making capabilities and coping skills in motherhood and this leads to the essence of being wise as a mother. As for the educational background and higher education, Cuartas (2022: 5-6) identified that mothers attain the skills of critical thinking, which is the aspect of developing and adapting all kinds of knowledge that persists around the mother. As

knowledge gets accumulated from the environment, the mother uses it as a skill for developing the child and thus generates herself as a resource with adequate wisdom. At this frontier, the former experiences of a mother are the basis for transforming oneself into the primary caregiver of the child. As such, Worthy, Gorlick, Pacheco, Schnyer, and Maddox (2011: 379) demonstrated that older adults, compared to younger adults, use past experiences to engage in model-based decision-making, allowing them to effectively navigate complex and dynamic decision-making tasks. Apart from the aforementioned generalized elements for constructing wisdom, especially in a mother, Maruyama et al. (2023: 4-6) identified that financial hardships and the ways to overcome hardships can foster resilience in women and that turns them into resourceful entities who become wise and capable of managing family difficulties while rearing the child. Additionally, there are also concerns about creating a work-life balance. Versey (2015: 1674-1678) noted that achieving a balance between work and family responsibilities through adaptive strategies, such as positive reappraisals, helps mothers mitigate stress and enhance their psychological well-being. Though this is identified as a crucial point of existence, still for a mother there remains no option but to generate the aura of maternal well-being and implement an effective mode of parenting for the child. Hosokawa and Katsura (2021: 3, 9) emphasize the critical role of maternal well-being in parenting, highlighting that stress and work-life imbalances can hinder optimal parenting practices and negatively affect child development. Mothers must prioritize stress management and effective parenting strategies to foster positive outcomes for their children. However, the most significant hurdle to maternal wisdom is the societal discourse that is based on the awareness and understanding of societal regulations and practices determined by social expectations towards a mother. This is an aspect that not only restricts the mothers from making decisions but also prevents the shaping of maternal wisdom in a woman. Maternal rationalism is regarded as oppressive when it necessitates sacrifices that contradict with the daughters' pursuit of happiness and emotional fulfilments. The daughters view these rational decisions as restrictive and collapsing, especially when they desire to build their personal desires and well-being. Flax (1978: 180-181) argues that societal and internalized oppression, through maternal rationalism and sacrifices, creates a conflict in which daughters experience maternal decisions as restrictive, undermining their autonomy and emotional fulfilment. This dynamic perpetuates the bind between nurturance and

independence in women. In this way, the rejection of maternal guidance becomes an act of reclaiming agency and prioritizing individual happiness. Finally, this rejection serves as a broader critique of traditional motherhood.

When it comes to feminism from a rationalist viewpoint, the rational choice theories are mostly identified for their transformative potentiality bestowed within the political and social construct of society. However, the integration of these ideologies has been found to be limited. As argued by Driscoll and Krook (2011: 212), the merging of feminism and rational choice theory entails addressing gender dynamics, which is integral to the process of structuring strategic decision-making, followed by institutional frameworks for understanding the power dynamics of a woman as another and as an individual entity. These are important for showing how feminists' choices can lead to new ways of working together to solve important theoretical and practical problems in women's social and political lives. For rationalist feminism, the scrutinization of gender-related phenomena and the emerging perspective of developing wisdom are noted to be integral aspects of feminist perspectives. Weingast (2002: 666-677) analysed how rational choice theory and institutional analysis provide insights into the constraints and incentives shaping political behaviour and decision-making processes. Thus, it can be concluded that rationalist feminism is the doorway for institutionalizing the ideologies of a woman, and the role of a mother becomes significant in the context of the selected play *My Mother*.

Radical feminism, as established by Durie-Smith and Meger (2020: 357-358), refers to the perspective that seeks to dismantle and further challenge the patriarchal structure, added by its norms determined towards the very existence of women. In the period from the 1920s to 1987 in *My Mother*, it is significant to realize the kind of patriarchal structure maintained by society. In this context, Aggestam and Towns (2019: 11) referred to patriarchy as the source for the construction of the diplomatic state, and as such, the dominance and the oppressive point of view were usually marked as integral to the respective societal construct. On the other hand, Robinson (2019: 14) identified that it is the patriarchal structure of society that restricts female power dynamics and leads to limitations on gender roles and female autonomy within the premises of governance. Under these characteristic features of radical realism, the play identifies the elementary aspects that lead to the rejection of traditional gender roles and question

the perceptions related to marriage and motherhood as institutions of oppression in the selected play. The focus is on Margaret and Jackie's self-expression and their ability to maintain their independence in their critique of gendered power dynamics. In this framework, this study fills in the gaps in our knowledge of how mothers are portrayed by looking at the radical feminist ideas present in the chosen text, and addresses the collective action and resistance to be led against patriarchal oppression by identifying motherhood wisdom.

Generational feminism explores the evolving priorities, strategies, and experiences of different feminist cohorts, emphasizing how each generation contributes uniquely to the broader movement for gender equality, often shaped by the socio-political context of their time. Van Der Tuin (2016: 3-12) made a critical reference to generational feminism by examining its evolution under the umbrella of feminist thought and activism across different historical periods or generations. This conceptual framework by Van Der Tuin (2016: 4-5) emphasizes the diverse perspectives, goals, and strategies adopted by feminists in response to shifting social, political, and cultural contexts. According to the argument of Van Der Tuin (2016: 3,10), generational feminism is effective in the process of acknowledging the complexities and tensions that delve within the respective feminist movements, and in different generations by prioritizing different issues and implementing diverse, distinct tactics. As specified, Van Der Tuin (2009: 18,23) noted that by tracing the trajectories of feminist thought over time, generational feminism illuminates the interconnectedness of past and present feminist struggles, which are liable to present the ongoing relevance of feminist ideals in addressing contemporary challenges. Critical reflection on the legacies of earlier feminist movements and their implications for current feminist praxis is thus marked for emphasizing the importance of intergenerational dialogue and solidarity in advancing feminist goals. It is significant to note that generational feminism refers to the different waves or phases of feminist thought and activism that have emerged over time with different goals. The advent of feminism as a global revolutionary movement attempts to eliminate the gaps led by gender discrimination and thereby encourage the promotion of categorization and equality in modern society. This movement has been classified into four determined waves, and each wave is a metaphorical simplification of narrative, offering the determined evolution of feminist ideologies. In the first wave from 1848 to 1920, there was the onset of organized political activism for the

establishment of social and political rights for women, which specified emphasis on the recognition and suffrage of women, and white women in particular (Pruitt, 2022: 2). The next wave, which lasted from 1963 to the 1980s, expanded on the achievements attained from the first wave of feminism and eventually challenged the predetermined patriarchal societal norms for the establishment of institutional reforms. This approach led to mainstream, cultural, and significantly identified radical feminism. The third wave was noted during the latter part of the 1980s, leading into the 1990s and onwards. During this phase, feminism concentrated on diversity, individuality, and intersectionality as practiced in human society. There was the acknowledgment of the intersecting oppressions, which were prevalent in the differences led under race, gender, and all the other factors. During this wave, feminism embraced the extended cultural diversity added by the amplified discourse of interpreting feminism in the global arena. The introduction of the internet gave global expansion a significant advantage, which contributed to much of this evolution. Finally, the fourth wave of feminism is in the present day, which is an extension of the third wave and is dominant through social media activism and confronts feministic challenges. These are especially for women's rights in the contemporary world through trends like #MeToo. Present-day feminism demands to practice inclusivity, added by intersectionality, to mitigate struggles faced by marginalized women groups (Pruitt, 2022: 4).

Since each of these waves represents intricate interactions between ideological movements, the narrative of each of the phases dominated reflections of these interactions. The notion of interpreting feminist waves in Keatley's *My Mother* is determined by the socio-economic and cultural tensions. As each of these waves embodies complex interplays of ideological movements, reflections of these interplays were much dominated by the narrative of each of the phases. In the current study, the notion of interpreting feministic waves in Keatley's *My Mother* is determined by the socio-economic and cultural tensions and analysed through the perspectives led by the playwright. It is essential to note here that though the aforementioned waves were specific under determined timeframes while interpreting the waves about the selected play, the ideological advents and visions will be considered in the context of the plot and the concerns specified by the major women characters. Following these phases of feminism, each generation of women in the selected play reflects the sociocultural norms of their respective periods and the kind of impact that they lay over the feminist

movements through the years. In the context of the determined phases of feminism, the sociocultural effects are identified as the impact of societal norms, added by the maintenance of determined cultural values in structuring the specified feminist phase in its chronological development. The social structures based on the reflection of human behaviours and the persuasion of attitudes and experiences are the core elements of these effects. The critical analysis strive in terms of looking into the justifications as noted in detecting societal norms that are responsible for dictating traditional gender roles, especially regarding matrilineal inheritance and decision-making powers.

While interpreting the mother-daughter relationships, it is also important to understand the developmental thread of matrilineal inheritance, whereby a certain number of ideologies get transferred from the mother to the daughter. Under the reflections of cultural practice, Giuliano and Nunn (2018: 2-10) noted that cultural traits and decision-making systems are transmitted across generations as part of the lineage, and these ancestral characteristics, shaped by pre-industrial practices, influence contemporary behaviours and social structures. Under this realization, by withholding the theoretical understanding of matrilineal inheritance, this study will investigate the factors whereby women hold significant economic and social power, yet get consistently challenged by traditional patriarchal norms. Parkin (2020: 226) referred to the 'matrilineal puzzle' of matrilineal inheritance as a socio-cultural system, whereby women can attain a profound hold over gender dynamics and thereby can avail hold over family structures. However, the gap remains when it comes to the macro-level understanding of this power dynamics attained through matrilineal inheritance. In matrilineal societies, men navigate a dual process of self-definition and adaptation, where their roles are shaped by a balance of traditional expectations and evolving dynamics. This process of identity formation creates opportunities to foster gender equality and redefine societal perceptions of motherhood, encouraging a more inclusive framework within these communities.

It is of course not only *My Mother* that treats the mother-daughter relationship in modern context, but there are some more plays on the same issue from different angels. *Top Girls* is just one of them that contributes to portraying conventional traits and understanding and presents a good example to lead to a better socio-cultural construct

for motherhood in the workplace. At this point, the relevance of intersectional feminism in terms of gaining insight into the establishment of the social identity of women becomes justified. The relevance of intersectional feminism within the theoretical framework of this study is counted for being able to interconnect the very nature of social identities, especially those marked as class, race, sexuality, gender, and ability. Intersectional feminism intersects various aspects of social identities to shape an individual's experience under the matrix of oppression. According to Crenshaw (1989: 140), intersectional feminism analyses the intersecting axes of marginalized identity to reveal how traditional frameworks of oppression often overlook compounded forms of subordination. This framework highlights the need for more inclusive approaches to address systemic inequality and work toward social justice, and in *My Mother* the realization of the kind of differences maintained in society can be detected.

Decision-making, as one of the significant elements that contribute to motherhood wisdom, is identified as a process that allows an individual to make a choice and thus reach out for a conclusive statement, which will abide by the persisting environment of the individual (Zumbyte, 2021: 475, 482). The ability of women to make autonomous decisions has long been hindered by the deeply ingrained socio-cultural structures within society. Patriarchal norms, in particular, have played a significant role in restricting women's autonomy and limiting their access to opportunities and resources necessary for independent decision-making. These systemic barriers create ongoing resistance to and constraints on women's empowerment and agency. Under such circumstances, the evolution of feministic phases has shown the hindrances that are marked as barriers to the process of participating in decision-making processes for women in general and mothers in particular. The reflection of feministic phases has made it clear that the only commonality that persists all through the ages is the decision-making power of a woman in society, especially when it comes to the need to balance motherhood with womanhood in professional life. In this reference, the research led by Lowes (2020: 121) has established that it is under the ideological advent of matrilineal inheritance that the decision-making power gets bestowed upon women. However, Lowes also identified that this power is largely subject to be established under the close consultation of the male members of the respective socio-cultural setup. According to Lowes (2020: 126), matrilineal inheritance systems often

enhance women's decision-making autonomy by granting them direct inheritance rights and closer ties to their kin group. However, in some matrilineal societies, male relatives, particularly maternal uncles, retain significant political and social authority, which shapes the extent of women's power within these systems. On this verge, by considering the theoretical implications of the influences led by matrilineal inheritance, it becomes appropriate to assess the position of the female characters of *My Mother* for establishing motherhood wisdom against societal stereotypes. The context of understanding the elements restrict the decision-making power of women, especially when women are mothers. The restrictions to choices and the reduction of autonomy are subjects of grievous analysis. Khaleque (2015: 1419-1420) conducted a meta-analysis that shows the significant impact of perceived parental indifference and neglect on children's psychological maladjustment and negative personality dispositions. The study emphasizes the global relevance of these findings, demonstrating robust associations across diverse cultural contexts. In this frontier, Korat et al. (2008: 7-9) noted that though there are similarities and distinct roles played by fathers and mothers in the lives of children and their young minds, the role of the mother over the father remains highly predominant. Cabrera et al. (2007: 127-132) emphasized the importance of understanding how the changing roles of fathers and mothers contribute to children's development. They note that fathers have increasingly taken on roles involving engagement and responsibility in parenting, which complements the caregiving traditionally associated with mothers. These changes reflect a shift toward more equitable and diverse family dynamics. On an empirical note, Shannon et al. (2002: 80, 85-86) referred to the case of American fathers from low socioeconomic backgrounds that exhibit more responsive and communicative behaviours to their 2-year-old children, especially in enhancing problem-solving and memory skills. Madore et al. (2015: 3) noted that episodic memory and specificity training enhance divergent thinking, a key component of creativity. This demonstrates the importance of early cognitive interventions in fostering creativity. Meanwhile, Silver (1997: 75) emphasized the role of problem-solving and inquiry-oriented education in enhancing flexibility and creativity in students' mathematical thinking, underscoring the broader role of engagement and guidance in intellectual development. For this thesis, the concept of parental acceptance or rejection is grounded in empiricist ideas, as evidenced by the findings of Giotsa et al. (2018: 139).

Their study, based on the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory), highlights the empirical relationship between parental acceptance or rejection and its effects on the socialization and psychological development of children's minds.

The empirical concept of rejection in youth stands for the kind of sensitive ideas in a socio-cultural system that is responsible for processing the necessity for direct interaction (Radder, 2023: 8). Under this provision, it can be inferred that children from diverse sociocultural backgrounds and ethnic groups, especially females and genders, perceive and respond towards the acceptance or rejection from their mothers. According to the research led by Rohner and Khaleque (2012: 5), the parental acceptance-rejection condition is central to the warmth dimension for assessing the emotional quality and bonds between young minds and their parents. This is the continuum that ranges from parental acceptance, characterized by affection, warmth, care, and support, to the state of parental rejection. This rejection is represented by negligence, emotional withdrawal, and even hostility. Empirical insights on parental acceptance or rejection have been underscored as a complex phenomenon, for it symbolically represents the nature of a highly variable and extensively saturated cultural and idiosyncratic establishment (Rohner and Khaleque, 2012: 6-8).

Since the empirical insights for this study interpret the understanding of the consistent effects of rejection on young minds, the core approach relies on accumulating the symbolic meanings attributed by *My Mother* to understand the parental behaviours across diverse socio-cultural contexts. The characters and the determined society lead the encore interpretations through the cultural norms and personal belief systems. This study approach considers the cultural and symbolic dimensions of empirical parental roles, especially towards rejection by the mother over both ethnic and cross-cultural studies. According to Stacks, Oshio, Gerard, and Roe (2009: 184), maternal warmth plays a significant role in moderating the effects of disciplinary practices on child outcomes, and its cultural variability presents the need to consider environmental and cultural influences on parental behaviours and expressions of affection. Thus, it becomes crucial to explore the symbolic interpretations of the mothers and daughters of the selected play in the context of their cultural backgrounds, and the environmental concerns attributing to their parental behaviours and the mode of expressing love and affection. In this context, Yildirim and Roopnarine (2014: 430,432) delivered the

universalised declaration that parents may demonstrate varied degrees of warmth or a state of rejection, and they added that the detection of these feelings is dependent on the determined cultural contexts in which the behavioural display occurs profoundly and relatively shapes the meaning and impact on young minds. Thus, the significance is led by the mode of comprehending acceptance and rejection as emotional ways to unfold diverse familial, cultural and societal settings for enriching career-oriented developments in the female characters of the selected plays. According to Fernández-García et al. (2017), parenting models exhibit notable differences between fathers and mothers, particularly regarding control dynamics. Fathers predominantly emphasize behavioural control, which can be moderated by elements of neglect and hostility. In contrast, mothers' control strategies are marked by a combination of behavioural control influenced by psychological control and parental warmth, which impacts the emotional and behavioural outcomes of their children (Fernández-García et al., 2017,655). Interestingly, it has also been identified by many scholars that parental support can positively correlate with behavioural control, alongside the negatively reflected psychological control, which are also the diverging factors over young minds (Kazarian et al., 2010: 72; Putnick et al., 2014: 923; Calafat et al.,2014: 187).

Under the umbrella term of feminist empiricism, the matters of historical constructs of female identity, added by the revolutionary initiatives for equating womanhood with motherhood are integral parts of this study. Following the feministic ideological establishments by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, and Betty Friedan in 1963, through their revolutionary contributions, *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1949), and *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963), respectively, the role of the mother in the development of young minds, especially the daughter and the challenges that get in the way of accomplishing maternal roles are evaluated. The stereotypical expectations of society are critiqued through the analyses of the texts and the societal confinement of mothers to domestic roles, added by the advocacy towards the autonomy of motherhood is assessed in the contemporary set-up. According to Intemann (2010: 791), feminist empiricists argue that empirical evidence is crucial in validating beliefs and theories. They emphasize that knowledge is contextual and socially situated, shaped by the assumptions and values of specific research contexts. This perspective acknowledges that variations in social contexts, particularly those influenced by power dynamics, generate diverse experiences that can serve as empirical evidence to support or critique

prevailing scientific assumptions. Women's roles as mother, wife, and working women get identified under complex dynamics, as their parental role is subject to scrutiny and society constantly assesses their roles as per children's outcomes. At this point, the empirical insights from feminist perspectives on the intricate interplay between parenting dimensions and their implications for the emotional and social well-being of their daughters by understanding societal dynamics within familial contexts are highlighted. While developing an understanding of generational dynamics, conflicts, and wisdom transmission, the generational differences in terms of holding professional positions and the interrelated challenges, especially in navigating and balancing personal and professional responsibilities are examined. As noted by Appelbaum et al., workplace conflicts often arise from the challenges of balancing personal duties and professional responsibilities. It is critical to understand the root causes of such conflicts and address them with strategies tailored to diverse generational contexts (Appelbaum et al., 2022: 7–9). In this domain, the integrated approach of wisdom transmission is identified as the way to transfer storytelling by passing down life lessons and values from grandmothers to grandchildren (Weststrate, Glück, & Ferrari, 2018: 586). This is an effective practice for influencing the views of the younger generations and is the medium to offer strategic work-life integration (Weststrate et al., 2018: 586). However, such ideologies are subject to investigation under the Cassandra and Bohemian ideologies of working women. As described by Sadaippan (2019: 242), the Cassandra effect illustrates the complicated dilemma whereby the act of truth-telling goes unheard or rather subject to disbelief. While referring to the mythological Cassandra, who was cursed by Apollo, Sadaippan (2019: 243) referred to Christa Woolf's reinterpretation of Cassandra that empirically reflects on resonating feminist critiques on marginalisation and the state of disbelief bestowed upon women. Sadaippan (2019: 244) states that the myth of Cassandra is to be analysed in the context of broader societal challenges, which are recognised in the suppression of women's voices and restrict their foresight. This socio-cultural status of marginalisation and disbelief concerning women underscores Cassandra's symbolic significance in challenging societal constraints (Pillinger, 2016: 1, 5) for the female characters of the selected play. Bohemianism embodies a rejection of conventional societal norms and an embrace of alternative lifestyles, characterized by non-conformist thinking and creativity. As Huston, Wadley, and Fitzpatrick (2015: 313-315) describe, bohemians are socially and

sexually unconventional individuals who challenge traditional expectations and thrive in environments that promote individuality and freedom. While advocating flexibility and balance in their lives, the implementation of the bohemian approach is a matter of controversy as it represents the sense of 'free spirit' that stands against the role of motherhood. These features stand against the restricted position of being a mother. Corinaldi (2019: 13) explains that motherhood often limits career opportunities due to the societal expectation that women prioritize caregiving roles, which perpetuates systemic biases and career stagnation. Similarly, Ravindranath et al. (2021: 23) highlight that working mothers face challenges such as gender stereotypes, inadequate workplace policies, financial constraints, and the pressures of balancing work and family responsibilities, which restrict their autonomy and career progression. Thus, it is at this contrastive point that this study exposes the factors that restrict the way of empowering daughters, especially while envisioning diverse professional paths for themselves.

The research methodology of this study is qualitative research. As stated by Carrasco and Lucas (2015: 166), qualitative research methodologies are essential for exploring subjective experiences and gaining an in-depth understanding of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. These methods provide rich contextual insights and are particularly useful for uncovering the causal factors behind people's actions and decision-making processes. It is here that qualitative research methodology is employed to explore the perspectives and social experiences. According to Alleyne (2015: 10), the emergence of theoretical exploration of narratives and storytelling opened the scope for examining social relations within narratives, and as such narrative analysis gained widespread acceptance and utilization in research. It is at this point that (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021: 2) established that narrative research attracts those interested in qualitative research with a constructivist orientation, focusing on restoring storytellers' agency and emphasizing their active role in shaping meaningful, contextual experiences. To unravel the socio-cultural landscape in *My Mother* through the interpretation of ideological feminist perspectives and to comprehend maternal wisdom and empirical rejection, this study will adopt qualitative research methodology. The research philosophy guiding this study is interpretivism, which is about understanding social phenomena by collectively realising the subjective interpretations and meanings attributed by individuals. This paradigm emphasizes the

socially constructed nature of reality and the importance of exploring subjective meanings to better understand social contexts (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022: 10-13). In this study, interpretivism enables the exploration of characters' subjective realizations regarding the portrayal of gender roles and motherhood in the selected play, *My Mother*. Further, within the interpretive framework, the constructivist paradigm refers to knowledge constructed by individual experiences, social interactions, and personal interpretations added by qualitative research methodology to identify human behavioural psychology will be considered. This study will undertake narrative analysis as the tool for interpreting the dynamics of empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom in the play, especially in terms of shaping societal perceptions of gender-specific recognitions, especially motherhood.

This literature review reveals three key research gaps. At the foremost level, the former research on intersectional analysis for understanding maternal rationalism explored various factors like class, race, and sexuality intersecting with maternal roles in general. However, these aspects need to be identified among the characters of *My Mother*- Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie. This analytical approach would clarify variations in maternal decision-making across diverse socio-cultural contexts. The next research gap is about initiating a longitudinal study to track changes in maternal rationalism and wisdom over generations, especially as depicted in the play *My Mother*. Since there is no research done with this specification, this study will bridge the gap by assessing evolving societal attitudes toward motherhood and younger generations, and the relationships between these groups, and career choices. Finally, the literature review referred to the gap in qualitative research on maternal wisdom in practice, especially in contemporary literary settings, where women balance work and family life. Such studies are liable to offer deeper insights into the way maternal decision-making gets structured, perceived and navigated. The purpose of bridging this gap is to provide practical implications for gender roles added by maternal autonomy in society. To address these gaps, this study would concentrate on adopting a research methodology that could meet the advanced feminist discourse and inform policy initiatives aimed at promoting equitable social practices.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study, discussing mother-daughter relationships, disagreements, the empirical rejection of younger

perspectives, generational conflicts, and societal improvements, and it outlines the research problem, objectives, hypotheses, and significance of the study. Chapter Two examines the literature review on empiricism, maternal rationalism, intersectional feminism, and generational feminism. Chapter Three features the materials and methods. Focusing on themes and narrative techniques, Chapter Four presents detailed analyses of the selected literary work, the findings, and the resulting interpretations. Chapter Five will include the discussion of the implications of the findings, and in Chapter Six, conclusions will be drawn in light of the study's objectives, with potential avenues for further research suggested. It concludes with recommendations on how young people can leverage maternal experiences for better decision-making.

In conclusion, this study examines the evolving dynamics of mother-daughter relationships and the shifting perceptions of maternal wisdom and authority in a contemporary context. Through a lens of feminism, it investigates the challenges and complexities of mother-daughter relationships, how younger generations empirically reject maternal rationalism, and how their choices affect their life. By employing Keatley's play *My Mother*, centred around the four generations of characters, this study provides a nuanced understanding of motherhood, addressing the limitations of maternal authority and the daughters' pursuit of autonomy and self-identity. In the theoretical part, maternal rationalism and wisdom, as well as empirical rejection, are analysed through a literature review. Additionally, from a feministic perspective, generational feminism and intersectional feminism, as well as sociocultural effects like matrilineal inheritance and decision-making dynamics, are examined. To get a detailed overview of the study area, the next chapter will offer an in-depth analysis of the characters and their intergenerational relationships in *My Mother*. In the play, how the characters' actions and motivations challenge the traditional portrayal of motherhood as wise and rational figures are explored.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother* explores the lives of four generations of women in post-war Britain. The study stands justified as it serves the purpose of exploring the complex interplay between maternal rationalism and wisdom as well as empirical rejections of younger generations within the socio-cultural landscape. The play's non-linear narrative juxtaposes the past, present, and future, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of maternal expectations and generational conflict. This thematic analysis follows the complexities of motherhood, generational expectations, and societal pressures. The play disrupts the conventional family narrative, portraying the tensions and emotional dilemmas experienced by mothers and daughters. Through the lens of ideological feminist perspectives, the play offers a rich tapestry of themes and narratives that unravel the intricate dynamics faced by women navigating the roles of motherhood and professional pursuits. This play was selected for its intricate exploration of maternal rationalism and wisdom, specifically how each generation rejects or reinterprets these inherited maternal roles. The rejection of maternal rationalism within the play reflects broader trends in feminist theatre, as discussed by Aston (2003: 2), who addresses the intersection of feminist theory and performance. This dynamic aligns well with the research objective of analysing the deconstruction of maternal authority. Scholarly reviews and critiques supplement this, including insights from studies such as Aston which discusses the feminist reimagining of motherhood in contemporary British drama by examining the transformative contributions of feminist dramatists to British theatre, emphasizing their critique of patriarchal narratives and the recovery of marginalized voices (Aston, 2003: 2). These academic reviews provide a broader understanding of the play's critical reception and its thematic concerns. The primary data source for this study is the full script of *My Mother*.

This study focuses exclusively on the textual analysis of the play. While the play has been performed widely, this research does not engage with live performances or directorial choices. Instead, the study is limited to the written text and its exploration of maternal wisdom and rationalism. Theatrical performance often varies significantly between productions due to directorial choices, the actors' interpretations, and the physical staging of scenes (Wainscott & Fletcher, 2003: 10). For instance, the portrayal

of Doris's authority or Margaret's defiance may be expressed differently in a live performance, depending on the tone, body language, or emotional delivery. These non-verbal cues are vital in drama but are not addressed in this study, limiting the analysis to what can be derived from the text alone. Moreover, while *My Mother* has been widely performed in the UK and internationally, this study does not engage with the variations in cultural reception across different audiences. Furthermore, audience interpretation can differ drastically depending on cultural background, historical knowledge, and current societal values. This study does not account for how performances might be adapted to resonate with different social contexts or how audiences might respond differently to the themes of maternal wisdom and rationalism based on their lived experiences. Additionally, this study is limited by its focus on the script's written language without engaging with the embodied experience of theatre, which includes gestures, stage design, lighting, and spatial dynamics that can all influence the audience's understanding of the themes. In performance, the physical presence of actors and the dynamic interaction between them can significantly shape how the rejection of maternal rationalism is portrayed, aspects that cannot be fully appreciated in a text-based analysis alone.

The study acknowledges that the play is deeply embedded in the specific cultural and historical context of post-war Britain. Written and first performed in 1987, the play reflects societal shifts in gender roles, family dynamics, and expectations of motherhood that were evolving in response to the social changes of the 20th century. During this time, Britain experienced transformations in its social fabric due to feminist movements, the aftermath of World War II, and shifting attitudes towards traditional family structures. In post-war Britain, there was a growing questioning of traditional maternal roles, which had long been idealized as nurturing, self-sacrificing, and rationally guiding. The play engages with this discourse by portraying women who resist or reinterpret these roles, such as Jackie's decision to give up her child and Margaret's struggle to balance career and motherhood. These themes resonate with the feminist challenges to patriarchal norms that emerged during the late 20th century. Furthermore, the specific British cultural lens through which the play was originally written and received may limit its resonance with international audiences. While the themes of generational conflict and motherhood are universal, the way these issues are framed in the context of British social class and historical events such as the decline

of Britain's global empire and its economic struggles in the 1980s may not fully translate to non-British cultural contexts. As such, the play's commentary on maternal rationalism might be interpreted differently depending on the audience's cultural background and their own society's norms regarding family and gender roles. By acknowledging these contextual limitations, this study recognizes that while the play offers valuable insights into the rejection of maternal wisdom, its interpretation is shaped by the specific historical and cultural moment in which it was created. Future research could benefit from a comparative analysis of how the play is received in different cultural contexts or how contemporary productions reinterpret its themes to address modern concerns.





4. MY MOTHER SAID I NEVER SHOULD AS A PLATFORM FOR MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

The selection of *My Mother* by Keatley as the play for this study stands justified as it serves the purpose of exploring the complex relationships of mother-daughter as well as empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom within the socio-cultural landscape. Through the lens of ideological feminist perspectives, the play offers a rich tapestry of themes and narratives that unravel the intricate dynamics faced by women navigating the roles of motherhood and professional pursuits as well as daughters' new ideas and discoveries to construct their inner identity. To analyse the impact of maternal wisdom on younger generations through feminist and theatrical lenses, it's essential to explore how it influences time management, work-life balance, and societal pressures. *My Mother* highlights these issues, revealing how race, class, and generational differences shape maternal experiences. Instances of comparative analysis with *Top Girls* offered critical evaluations of theatrical portrayals and economic factors like the motherhood pay gap. This approach also provides deeper insights into the socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by working mothers. This underscores the need for nuanced feminist perspectives and informed policy reforms.

Spanning the periods from the 1920s to 1987, the play unfolds through a complex and non-linear narrative, traversing between different locations such as Manchester, Oldham, and London. Within this structure, various episodes from the lives of four female characters are depicted in the play. The story commences in the Wasteground, where the four girls, represented as contemporaries, engage in imaginative play. Doris appears at the age of five, Rosie at eight, and Jackie and Margaret at nine. Rejecting conventional notions of femininity, they express disdain for the idea that little girls are made of 'sugar and spice and all things nice' and instead contemplate the idea of 'killing their mummy.' The play is interrupted by the appearance of a figure representing their older selves, Doris, who is now an adult. While George Formby's "*Chinese Laundry Blues*" plays on the wireless, Margaret, aged nine, surprises Doris by exclaiming 'knickers' from under the piano. Doris, preferring to be addressed as 'Mother' rather than 'Mummy', redirects Margaret's curiosity about the war and religious practices towards piano practice. The narrative transitions to Doris as a

grandmother, interacting with Jackie, Margaret's daughter, with a more affectionate and lenient demeanour than her relationship with Margaret. Through these scenes, the complexities of familial dynamics and the passage of time are poignantly explored, offering insights into the evolving relationships between generations of women.

My Mother explores the intimate dynamics of mother-daughter relationships, emphasising the transmission of wisdom amid societal pressures. It appears to provoke critical reflection on gender, ambition, and familial ties, revealing the intricate intersections of women's identities in their quest for fulfilment.

In *My Mother*, the theatrical representation of maternal wisdom and empiricism is vividly illustrated through the dialogues and interactions between young and adult characters. The play's Wasteground scenes provide a unique setting where young girls engage in candid and unfiltered conversations, revealing their raw, experiential understanding of the world. For instance, in *Act One Scene Three (15-16)*, an exchange between characters referred to by initials like 'D' and 'R', the dialogue:

D: Is it very bad?

R: I'll just have to feel it...

D: Don't touch.

R: But you like it...

R: I think you've got one already.

R: How is your husband? (15)

D: Oh he's upped and gone....

R: You have to get married first. (16)

The conversation between Doris and Rosie on childbirth simulation reflects societal awkwardness casually and humorously when they discuss childbirth. Their exchange of dialogues, including the casual mention of a potentially sensitive issue, e.g., the husband's absence and the baby's, reflects a lack of seriousness or conventional decorum, which can be unsettling or awkward given the gravity of the subject matter. From the dialogue, it can be concluded that the interaction between the characters portrays a nuanced exploration of personal autonomy versus societal imposition, which can be critically analysed within the framework of feminist theory concerning the empirical rejection of maternal rationalism. Initially, the conversation starts with a personal inquiry about a potential problem to which one character suggests a physical

intervention. This proposal is immediately countered with a firm boundary setting signifying an assertion of personal autonomy and the rejection of the physical interaction. This aspect of the dialogue mirrors feminist critiques of how societal norms often disregard individual consent under the assumption of implicit acceptance based on past interactions or established relationships.

The blending of casual conversation with intimate or serious topics can create discomfort, especially as it deviates from typical formal discussions about childbirth and relationships. This communication shows their empirical approach, grounded in direct, lived experiences. This setting allows them to explore complex topics such as childbirth and societal roles with stark honesty, unburdened by societal or familial expectations. The timeless and abstract nature of the Wasteground environment facilitates this open exploration, with the use of initials rather than full names emphasising the characters' innocence and exploratory spirit. In contrast, the adult characters in the play represent rationalism through their structured, reflective approaches to life, applying theoretical frameworks and societal norms to navigate their roles. This contrast underscores the different ways that empirical experiences and rationalist strategies shape perspectives on motherhood and life choices, illustrating the tension between these approaches across different life stages. Further, in *Act Two*, the dialogues of Margaret appear to be very specific in shaping maternal wisdom and empiricism.

M: Goitre. Women over thirty never showed their necks in those days. Swellings. Hormone problem. No proper medicine to control it.

J: Why hasn't Granny ever showed us this?

M: (pause): Father didn't like it . . . Mother grew up in what she calls 'reduced circumstances' . . . Her mother wasn't married . . . I found out in a letter once. (51)

Margaret's dialogue illustrates the interplay between historical context and personal experience in shaping maternal wisdom and empiricism. Her mention of "Goitre" and the societal aversion to women showing their necks due to health issues highlights how historical medical limitations and social norms influenced women's lives. Her reflection on her mother's "reduced circumstances" and the discovery of her grandmother's unmarried status expose personal and familial struggles, displaying how past experiences and societal expectations shape her perspective. This dialogue reveals how maternal wisdom is informed by both personal histories and broader

societal constraints, blending empirical experiences with historical context to shape understanding and identity.

In theatrical representation, the depiction of wisdom is intricately shaped by ethnic practices and class affiliations. These elements serve as a foundation for understanding how wisdom is culturally constructed and conveyed through performance and narrative. Davis (2012: 1-2) expands on this by framing maternal wisdom as a sociocultural construct intimately connected to the experience of motherhood, persisting despite differing levels of solidarity among women by discussing how motherhood, shaped by sociocultural constructs, reflects broader societal changes and expectations, highlighting the complexities and contradictions in women's roles and identities. Empiricist perspectives, as outlined by Giotsa et al. (2018: 139-147), emphasize the role of evidence-based approaches in understanding how parental acceptance or rejection impacts the socialization and development of children. According to their findings, the more a child feels accepted by their parents, the less interpersonal anxiety they experience during adulthood, highlighting the long-term effects of parental behaviour.

Radder (2023: 8, 18) further notes that youth rejection involves delicate socio-cultural dynamics that require nuanced interaction. In the play, the dialogues as specified in the former subsection, are deeply emotional and introspective, focusing on the complexities of family relationships and the influence of maternal expectations across generations. The play captures the personal and often painful effects of familial pressures and societal norms on individual identity and choices, imbuing the dialogue with significant emotional depth. At this point, Act Two, Scene Two of *Top Girls* can be given as an example that illustrates a transition from casual conversation to a more formal discussion about career ambitions. This gets highlighted as Marlene's questioning of Angie's interest in working with children, alongside Joyce's acknowledgement of her lack of direction, facilitates a deeper exploration of personal ambition and societal roles, highlighting the difficulties that women encounter in defining their aspirations. This mirrors themes in *My Mother*, where similar challenges in realizing ambitions and making life choices are explored within the mother-daughter dynamic, emphasizing the impact of familial expectations on individual paths.

The concept of temporal flexibility in *My Mother* depicts personal experiences and perspectives that shape identity over time, which emerges through the distinct narrative approach of the play. In a significant manner, *My Mother* portrays temporal flexibility by examining four generations of women within a family. The play weaves personal histories and relationships across different eras, revealing how these experiences influence identity. In Act Two, Rosie worries about nuclear war and her future and states,

R: I worry about nuclear war, not getting a job, and whether Mr Walsh, the physics teacher, fancies me. Mum doesn't understand. (53)

Such statements reflect personal anxieties, which are responsible for shaping the identity of a woman, Rosie in this context. Moreover, such declarations in terms of generational dynamics presents the significance of personal life events in forming a rich exploration of identity through familial contexts. Conversely, *Top Girls* uses a fragmented narrative structure, juxtaposing Marlene, a career-focused woman, with a surreal dinner party featuring historical figures. This structure critiques socioeconomic conditions and societal expectations, illustrating temporal flexibility in personal ambition that intersects with broader societal pressures. It is the non-linear narrative and overlapping dialogues in the play that demonstrate the complexity of identity within socio-economic frameworks, which remains in alignment with the role of narrative perspective in identity exploration (Parks, 2023: 64-67). Thus, these plays demonstrate temporal flexibility and personal experiences as the tools for shaping identity through narrative strategies language and ideological differences as identified in generational dynamics.

In *My Mother*, ideological rationalist generational dynamics are explored, revealing personal and professional conflicts that shaped identities and passed down through generations. This exploration aligns with the concepts discussed by Appelbaum et al. (2022: 7-9), who emphasize the importance of understanding generational conflicts and their impact on balancing personal and professional responsibilities. The authors present how generational differences in workplace values, communication styles, and expectations often lead to conflict, necessitating strategies to harmonize these differences and promote a collaborative work environment. In *Act Three, Scene Five*,

the dialogue between Rosie and Jackie underscores the generational conflict and ideological tensions within the family.

R: If you were really my mum you wouldn't have been able to give me away.

J: How dare you! You're at the centre of everything I do!

Pause.

Mummy treated me as though I'd simply fallen over and cut my knee, – picked me up and said you'll be all right now, it won't show much. She wanted to make it all better . . . She was the one who wanted it kept secret. I WANTED you, Rosie. For the first time in my life, I took care of myself – refused joints, did exercises, went to the clinic. (85)

In the quoted lines, Rosie accuses Jackie of failing to act as a true mother by giving her away, which reveals her deep-seated feelings of betrayal and the generational rift in understanding parental roles and sacrifices. Rosie's accusation challenges the conventional maternal ideal that equates motherhood with constant physical presence and devotion. This statement shows a rejection of alternative forms of mothering that may include separation for any reasons. Rosie's words reflect a societal culture to define maternal roles and responsibilities, implying that true motherhood must encounter difficult choices like separation. Jackie responds indignantly, expressing that Rosie is at the centre of everything she does. She also recounts her efforts to care for herself and Rosie, which presents the emotional and defensive posture adopted by mothers and ideological struggles she faced. Jackie's assertion emphasizes that her decisions, though non-traditional, are still rooted in the deep care and prioritization of Rosie's well-being, challenging the notion that physical proximity is the sole indicator of effective mothering. This exchange reflects the complexities involved in balancing personal desires with societal expectations and familial responsibilities.

The play also captures the essence of wisdom transmission, as described by Weststrate et al. (2018: 586), through the intergenerational dialogue that reveals how each generation's experiences and values influence the next. Jackie's past sacrifices and her subsequent explanation to Rosie about the secrecy surrounding her pregnancy further illustrate this transmission of life lessons and emotional weight. As noted in *Act One, Scene One*, the play features a provocative dialogue among the children.

J: Let's kill our Mummy.

M: Whose Mummy?

D: Whose Mam?

R: Yes, whose Mum?

J: All our Mummies if you like?

R: Who's going to do it?

M: Dare you!

D: . . . Dare you . . .

J: We'll all do it. (3)

The symbolic discussion among female characters, revolving around the metaphorical idea of “killing” their mothers, shows the intense and often radical responses children have to their familial and social environments. The children’s collective willingness to entertain such an extreme idea imply their internal struggles and the influence of their environment on their perception of family and authority. This concept serves as a powerful exploration of breaking away from maternal expectations and the traditional roles imposed by society. The initial suggestion by Jackie can be interpreted as a call to reject the oppressive and constraining maternal influences that each character experiences. The questioning by Margaret, Doris, and Rosie demonstrates a collective confusion or search for identity, reflecting the generational impact of these maternal expectations and the individual struggles to define oneself outside of these roles. Jackie’s response suggests a universal revolt against not just personal maternal figures but the broader societal norms represented by these figures. This line proposes a rejection of the traditional maternal role that binds women to specific behaviours and responsibilities, which can hinder their personal and generational growth. The sequence where Margaret and Doris taunt each other enhances the theme of challenging the status quo, pushing each other to confront and possibly transcend the limitations imposed by their maternal legacies. The dialogue ends with Jackie’s assertiveness symbolizes a unified decision to eliminate these inherited constraints. In the dialogue, the metaphorical “killing” can be interpreted as a liberation from the restrictive definitions of motherhood that dominate their lives and identities. It serves as a metaphor for rejecting the empirical maternal wisdom that manage their actions and feelings. This scene addresses the play’s central theme: the tension between personal desire and societal expectation, and the search for autonomy in a world that frequently seeks to define women through their relationships with others, especially within familial roles.

The generational conflicts and ideological differences within the play also show the ideological rationalist approach to understanding how personal histories and societal expectations shape identity over time. The play's narrative provides a nuanced exploration of how these dynamics affect women's choices and their relationships across generations, emphasizing the ongoing evolution of these issues in the context of family and societal norms.

The language and ideological differences between *My Mother* and *Top Girls* are reflected by the distinct narrative strategies and thematic concerns which are responsible for addressing women's roles and identity from varying perspectives. In *My Mother*, the play employs a naturalistic and conversational language to emphasise the personal and generational conflicts among women. The play explores how the women's dialogues, such as Rosie's anguished remark in *Act Three, Scene Five*, about Jackie not being able to give her away, highlight their deeply felt struggles and betrayals. This interaction reveals the ideological conflict between traditional and evolving views on motherhood and personal sacrifice, explaining how generational perspectives influence identity and expectations. Additionally, the language used in the play reflects an empathetic and reflective approach to the female experience, focusing on personal histories and familial bonds that shape identity. On the other hand, *Top Girls* utilizes fragmented dialogues and surreal scenarios to critique socio-economic conditions and the notion of female success. The play's use of overlapping dialogues and historical figures in the first act demonstrates a radical departure from linear storytelling. Churchill's language reflects a critique of the capitalist and patriarchal systems, as seen in Marlene's interactions with the historical figures and her struggle with individualism versus collective female solidarity. The fragmented narrative and the ironic portrayal of successful women in *Top Girls*, are noted for serving the superficial nature of so-called progress in the ideology for liberation for women. Ultimately, the contextual embeddedness through narrative forms concerning the two selected plays for this study offers generational differences in the perspectives of the playwrights. The selected plays note the realization that the scarcity of precise explanations and tangible instances of narrative methodologies creates ambiguity within the field (Andrews, 2021: 353). It is in this context that this study explores collecting the subjective experiences and establishing the relation to gender roles and motherhood with the ideological feministic perspectives as detected in the former

chapter. In specific terms, *My Mother* uses a fluid, adaptable set that enhances the depiction of memory and personal history, with costumes and other objects serving as actants that support narrative development.

The play *My Mother* employs a distinctive narrative structure that mirrors the complexities of generational relationships that withstand cultural and societal factors to shape individual life choices. It highlights how various generations of women navigate societal expectations and family traditions, e.g., Rosie's anxieties about her future and her relationship with Jackie reflect the broader tension between individual desires and societal pressures. On the other hand, in Act One, Scene Seven, the focus of Margaret is on practical skills and economic independence demonstrating the influence of contemporary societal values on her ambitions.

M: I can't wait to live in London! Ken says he can get a job there. He's frightfully clever...

M: And I'm going to learn to type! Ken says it will be helpful if we need a second income. Typing's far more useful than all those stupid school certificates. I'll get a proper job. (27)

D: I had a job once too. I know it was only teaching, but. . . There's an odd maroon one over there, on the grass. Of course, Father has absolutely no idea. One would never . . . tell him. There wasn't any choice, then; so I don't know whether it was my need – to love him, if you know what I mean . . . or his desire – for a son. (29)

Again in *Act Three, Scene Two*, Margaret exclaims,

M: With the job. Trying to work and look after Rosie. . . Well, I had to work, London's so expensive now. But Ken married a wife, not a working mother. (71)

In these dialogues, the complexities of the characters' aspirations, economic necessities, and the sociocultural expectations of women during different times are reflected. Margaret's ambition and societal expectations are evident, and the enthusiasm for living in London indicates a desire for independence and self-improvement. Her desire demonstrates the evolving roles of women during the period as she seeks to gain financial independence. This reflects a shift from traditional domestic roles towards more active participation in the workforce, which challenges the maternal rationalism that typically defines women's roles as strictly homebound. Doris reflects on her own past job, lamenting subtly that it was "only teaching," a job that stereotypically associated with women and often undervalued compared to male-dominated area. Her mention of a son hints at the gender preferences and expectations

prevalent in society, which may have influenced her career choices or her perception of her professional role. It can be concluded that the intersection of personal ambition and societal pressures, where familial and societal expectations overshadow women's career achievements are evident in the dialogues. In Act Three, Scene Two, Margaret's statement demonstrates a searching for a balance between work life and motherhood in a modern city. Her remark that "Ken married a wife, not a working mother" presents the conflict between changing societal roles and conventional marital expectations. This tension dictates women's primary role as caregivers, not earners or professionals. Both these characters were found to be navigating their desires within the constraints of their societal and cultural contexts, illustrating how these factors play a critical role in shaping their life decisions and identities.

The structural approach of *My Mother* foregrounds the deeply personal and intimate dynamics inherent in the mother-daughter relationship, while *Top Girls* interrogates the broader societal contexts that influence women's choices through a critical lens. *My Mother* emphasizes the nurturing wisdom passed down from mothers to daughters, whereas *Top Girls* shifts the narrative to deconstruct the notion of sisterhood, exposing the divisions wrought by culturally conditioned ideologies. However, *My Mother* remains focused on enhancing the understanding of the complexities surrounding women's identities, through distinct frameworks. Thus, it can be concluded that *My Mother* celebrates the generational transmission of wisdom and the emotional intricacies of maternal bonds, specifically illuminating the diverse landscapes women navigate, encompassing both the intimate wisdom found within familial ties and the broader societal critiques that challenge their autonomy and sense of community. This juxtaposition enriches the discourse on women's roles, and multifaceted nature of their experiences and identities in a patriarchal world.

The non-linear narrative and flexible set design emphasize memory and generational dynamics, which eventually enhance the exploration of repressed desires and unresolved issues in the play. The fluid structure, alongside the symbolic "Wasteground" setting, allows for a deeper portrayal of evolving relationships and personal struggles. The play implies the theatrical technique of providing an intimate connection to the characters' emotional journeys to the audience by using the severity of dialogues. Further, in this play, a contiguous dramatic organization is used rather

than a linear one. It is allowed a fluid exploration of memory and personal history across different periods. The play often interrupts the narrative flow with monologues from disempowered female characters, providing them with a platform to express their internal struggles and perspectives. Domestic scenes are exclusively women-only, emphasizing female relationships and dynamics free from male influence. The absence of male characters shifts focusses to female perspectives and thereby engages the challenge to the traditional gender norms. It also demonstrated the play's socialist feminist stance. This choice facilitates a concentrated exploration of female dynamics and power structures, allowing the audience to engage deeply with the characters' experiences from a distinctly female viewpoint. However, the feminist appeal of the play predominates the traditional set design, yet the fragmented dialogues to critique societal structures and gender roles allow scope for a cumbersome set. There was still the detailed theatrical presence of displaying socio-cultural costumes, and the effort to reflect the chaotic nature of the characters' interactions and societal expectations.

The theatrical presentation of the play critically engages with the themes of maternal wisdom and rationalism through its innovative structure and design choices. Utilizing a non-chronological narrative, the play reflects the fluidity of memory, which is particularly relevant in the context of maternal relationships. These connections are often shaped by a complex interplay of past experiences and present realities, illustrating how maternal wisdom transcends linear timelines. By revisiting the moments in the mother-daughter dynamic, the narrative emphasizes the enduring impact of a mother's guidance, as daughters grapple with their identities in response to the values imparted by their mothers. This cyclical exploration shows not just the wisdom shared, but also the rational decision-making processes that daughters undertake as they learn to navigate their paths. The minimalist and deliberately unrealistic set design serves to heighten the emotional and psychological experiences of the characters. By stripping away detailed physical environments, the production presents the universality of the lessons shared between mothers and daughters. This abstraction allows the audience to focus on the underlying themes rather than being distracted by specific settings. The play posits that maternal wisdom is often rooted in broader human experiences and emotions, which can be shared across diverse backgrounds and situations. This universal approach enhances the relatability of the narrative, making it accessible to a wide audience. Rapid costume changes between

childhood and adult scenes further reinforce the theme of growth and the lasting influence of maternal figures. These transitions visually encapsulate how formative experiences in childhood shape the rational frameworks through which adult characters interpret their lives. This emphasis on the continuity of maternal influence demonstrates the importance of understanding one's upbringing in the context of personal development.

The absence of male characters is a significant choice that shifts the focus entirely onto women's experiences and expectations. This deliberate decision allows the narrative to explore the intricate dynamics of female relationships without the overshadowing influence of patriarchal narratives. By centering on the mother-daughter bond, the play cultivates an intimate space where maternal wisdom can be explored without external judgment. It is appropriate to mark here that *My Mother* remains grounded in real-life scenarios, effectively marrying authenticity with the exploration of maternal wisdom and rationalism. This enriches the audience's understanding of the multifaceted nature of mother-daughter relationships, and employs the wisdom that transcends generations while acknowledging the rational complexities of navigating those connections.

4.1. Character Analysis

Character analysis is fundamental to literary studies as it deepens our understanding of the psychological, social, and moral dimensions of a narrative. By examining a character's motivations, responses, and transformations, we can uncover the broader themes and conflicts of the text, offering insights into human behaviour and societal norms. In this play, it is quite evident to monitor the features of each characters' period of time. It can be concluded from the play that each character demonstrates their own way of life, their inherited beliefs, reflecting the changing and evolving societal values from the 1920s to the 1990s. In this framework, Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie embody the shifting expectations of their respective eras, presenting a complex interplay between duty, identity, and agency.

Doris, as the traditionalist of early 20th-century Britain, embodies the early 20th-century maternal archetype, shaped by societal expectations of duty, sacrifice, and strict adherence to gender roles. Her dialogues reflect her internalized traditionalism and the emotional toll of living within rigid societal norms. Her struggle challenges

the idealization of maternal rationalism as inherently fulfilling, offering a stark critique of early 20th-century expectations for women. In Act 1, Scene two;

D: You are always your mother's child, my mother used to say.

J: She's my mummy.

D: I'm her mummy.

J: Yes but she calls you 'Mother'. That's different. (11)

In this dialogue, intergenerational dynamics and maternal rationalism are central to theme. The exchange between Doris and Jackie reflects societal expectations and the evolving perceptions of motherhood across generations. Doris' words represent a generational continuity, and her belief in the enduring nature of maternal bond. This dialogue implies that one's identity is perpetually tied to maternal legacy. This reflects an internalized traditionalist view of motherhood, where the maternal bond is seen as immutable and defining. It also suggests a cyclical nature of maternal influence, one that passes from generation to generation, perpetuating societal norms and expectations. However, this notion becomes a source of tension as later generations reject the continuity of these ideals, seeking to redefine their roles and identities instead. In Act One, Scene Seven;

D: I'm talking about the desire... for little arms reaching up and clinging round your neck.

Sniffs the sheet.

Smell: lavender. From the beds, there. Mother Nature is very hard to fight. It's not just a question of rubber things or what have you.

M: 'Little arms . . . clinging' . . . There, see, that's what I don't want. That's the difference between our generations, Mother.

D: Well I'm glad to know you've worked it out, Margaret. Can you sort out Father's socks please? (28)

Doris romanticizes motherhood, portraying it as a source of emotional fulfilment. Her grandchildren perceive these sentiments as constrictive, illustrating the generational shift in perspectives on parental responsibilities and relationships. Her statement reflects the deeply ingrained maternal instinct and societal expectation of women to find fulfilment in nurturing roles. Her imagery evokes a romanticized view of motherhood, an emotional connection and natural instincts. By referencing the sensory experience of lavender, Doris links maternal love to the comforts and routines of domestic life which suggest an almost inevitable pull towards traditional roles.

Additionally, her mention of “rubber things or what have you” subtly critiques modern contraceptive methods. This implies a tension between natural impulses and the increasing agency of women over their reproductive choices. Doris’s response to Jackie, “Well, I’m glad to know you’ve worked it out, Margaret. Can you sort out Father’s socks, please?” implies sarcasm and resignation. Her refusal of Margaret’s rejection presents the generational divide and her adherence to traditional roles. The sudden shift in conversation to a domestic task, sorting socks, symbolizes how Doris perceives Margaret’s rejection of motherhood as impractical or irrelevant in the face of daily responsibilities. It also serves to reassert Doris’s own internalized role as a caregiver, deflecting the deeper emotional tension in their exchange. Doris’s experiences exemplify early 20th-century Britain, a period when women’s lives were mostly governed by home obligations. The societal emphasis on duty and propriety often suppressed individual desires, fostering a culture of self-sacrifice. Through Doris, incompatibility with the changing roles of women in subsequent decades is presented in the play. As a result, it can be concluded that Doris embodies the traditional maternal rationalism that aligns motherhood with nature and duty, while Margaret represents a more modern perspective that prioritizes individual choice and rejects prescribed gender roles.

Margaret, as the representative of post-war pragmatism and maternal conflict, experiences a generation caught between the conventional values of her upbringing and the progressive social changes of her time. Spanning the post-World War II recovery, the civil rights movement, second-wave feminism, and the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, that period of time saw the re-evaluation of traditional values and the emergence of new ideologies. Evans (2015: 148) noted that “Freedom movements in the 1960s were what some of us call “free spaces,” environments that enabled a new sense of possibility by giving the women not only egalitarian ideals but also the skills to challenge hierarchical structures and attitudes.” The war enabled women to take on roles traditionally held by men, such as factory work, and other non-domestic jobs. This newfound sense of empowerment fostered post-war feminist ideals and ambitions for equality. The civil rights movement emphasized racial and gender equality, while feminist thought questioned patriarchal structures that limited women’s autonomy and agency. Writers like De Beauvoir and Friedan critiqued the societal structures that confined women to domestic roles. De Beauvoir’s assertion that “One

is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” in *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1949/2011: 17) became a foundational idea for feminist theory, emphasizing the constructed nature of gender roles. These decades reflect a backdrop that catalyses significant changes in Margaret’s thought process and worldview. Her initial adherence to traditional societal norms is gradually replaced by a critical perspective shaped by the evolving values of her time.

In the play, raised under Doris’s rigid beliefs, Margaret finds herself dealing with the challenges of raising her daughter, Jackie, in a rapidly changing world. Her approach to motherhood reflects a mix of traditional caution and emerging openness to new ideas. Margaret’s struggle to guide Jackie reflects her fear of societal judgment, particularly in an era where single motherhood was criticized by society. Moreover, her character reflects the tensions of post-war Britain as women found a chance for new opportunities for independence while remaining adhered to traditional domestic roles. Her dialogues reveal her struggles to balance personal ambition with familial expectations, showcasing the limitations of maternal rationalism in this transitional period. Act 1, Scene 7;

M: Women did so much during the war; there’s nothing stopping us now.

M: Well, I’m going to be different! Women did so much during the war: there’s nothing stopping us now.

D: Ha!

M: You think I’m being selfish, don’t you? (29)

Margaret believes that the sacrifices and advancements of women during the war have opened new doors for her generation. The dialogue shows her determination to build an independent identity, rejecting the domestic and subordinate roles traditionally imposed on women. The dialogues also reflect optimism reflecting the post-war era’s increasing opportunities for women. Additionally, the dialogue reveals Margaret’s awareness of the societal judgment she faces for wanting more than the traditional life of marriage and motherhood. The word “selfish” implies the internalized guilt and societal pressure many women felt for prioritizing their ambitions over familial or domestic responsibilities. This dialogue explains Margaret’s struggle to reconcile her desires for independence with the expectations placed upon her as a woman. However, her eventual frustrations with the sacrifices required by motherhood reveal the enduring power of traditional maternal ideals, even as societal norms began to shift.

M: ...But we still have to save hot water...Everything is a sacrifice in this house.
Everything's – is – sacrificed for ... Piano tuition. (82)

Margaret's recognition of the cycle of sacrifice critiques the rationalized maternal wisdom passed down by Doris. Her statement shows the emotional costs of these ideals, which prioritize familial duty over individual fulfilments. Margaret's struggles mirror the broader societal tensions of post-war Britain, when women were expected to return to domestic roles after contributing significantly to wartime efforts. Despite growing opportunities for independence, cultural expectations of maternal sacrifice persisted, limiting women's ability to redefine their roles. Margaret's character justifies the emotional and practical conflicts inherent in this transition.

The character Jackie, as the feminist rebellion against maternal expectations, reflects the feminist ideals of the 1970s, where autonomy and self-determination were increasingly valued. During the 1970s, the feminist liberation movement catalysed a cultural shift where women increasingly sought personal goals and ambitions, rejecting the constraints of traditional domestic roles and challenging the hierarchical systems of 'sex roles' in society (Evans, 2015: 145–146). Unlike her mother and grandmother, Jackie rejects the notion that wisdom is inherently tied to tradition or societal expectations. Her rejection of traditional family structures mirrors the feminist critique of societal norms that equated a woman's value with her ability to conform to patriarchal expectations. Her decision to keep and raise Rosie as a single mother reflects a shift toward valuing personal agency over conformity. Her dialogues illustrate her attempts to navigate the complexities of independence and motherhood, exposing the emotional costs of rejecting societal expectations. In Act one, scene six;

J: I'll go back! Yes, I will! Finish the degree. I won't fail both things! (24).

R: makes a snuffling noise in her sleep.

J: Only think about her at night, her cheek against mine, soft and furry, like an apricot . . . She'll be happy, won't she? (25)

The dialogue reveals a woman caught between personal ambition and maternal responsibility, challenging traditional expectations of motherhood while also grappling with the vulnerabilities and sacrifices inherent in her choices. Jackie's determination to pursue education while grappling with her love for Rosie critiques the traditional notion that motherhood must overshadow personal ambition. Her attempt to "finish the degree" signifies her determination to reclaim her autonomy and

agency in a world that often demands women sacrifice personal goals for their families. Jackie's softer, more vulnerable side emerges in her intimate moment with Rosie. This tender reflection illustrates Jackie's deep love for her daughter, even as she contemplates the challenges of raising her as a single mother. The juxtaposition between her feminist ideals and her maternal vulnerability adds complexity to her character, revealing the emotional weight of her decisions. This moment also demonstrates the duality of Jackie's rebellion. On one hand, she rejects the traditional maternal expectations handed down by Doris and Margaret, asserting her right to define motherhood on her own terms. On the other hand, her self-doubt, expressed, reveals the enduring pressures of societal judgment and maternal guilt.

The feminist movement of the 1970s championed the idea that women should not be left in a position to choose between motherhood and ambition. However, Jackie's struggles reveal the limitations of this vision as societal structures continued to lack adequate support for single mothers. By presenting Jackie's internal struggles the play puts her as both a feminist archetype and a humanized figure navigating societal constraints. Given the dialogue, her struggle reveals the emotional toll of challenging these norms. In Act three, scene five;

J: I wanted you, Rosie. For the first time in my life I took care of myself - refused joints, did exercises, went to the clinic. (85)

Jackie's expression of love for Rosie juxtaposes her decision to give her up. This presents the complexities of rejecting traditional maternal roles while still grappling with their emotional weight. In Act one, scene nine;

J: Simon wanted children. I tried to believe I could start again. – Stupid – I just kept dreaming about Rosie. (37)

Jackie's inability to overcome her choice to abandon Rosie critiques the idealization of maternal rationalism, exposing its inadequacy in addressing the emotional intricacies of contemporary parenthood. Jackie's experiences reflect the feminist movement of the 1970s, which aimed to deconstruct patriarchal frameworks and re-establish women's positions in society. However, Jackie's vulnerability and self-doubt humanize her character and reveal the emotional costs of her rebellion. Her rejection of maternal sacrifice shows a broader push for equality and autonomy during this

period, yet emphasizes that equality requires not only individual determination but also systemic change to support women's autonomy and caregiving roles.

Rosie, the youngest character faces the consequences of maternal rejection. She represents a generation that prioritizes transparency and personal autonomy over the secrecy and dominance that defined her ancestors. Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, Rosie is shaped by an era that increasingly values openness and self-expression. Her dialogues in the play reflect her struggle in reconciling her fractured relationships and defining her identity within a family shaped by conflicting beliefs. Unlike Doris, who adhered to rigid social norms, and Margaret, who internalized societal judgment, Rosie seeks to define her identity through authenticity and personal agency. The struggle that she has to uncover the truth about her family history reflects broader societal transition toward valuing emotional transparency over repression.

The late 20th century marked a critical departure from traditional family hierarchies as younger generations increasingly prioritized communication, emotional fulfilment, and individuality over rigid inherited expectations. This era saw significant cultural shifts in the 1980s and 1990s, increasingly reflecting a move towards egalitarian relationships where mutual respect and emotional connection became central. This focus on communication was indicative of an evolving social ethos that valued transparency and self-expression as essential elements of familial and personal relationships. This departure from hierarchical norms was not only a response to the feminist movement but also a broader cultural acknowledgment of the benefits of individuality and emotional openness. Rosie's experiences are deeply influenced by the secrecy surrounding her parentage, a legacy of her family's attempt to conform to societal expectations. Raised under the belief that Margaret is her mother, Rosie feels the emotional consequences of this concealment. Her questioning reflects her frustration with the lack of transparency that defined her upbringing and the betrayal she feels upon discovering the truth about her parentage. In Act three, scene five;

R: If you were really my mum you wouldn't have been able to give me away.

J: How dare you! You are at the center of everything I do. (84)

In this dialogue, her accusation is noted to show the emotional impact of Jackie's choice to abandon her. Her rejection of this option questions the pragmatism of maternal rationalism, emphasizing its emotional repercussions.

R: I hope you're a success, Jackie. A big, big success. (83)

Rosie's sarcastic remark critiques Jackie's perceived prioritization of career over motherhood, reflecting her frustration with the consequences of maternal rejection. Rosie's experiences reflect the evolving attitudes of younger generations, who grapple with the legacies of feminist movements while forging new paths of self-expression. Her character illustrates the emotional intricacies of rejecting conventional maternal responsibilities. In Act two;

R: Well, she doesn't want you to know she's messed things up. – C'mon, help me rip this sheet.

J: What for?

They rip the sheet in half.

R: A banner. We're doing a Greenham protest outside the physics lab at school. (52)

J: Why?

R: Secrecy kills. Nuclear secrecy. Here, you can make one too. (53)

This dialogue between Rosie and Jackie is symbolic, representing evolving values of activism, transparency, and autonomy in the context of late 20th-century societal shifts. Her involvement in a Greenham Common protest demonstrates that she was involved in broader cultural movements of the 1980s. This emphasizes that her rejection of secrecy and authority reached a different level. Rosie's statement, including the term "nuclear secrecy," demonstrates the changing values of transparency and accountability that were becoming prominent during the 1980s and 1990s. This era saw widespread activism, particularly around issues like nuclear disarmament and environmental sustainability, which were spearheaded by grassroots movements such as the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. Rosie's participation in such protests shows that she challenges the hierarchical structures of secrecy that defined earlier generations. Moreover, Jackie's question of "Why?" reveals her distance from the activist values that Rosie espouses. This response shows the generational divide between Jackie, whose decisions were shaped by the societal pressures and limitations of the 1970s, and Rosie, who is a product of the more radical and individualistic ethos of the 1980s. Jackie's hesitation to engage with Rosie's activism reflects her internal conflict, as she struggles to reconcile her maternal role with her daughter's rejection of inherited values. The act of ripping the sheet to create

a protest banner is rich in symbolism. It represents Rosie's rejection of the domestic and restrictive expectations traditionally associated with women, as she repurposes an object of domesticity into a tool of activism. This act is emblematic of the feminist ideals of the 1980s, which emphasized the subversion of traditional gender roles and the assertion of agency through direct action. The reference to Greenham Common further situates Rosie within the historical context of feminist and peace movements. The Greenham Common protests were led predominantly by women, emphasizing the interconnectedness of gender equality and anti-nuclear activism. Whittier (1995: 4) noted that "A radical feminist challenge persisted throughout the 1980s and into the 1990S in many forms: women's movement organizations, the politicized actions of individuals in their daily lives, and within movements for other causes."

The play critically evaluates the concept of maternal rationalism and wisdom through the intergenerational experiences of Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie. Rather than rejecting the wisdom passed down through generations, the play offers a nuanced examination of how this wisdom can both empower and constrain individuals, depending on how it is interpreted and applied. The evolving roles of women and the tensions between tradition and autonomy are presented by situating the characters within their historical contexts. By focusing on the intergenerational dynamics between Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie, a balanced perspective on the value of maternal wisdom can be observed in the play. It can also suggest that while inherited guidance can offer stability, it must be adapted to meet the evolving needs of each generation. Through its rich character development and emotionally charged dialogues, the play challenges the audience to consider how traditional maternal advice can be both a source of support and a means of control.

4.2. Thematic Analysis

Maternal expectations in *My Mother* serve as a primary source of conflict, mirroring the changing cultural norms during the 20th century. Doris represents traditional maternal values rooted in duty and sacrifice. Her expectations of Margaret are stringent, reflecting her belief that discipline and resilience are essential traits, influenced by her experiences in a time when women were predominantly characterized by their home responsibilities. Margaret, while respecting her mother's values, struggles to balance these expectations with her own desire for independence.

Her exclamation, “I’m not wasting my life” (28), embodies the conflict between following Doris’s guidance and seeking for personal fulfilment. This generational conflict is intensified by Jackie, whose outright rejection of maternal wisdom symbolizes the cultural shifts of the 1960s and 1970s. When Margaret confronts Jackie about her behaviour, Jackie responds defiantly: “If you want me to behave like an adult, then stop treating me like a child!” (17). This presents the growing assertion of autonomy by younger generations. It can be concluded that the play’s exploration of generational conflict transcends personal dynamics, offering a broader critique of how societal expectations constrain women’s identities across time. The cyclical nature of this conflict, where each generation grapples with inherited expectations, is a central theme of the play.

Rejection in *My Mother* functions as both an act of defiance and a pathway to empowerment. Jackie’s choice to relinquish custody of Rosie is notably significant. While Margaret perceives this as an abdication of duty, Jackie regards it as an expression of love and self-preservation. By rejecting traditional maternal expectations, Jackie asserts her autonomy, creating a new framework for her identity. Similarly, Rosie’s playful defiance in the *Wasteground* scenes, such as her mock burial of a doll, signifies her rejection of societal norms surrounding gender and motherhood. These acts, while seemingly minor, represent Rosie’s increasing awareness of the limitations imposed by her environment. Butler’s theory of performativity is particularly relevant here, as she argues that subversive acts expose and destabilize societal norms, enabling a critique and transformation of regulatory frameworks (Butler, 1990: 92).

4.3. Structural Analysis

The non-linear narrative structure of the play subverts conventional storytelling, facilitating a more dynamic examination of maternal relationships. By shifting between the past, present, and future, the play presents the cyclical nature of familial conflicts and reconciliations. The fragmented chronology illustrates how choices made by one generation resonate with the next, creating a layered narrative that mirrors the complexities of real-life relationships. For instance, the juxtaposition of Doris’s strictness with Margaret’s frustrations reflects the repetitive nature of maternal expectations. Regarding the symbolism and metaphor in the play, the usage of

mundane objects in the play, such as Doris's utility cups and Rosie's red sock, further emphasizes the tension between tradition and modernity. The cups, a remnant of wartime austerity, symbolize Doris's adherence to practicality and duty. Conversely, the red sock, a personal and emotional artifact, reflects Rosie's individuality and the shift toward personal agency. Symbols such as the cherry tree and the piano enhance the narrative, offering deeper insights into the characters' relationships. The cherry tree, depicted by Jackie and Rosie, represents growth, continuity, and imperfection. The piano, associated with Doris's insistence on discipline, symbolizes the weight of maternal expectations. In the play, the use of metaphor bridges personal narratives with societal critiques, creating a layered commentary on motherhood.

The theme of rejection in the play manifests in various ways, including verbal defiance, emotional detachment, and symbolic acts. Doris's traditional rationalism is rooted in her lived experience of pre-war Britain, where maternal roles were synonymous with self-sacrifice and societal conformity. Margaret begins to push back against these expectations but remains constrained by the cultural norms of her era, embodying the transitional generation caught between traditional and modern values. Jackie and Rosie, influenced by feminist ideals, take more radical stances, rejecting the cycles of sacrifice and expectation to define their paths. Furthermore, Jackie's disregard of Margaret's advice on Rosie's upbringing indicates a rejection to of perpetuating generational cycles of submission. Jackie questions Margaret's justification for transcending the constraints imposed on previous generations. Jackie's tone presents her exhaustion with inherited expectations, framing her defiance as an assertion of her autonomy. Rosie's burial of Suky, the family doll, in Act One, Scene Nine (34) serves as a striking metaphor for her rejection of maternal legacy. Suky, passed down through generations, symbolizes the emotional burdens and expectations tied to maternal duties. By burying the doll, Rosie symbolically disconnects herself from the burdens of the past, emphasizing the younger generation's desire to forge a new narrative free from conventional maternal logic. These patterns of maternal rejection are not isolated but essential to the play's broader plot. They create dramatic tension and drive character development, allowing the audience to witness the complexities of intergenerational relationships. The repeated acts of defiance reveal the central conflict between inherited wisdom and the pursuit of personal autonomy, challenging the audience to reflect on the evolving role of motherhood in a rapidly

changing society. The tension between modernity and tradition is most apparent in the relationship between Doris and Margaret, as Doris's insistence on the necessity of motherhood contrasts with Margaret's more progressive perspective. Doris's adherence to maternal rationalism reflects the societal values of her time, wherein a woman's value was frequently tied to her familial responsibilities. Margaret, caught in a transitional period, exemplifies the cultural shift towards scrutinizing these roles yet grapples with completely severing her ties to them. Margaret represents the "negotiation of two competing ideologies; one steeped in sacrifice, the other in self-determination. The rejections of Jackie and Rosie are more explicit and demonstrate the impact of second-wave feminism. Jackie's decision to relinquish Rosie to Margaret's custody exemplifies her rejection of traditional maternal norms. This decision, however emotionally challenging, shows Jackie's prioritization of her career and identity over societal norms. Rosie's viewpoint adds an additional depth of intricacy. As the youngest character, she contends with the emotional consequences of her mother's decisions while rejecting the maternal rationalism that has influenced her upbringing. This creates a cyclical pattern of rejection and redefinition, reflecting broader societal shifts in the comprehension of motherhood. By confronting the image of the self-sacrificing mother, the play invites audiences to question the relevance of maternal rationalism in contemporary contexts, making the play a powerful commentary on the intricacies of family dynamics and female agency.

The rejection of maternal guidance significantly influences the relationships between mothers and daughters in the play which introduces cycles of conflict, separation, and reconciliation that reflect wider societal changes. Each rejection, while painful, reflects the characters' attempts to reshape their identities to or in opposition to maternal expectations. For instance, Doris's reproachful tone while questioning Margaret's decision not to have more children shows her struggle to a worldview in which motherhood is a woman's paramount fulfilment. This generational barrier creates an emotional distance between Doris and Margaret, leaving minimal opportunity for reconciliation in the initial phases of their relationship. Jackie's decision to permit Margaret raise Rosie illustrates her conflict with the emotional and societal expectations of motherhood. This choice, while intended to provide Rosie with stability, leads to a tense relationship between mother and daughter. Jackie's feelings

of inadequacy and guilt manifest in her emotional detachment from Rosie, as reflected in Act One, Scene Six:

J: You'll never call me Mummy. Rosie. Mummy. (26)

R: Mummies give their babies away sometimes. They do. Shut up crying (34)

Jackie's internal conflict, where she rejects the traditional maternal roles, results in a diminished bond with her child. Rosie, in turn, internalizes this rejection, as demonstrated in Act One, Scene Nine:

R: Mummies give their babies away sometimes. They do. Shut up crying (34)

The emotional alienation between mothers and daughters sustains cycles of rejection and misunderstanding. Margaret's strained relationship with Doris influences her struggles with Jackie, while Jackie's emotional distance from Rosie reflects the unresolved conflicts of her own childhood. These patterns demonstrate that maternal rejection, far from being isolated, resonates across generations, significantly influencing identities and relationships. Despite the prevalent conflicts, the play presents instances of reconciliation that give hope to the possibility of healing within familial bonds. Doris and Margaret, for instance, find common ground in their shared experiences of sacrifice. Despite their initial discord, their shared comprehension of the struggles and compromises intrinsic to motherhood fosters a sense of respect. The relationship between Jackie and Rosie, while characterized by emotional distance, also evolves toward reconciliation. Jackie's eventual recognition of Rosie's suffering and need for validation allows for moments of empathy and connection. In later scenes, Jackie begins to address Rosie's feelings of abandonment, signalling a shift in their relationship. This progression illustrates the play's broader theme of reconciliation as a process of admitting and addressing generational wounds. The play's intricate depiction of these dynamics emphasizes that reconciliation is not about erasing the past but about forging a path forward that recognizes collective suffering and promotes understanding. This theme resonates with contemporary discussions of intergenerational reconciliation and the changing dynamics of motherhood. The play contextualizes the rejection of maternal rationalism within the broader cultural evolution of motherhood. The play captures the ways in which societal expectations have shifted, especially as women have attained increased access to education, professional opportunities, and reproductive autonomy. Furthermore, these shifts

challenge the traditional paradigms of motherhood, pushing against the constraints that have historically defined women's roles in both public and private spheres. The narrative explores the personal histories of its characters, by reflecting their experiences and decisions with a broader societal changes and individual agency. As the characters navigate their complex relationships and personal aspirations, the play presents the importance of dialogue and understanding in healing and shaping future generations. Ultimately, it emphasizes the need for societal structures to adapt to the evolving roles of women, thereby fostering environments where new forms of motherhood and female empowerment can thrive. This adaptation not only supports women's growth but also contributes to a more equitable and inclusive society.





5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study suggest that *My Mother* challenges traditional notions of maternal wisdom and rationalism, particularly the assumption that motherhood is inherently rational, self-sacrificial, and selfless. In the context of Doris, the maternal figure who represents the early 20th-century norms, the play complicates the conventional view of the mother as an inherently beneficent and self-sacrificing role. Doris's assertions encapsulate the deterministic view of motherhood that was prevalent in her era. Doris reflects not only the lack of agency women had regarding motherhood in her time but also how maternal roles were often imposed by societal structures rather than individual choices. This rejection of maternal wisdom as an essential, rational truth is extended through the generations. Doris represents a period when maternal wisdom was largely institutionalized as self-sacrifice, duty, and unconditional nurturing. In contrast, Margaret struggles with the conflicting demands of upholding these ideals while asserting her own independence in the post-war era. As feminist theorist Rich (1976: 253) asserts, motherhood as an institution thrives on women's sacrifice, but the lived experience often defies such idealized ideals. The play's portrayal aligns with Rich's assertion, illustrating how Doris's challenges to maternal ideals create conflict in her relationship with Margaret, whose desire for autonomy and professional fulfilment directly challenges the inherited maternal wisdom. Jackie's character, in particular, becomes a radical shift from Doris's adherence to maternal duty. Jackie's refusal to accept the traditional role of motherhood presents a departure from Doris's world, as Jackie rejects the notion that maternal identity must supersede personal ambition. Jackie's decision to relinquish Rosie is emblematic of her complete break with the maternal expectations set by Doris and Margaret. It demonstrates how feminist ideologies of the 1970s began to reshape maternal identity, positioning it as one of many potential identities a woman could choose rather than a singular, all-defining role. Thus, examination of the play of maternal rejection in each generation serves not only as a critique of maternal roles but also as a powerful statement on the evolving nature of women's autonomy and agency. In doing so, the play invites a radical reinterpretation of maternal wisdom, suggesting that maternal roles are fluid, often conflicting, and shaped by the socio-historical context rather than an essential, universal truth.

The empirical rejection of maternal guidance serves as a powerful narrative strategy throughout the play. This rejection is not a simplistic revolt against maternal wisdom; rather, it reflects a deeply emotional and intellectual engagement with the complexities of motherhood. In the play, the rejection of maternal rationalism is used to propel the characters' development and illustrate the generational conflicts around maternal roles. Through this process of rejection, each character asserts her autonomy, complicating the maternal narrative by exposing the emotional costs of rejecting inherited wisdom. The act of empirical rejection in the play serves as a performative act of agency, a central concept in feminist theories of identity and autonomy. Judith Butler (1990: 25) argues that gender identity is performative; it is constructed through repeated actions and behaviours rather than being an inherent trait. While Butler does not directly address maternal identity, her framework suggests that all identities, including motherhood, are shaped by societal norms and repeated performances.

Jackie's decision to relinquish Rosie can be seen as a performative rejection of traditional motherhood, forcing both characters and the audience to confront the complexities and contradictions inherent in maternal identity. As Butler's theory of performativity suggests, rejecting the societal expectations tied to motherhood exposes the constructed nature of such roles, and in this context, Jackie's actions can be seen as a subversive challenge to the structures that seek to define and limit her identity (Butler, 1990: 192). This rejection also alters the way the audience perceives the characters and their relationships. The interactions between Doris, Margaret, and Jackie become a battleground where maternal wisdom is continually renegotiated. Doris, who views motherhood as a duty, feels betrayed by her daughters' rejection of the maternal ideal. Margaret's attempt to balance societal expectations with personal desire reflects the transitional period between the two worldviews. Jackie, whose feminist rejection of traditional motherhood reaches its peak with her decision to relinquish Rosie, disrupts the conventional maternal narrative entirely. Rosie's anguished reaction expresses the emotional pain of maternal rejection, both for the character and the audience. Rosie's words challenge the assumption that rejecting motherhood is an act of liberation. This powerful critique forces the audience to rethink the ideological expectations surrounding maternal roles and question whether women's autonomy should always come at the cost of relational bonds. By employing the strategy of maternal rejection, the play is not simply telling a story of women

rejecting their mothers' advice but is instead offering a broader commentary on the societal constructs surrounding motherhood. Chodorow (1978: 7) argues that the roles and responsibilities of mothering are historically and culturally reproduced, reinforcing gender asymmetry, which suggests a need for societal and structural change to achieve gender equality. Thus, it can be referred that maternal identity is socially imposed and, at times, stifling and that the act of rejecting maternal wisdom is a form of self-liberation.

The play offers a profound contribution to feminist literary criticism by critiquing the traditional portrayal of motherhood as an unchanging, self-sacrificing institution. Feminist critics have long challenged the notion that motherhood is a singular, idealized role that all women must adopt. The work of Rich, for instance, questions how the institution of motherhood in patriarchal societies has been used to control and define women's roles. In her influential work *Of Woman Born*, Rich argues that the idealization of motherhood as self-sacrifice is a form of social control, reducing women to their reproductive and nurturing roles (Rich, 1976: 242). The play resonates with these feminist critiques by presenting a complex portrayal of motherhood that challenges conventional wisdom. The maternal figures in *My Mother* are not depicted as perfect caregivers; rather, they are flawed and multifaceted, embodying the emotional and psychological complexities of maternal roles. Doris, Margaret, and Jackie each reflect different responses to the pressures of traditional motherhood. Doris's self-sacrificial motherhood, Margaret's negotiation of maternal duty and personal ambition, and Jackie's outright rejection of maternal expectations suggest that maternal roles are not monolithic but are shaped by personal, historical, and cultural contexts. By portraying empirical rejection, the play shifts the focus from the idealized notion of maternal wisdom to the more complex, lived experience of motherhood. This shift is demonstrated with feminist arguments that maternal roles should not be seen as universal or deterministic, but as fluid and open to reinterpretation. The study thus expands the feminist discourse on motherhood, offering a critique of how maternal roles are constructed and performed, both in literature and in society. The exploration of maternal rejection in the play offers new directions for feminist literary criticism, particularly in the context of maternal studies. Feminist scholars have increasingly turned their attention to maternal narratives, recognizing that these stories reveal much about gender, power, and identity. The portrayal of empirical rejection of the maternal

rationalism and wisdom in the play contributes to this discourse by providing a nuanced depiction of motherhood as a contested space, where women both challenge and reaffirm their roles as mothers. This complex portrayal invites further investigation into how maternal figures are represented in contemporary literature and how these representations intersect with broader feminist concerns about autonomy, gender, and identity.

The findings of this study significantly expand our understanding of maternal theory in literature, particularly in the realm of feminist maternal theory. By emphasizing the rejection of maternal wisdom, *My Mother* provides an important case study in how maternal roles are portrayed as dynamic rather than fixed. This study confirms the argument made by Ruddick (1989: 125) that maternal practice, rather than being defined by universal traits, is shaped by social and historical context, and thus can differ greatly across generations. The play demonstrates how the maternal roles of Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie each embody the societal expectations and cultural conventions of their respective times. Doris's embodiment of early 20th-century maternal ideals, characterized by self-sacrifice and duty, contrasts sharply with Jackie's feminist-driven rejection of these roles. This generational shift explains the argument that maternal identity is dynamic, adapting to evolving social situations and cultural values. The portrayal of empirical rejection in the play invites future scholars to investigate maternal theory beyond traditional boundaries, exploring how different forms of resistance to maternal roles can be interpreted in feminist narratives. This opens new opportunities for understanding maternal roles, not as fixed norms but as evolving sites of negotiation and power. Moreover, the transitional nature of gender roles during the mid-20th century, marked by significant social change and the emergence of second-wave feminism, is explored through feminist critiques of traditional maternal expectations and aspirations (McRobbie, 2009: 3-6). For example, Margaret's struggle to balance traditional maternal expectations with her own aspirations reflects the transitional nature of maternal roles during the mid-20th century, a period marked by significant social change and the emergence of second-wave feminism. Furthermore, the play's intricate depiction of maternal figures challenges the essentialist views of motherhood that frequently prevail in literature and societal discourse. The rejection of maternal wisdom by later generations in the play explains the complexities and contradictions inherent in maternal identities. Judith

Butler's critique of essentialism challenges the notion that gender, womanhood, or motherhood are fixed, universal categories. Instead, she argues that these identities are socially constructed and constituted through repeated performances, allowing for diverse experiences and interpretations within different cultural and social contexts (Butler, 1990: 25).

By presenting maternal roles as contested and multifaceted, the play broadens the theoretical framework of maternal studies, encouraging a more critical examination of how maternal identities are constructed, performed, and challenged. This approach is particularly significant for aimed at investigating the intersections of gender, power, and identity in maternal narratives. One of the key theoretical contributions of this study is its critique of the rationalist lens through which maternal roles have traditionally been viewed. The play challenges the notion that maternal roles are inherently rational and selfless, showing the emotional and relational complexities involved in motherhood. Doris's adherence to duty is framed as a social construct, a product of her historical and cultural context, rather than an intrinsic aspect of womanhood. Rationalist interpretations of motherhood often emphasize logic, sacrifice, and duty, overlooking the emotional and psychological dimensions that are equally integral to maternal experiences. The characters who struggle with these dimensions expose the limitations of a purely rationalist approach to understanding maternal roles. In this framework, Margaret's lament about the sacrifices made for piano tuition reveals the emotional burden of maintaining generational expectations, challenging the audience to reconsider the validity of rationalist ideals in maternal narratives. Moreover, Jackie's rejection of traditional motherhood in favour of personal autonomy shows the limitations of viewing maternal roles through a rationalist lens. Her decision to relinquish Rosie is not just a rational choice but a deeply emotional one, reflecting her internal conflict and desire for self-actualization. This act of rejection complicates the traditional narrative of motherhood, and suggest that motherhood is shaped by the interplay of societal expectations and individual psychological processes which reflects a complex integration of emotional depth and structured social roles (Chodorow, 1978: 10-14).

The performance in the play encourages a revaluation of maternal tales, prompting scholars to transcend rationalist interpretations and explore the emotional and

psychological complexities of parenthood. This approach aligns with the feminist critique that emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the diverse and often contradictory experiences of women in their maternal roles (Rich, 1976: 236). Furthermore, by stating the limitations of rationalism in maternal narratives, the study opens up new ways for exploring how maternal identities are constructed and deconstructed in literature. Future research could investigate how different cultural and historical contexts shape how maternal roles are portrayed and understood, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of motherhood. In a society that still often views mothers as self-sacrificing caregivers, the play suggests that rejecting or redefining maternal wisdom is not an act of betrayal but one of empowerment and growth. The depiction of Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie in the play illustrates how maternal roles can evolve and change over generations in response to changing societal values. As feminist theorist Hooks (2000: 2) suggests that rejecting traditional gender roles is central to dismantling patriarchal structures. The play's depiction of maternal rejection corresponds with this viewpoint by emphasizing how conventional maternal responsibilities can limit women's identities and hinder personal development. By presenting maternal rejection as a valid and necessary act, the play encourages a rethinking of maternal roles in contemporary society. This challenge to traditional views of motherhood can influence contemporary understandings by promoting a more nuanced and individualized approach to maternal identity and allows women to define their roles according to their desires and circumstances. Furthermore, the play's innovative narrative strategy, which focuses on maternal wisdom's rejection, has the potential to inspire future playwrights to explore similar themes in their own work. The play emphasizes the emotional and psychological intricacies of parenting, presenting a novel narrative perspective that may impact the depiction of female characters in future works. Her intricate portrayal of rejection of maternal values, along with a profound examination of female agency and autonomy, offers a fascinating framework for contemporary playwrights to address the evolving roles of women in modern society.

6. CONCLUSION

Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* is a rich and multifaceted exploration of feminist themes, offering a nuanced critique of patriarchal systems while advocating for intergenerational dialogue and solidarity. This thesis analyses the play through the interconnected frameworks of rationalism, maternal rationalism, empiricism, empirical rejection, intergenerational feminism, maternal sacrifice, and secrecy within familial relationships. By positioning these themes within feminist literary discourse, particularly radical and intersectional feminism, the play emerges as a powerful commentary on the complexities of gendered experiences across generations. This study uncovers the intricate layers of empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom, showing how it displays not only as a personal conflict but as a reflection of changing social, political, and cultural realities. The play explores deeply the emotional and intellectual struggles of four generations of women who reject traditional maternal roles. This rejection is not simply a reaction to motherhood as an institution but rather a complex process of reshaping identity, autonomy, and social expectations. Each of the characters rejects maternal ideals in ways that reflect their historical and cultural contexts. Doris, as a product of early 20th-century Britain, embodies the archetype of the self-sacrificing mother, shaped by the rigid norms of her time. Her acceptance of maternal duty speaks to the social construct of motherhood as an institution that demands personal sacrifice. Doris's adherence to these ideals sets the stage for the generational conflicts that follow the play's depiction of Doris. The play presents that how maternal wisdom is often constructed around cultural expectations, and present an ideal that many women must struggle against. Margaret, born into a post-war society, is caught between the inherits of her mother's worldview and the growing cultural shifts towards individualism and women's rights. Her rejection of her mother's self-sacrificial ideals reflects the tension between old and new paradigms of womanhood. Margaret's frustration with Doris's generational worldview becomes a key moment in the play's portrayal of maternal conflict, showcasing how motherhood is renegotiated in the face of evolving cultural norms. Jackie's rejection of maternal ideals is the sharpest break from Doris's and Margaret's acceptance of maternal duty. Her decision to relinquish her daughter Rosie is a radical choice that reflects the feminist shift in the late 20th century, where women began to challenge the idea of motherhood as their sole defining role. Jackie's act of rejection,

while painful, echoes feminist critiques of the institutionalized nature of motherhood and represents a deliberate reconfiguration of identity, not merely as a mother but as a person with her own ambitions, desires, and agency. This radical choice exposes the emotional and psychological cost of rejecting a system that has long defined women's identities. Rosie, the youngest generation, exemplifies the emotional repercussions of empirical maternal rejections. She contends with the ramifications of generational divides and the disillusionment over the maternal wisdom passed down to her. The act of giving away Rosie symbolizes more than just Jackie's break from maternal duty; it embodies a disruption in the conveyance of maternal wisdom, leaving Rosie with the emotional remnants of a fractured maternal inheritance. This study signifies that the transformative potential of empirical rejection is not without its challenges. The emotional and relational consequences of rejecting traditional roles, as depicted in Jackie and Rosie's strained relationship, mirror the personal cost of challenging societal expectations. In contemporary activism, similar relational tensions often arise as individuals reconcile personal sacrifices with collective goals. The findings from this study significantly advance the understanding of maternal narratives in contemporary literature, particularly in how maternal rejection functions as a form of resistance to societal norms. This play critiques the romanticized notion of motherhood as self-sacrifice, revealing how the ideal of motherhood is often a culturally constructed role that women are expected to perform without questioning. The rejection of maternal wisdom in the play opens up new perspectives on motherhood as a complex, evolving identity. This study confronts with feminist theorists like Ruddick (1989: 125), who argues that maternal thinking involves a commitment to nurturing and protecting life, but it also involves complex negotiations with social and political forces. It is inferred that maternal identity is not an isolated, self-contained role but one that is shaped by the broader social and political contexts within which women live. In this framework, this play calls attention to the performative aspects of maternal identity, where women are not simply born into motherhood but continually renegotiate their roles in response to evolving social norms and personal desires. By focusing on empirical rejection of maternal rationalism and wisdom, the play challenges the idea that motherhood is an unchanging and universally accepted institution. Instead, it referred that maternal roles are constantly shifting, influenced by societal changes, personal decisions, and political movements. This is particularly

evident in Jackie's rejection of motherhood as an institution, which reflects the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s that questioned traditional gender roles. In this way, the play's messages coincide with the idea of Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, which suggests that maternal identities are not predetermined but are actively shaped through the performance of various roles that women must negotiate throughout their lives.

The broader theoretical implications of this study are grounded in feminist literature and the ongoing critique of maternal roles within cultural narratives. The play invites a deeper understanding of maternal identity as fluid and negotiable, challenging traditional readings of motherhood as a static and self-sacrificial role. This study also corresponds with feminist critiques of motherhood and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the diverse experiences of mothers and daughters within shifting cultural contexts. By rejecting traditional maternal ideals, the play not only critiques the institution of motherhood but also offers a model for feminist literature that encourages the exploration of diverse maternal identities and experiences. It advocates the view that generational, societal, and individual factors shape mother-daughter relationships, and these relationships should be examined and shaped according to historical and social constructs. Through its radical deconstruction of maternal roles, the study invites readers and audiences to reconsider normative expectations of motherhood and offer a framework for feminist narratives that support multiplicity and divergence in maternal experiences. The play offers a bold and innovative contribution to feminist drama by deconstructing the traditional maternal roles often idealized in society. The play's exploration of empirical rejection does not merely challenge a personal relationship between mother and daughter but acts as a broader social critique of the expectations placed on women. The characters in the play engage with maternal identity in various ways that reflect their generational conflicts, challenging the notion of motherhood as an inevitable or natural role. This is central to feminist drama, which seeks to uncover the tensions between societal norms and individual agency. Feminist dramatists often seek to explore the restrictive roles that women are expected to occupy, particularly in relation to motherhood. In this play, the rejection of traditional maternal roles is a form of resistance against the patriarchal expectations that confine women's identities to the role of the mother. Doris's adherence to maternal duty is contrasted with Jackie's empirical rejection of motherhood, illustrating the spectrum

of feminist responses to societal pressures. Jackie's decision to relinquish Rosie symbolizes a refusal to accept motherhood as the defining role of her identity, thus pushing against societal expectations that continue to define women primarily through their relationship with children. Halberstam (2011: 125) argues that contemporary feminist theory and literature offer alternative narratives to the conventional roles of mother and daughter. Queer temporality and feminist subjectivity challenge traditional family structures, disrupting generational logic and enabling the imagination of new relationships between mothers and daughters, free from the burden of tradition. The portrayal of maternal rejection in the play challenges the conventional narrative, and creates space for new understandings of how women can relate to one another, not just as mothers and daughters, but as individuals asserting their own identities. Moreover, the feminist critique of motherhood often illuminates the ways in which women's roles are constructed and policed by societal expectations. As Federici (2012: 65) points out, motherhood has historically been an institution that enforces patriarchal control over women's lives, and limits women's agency and freedom. The characters of the play reflect the internal struggle against these societal constraints. Jackie's rejection of motherhood as an institution is not only a personal act of defiance but also a critique of how society enforces narrow gender roles upon women. Through Jackie, the socialization of women into motherhood as a primary identity is criticized, opening up space for a more expansive view of female autonomy. This study relates significant aspects of both radical feminism and intersectional feminism. Radical feminism posits that the liberation of women necessitates radical reordering of society in terms of power and gender norms. This thesis supports radical feminist views by demonstrating that daughters' rejection of maternal rationalism is not merely a personal rebellion but a form of challenging the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that have historically dictated women's roles. By asserting their autonomy and resisting traditional maternal advice, daughters actively disrupt the expectation of subservience to gendered norms. In doing so, they advocate for broader systemic liberation that transcends individual defiance, paving the way for societal transformation. Moreover, the findings of this study enrich the discourse of intersectional feminism by revealing the different layers of identity that affect the mother-daughter dynamic. The study suggests that the experiences of resistance against traditional norms are not uniform but vary significantly across different cultural, socio-economic, and racial contexts. This

variability fosters the central theme of intersectional feminism, which argues that the experiences of women cannot be understood in isolation from other facets of their identity, such as race, class, and sexuality. The daughters' rejections are shaped by their intersecting identities, which influence how they perceive and respond to maternal advice and reflect a complex influence that transcends the simple binary of generational conflict.

The play offers profound implications for future feminist interpretations of maternal narratives, especially in the context of generational sighting and rejection. The play critiques the role of the mother and the daughter, and shows that women navigate a path between societal expectations and personal desires. By focusing on empirical rejection as a core theme, the play provides a ground for future scholarship to explore how maternal roles can be redefined, negotiated, and ultimately liberated from traditional confines. The play's complex portrayal of motherhood corresponds with feminist scholars who emphasize the fluid and negotiable nature of maternal identities. As Ahmed (2010: 7,13) asserts in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, emotions are integral to how subjects are positioned within cultural discourses and how they resist or challenge those discourses. In the context of the play, the rejection of maternal wisdom is an emotional and psychological act that positions the characters against the deeply embedded cultural norms of motherhood. This emotional resistance is key to understand that maternal roles are not just inherited, they are actively contested, and constructed. The play invites feminist critics to question the binary between maternal self-sacrifice and personal autonomy. The characters in the play, particularly Jackie and Rosie, challenge this binary by showing that empirical rejection is not a one-dimensional act but an emotionally complex and politically charged decision. As such, motherhood is not a natural state but a social construct that is continually redefined within a given society. In the play, the exploration of this redefinition through the rejection of maternal roles offers a feminist critique of how women's identities are shaped by societal pressures and how these pressures can be resisted and reimagined. Moreover, the generational dynamics in the play also raise important questions about the inheritance of maternal roles and the possibility of breaking from them. The emotional legacies of the characters reflect the transmission of maternal wisdom and rejection across generations. This speaks to the broader feminist concern with intergenerational power dynamics and the ways in which past gendered expectations

continue to influence contemporary women's lives. As Kristeva (1986: 223) argues in *The Kristeva Reader*, the maternal function is one of transmission, and it also involves a rupture, a challenge to the status quo. This play embodies this rupture, and maternal rejection can both break the chain of traditional expectations and create new possibilities for the future.

The play introduces a compelling critique of maternal wisdom and societal expectations through the lens of empirical rejection, which is especially evident in the younger generations, most notably in Jackie. The notion of empirical rejection of maternal wisdom speaks to the active, conscious rejection of the traditional maternal role, one that has been imposed by previous generations. Jackie's choice to relinquish her daughter Rosie is a radical expression of young feminism, a movement that seeks to reclaim women's autonomy over their lives, free from the historical and cultural constructs of self-sacrificial motherhood. The act of rejecting maternal wisdom, particularly in the case of Jackie, is rooted in the empirical rejection of a generational legacy that has long dictated women how they should behave, feel, and function within society. This rejection is not merely a personal rebellion but rather a political statement against a cultural history that enshrines motherhood as the defining feature of womanhood. Rejection of traditional family roles is not just an individual act; it is a collective critique of a structure that confines women's identities to the domestic sphere. In this regard, Jackie's decision can be seen as part of a larger movement to reimagine what it means to be a woman outside of the constraints of maternal identity. Here it can be inferred that the generational empirical rejection of maternal wisdom also corresponds with young feminism's emphasis on autonomy and self-determination. Young feminists do not simply challenge the norms of their mothers, but aim to disrupt the system of expectations that has long dictated women's roles. The exploration of maternal rejection in the play also contributes to the ongoing critique of young feminism. Unlike previous generations, which might have felt bound by maternal expectations, young feminists often reject these expectations entirely, asserting that women's roles should be defined by their own desires and aspirations, not by the roles inherited or imposed upon them by society. As Ahmed (2010: 152) argues in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, feminism challenges the emotional norms that dictate how women are expected to feel about their roles in the family, asking instead how women might feel about their autonomy and individual identity. In

rejecting maternal wisdom, Jackie and the other younger women in the play analyse this emotional autonomy and the freedom to define their lives outside of the limiting norms of motherhood. The empirical rejection of maternal wisdom becomes an act of emotional liberation, allowing the younger generation to assert their independence from the burdens placed upon their mothers. The trauma of rejection is not the only emotional experience in play, there is also a sense of empowerment that comes from making the conscious decision to reject what has been imposed. The feminist critique here is clear: self-determination for women, particularly young women, can only be achieved when they reject the idea that their worth is tied to their roles as mothers. As Judith Butler (1997) argues that the identity of women is not defined by the roles they play but by the acts they perform and the desires they express (Butler, 1997: 25). In this regard, the rejection of maternal wisdom becomes an act of creative defiance that allows women to reconstruct their identities.

The rejection of maternal wisdom in the play can be seen as both a personal and political act. The emotional pain that accompanies this rejection is undeniable, but the play powerfully suggests that this pain is necessary for breaking free from the societal constraints that have historically defined women's roles. The characters in the play do not simply reject motherhood because they find it burdensome or oppressive; they do so because they seek to reclaim their identity and challenge a patriarchal system that reduces women to their roles as mothers. In rejecting maternal wisdom, the characters confront the broader societal structures that enforce gendered expectations. The play's portrayal of Jackie's rejection of motherhood mirrors this feminist critique of motherhood as a culturally constructed role designed to restrict women's freedom. Jackie's act of relinquishing Rosie challenges this notion, forcing the audience to confront the ways in which gendered expectations are not biological imperatives but social constructs that can and should be questioned and dismantled. Finally, the broader social and cultural implications of maternal rejection in the play resonate with feminist theories about the role of women in society. Maternal rejection is not just a personal act; it is an assertion of political power. By rejecting maternal norms, the characters are resisting the cultural and social norms that have long confined women to the domestic sphere and limited their opportunities for self-expression and self-determination. This rejection is tied to the feminist ideal of reclaiming power over one's own identity and life choices, which includes the right to reject societal

expectations of what it means to be a woman, a mother, or a daughter. The portrayal of maternal rejection in the play is also a call to action for contemporary audiences, asking them to reconsider the structures that define women's roles in society. Empirical rejection is not simply about personal defiance, but about creating space for future generations to live outside of restrictive norms. It is about empowering women to challenge societal expectations and create new definitions of femininity, autonomy, and power. The rejection of maternal wisdom in the play, then, is not only a feminist act but a transformative act. One that encourages women to imagine and perform new, more liberated futures. The depiction of maternal rejection is also a call for feminist action, urging women to challenge the patriarchal structures that have long dictated their lives and identities. The emotional costs of maternal rejection, while significant, should not overshadow the liberatory potential inherent in rejecting the constraints placed on women by society. Through its portrayal of young feminism and empirical rejection, the play remains a critical work in feminist drama, urging a re-examination of the role's women are expected to play in society and the ways in which they can forge new paths for themselves. As a result, in the climax of the play, the revelation of long-held secrets and the subsequent regrets serve as critical turning points, highlighting the complex interplay between individuality and tradition. The narrative suggests that while nurturing one's autonomy and personal growth is essential, a complete severance from tradition often leads to emotional dissatisfaction and disconnection. This dynamic implies that the play advocates for a nuanced balance, an approach that fosters mutual understanding and reconciliation between personal freedom and familial heritage. As we struggle to assert our individual rights and freedoms, the insights and experiences of our families should not be dismissed as outdated or overly conservative. Instead, they should be recognized as valuable sources of wisdom that can inform our decisions and enrich our perspectives. By adopting this balanced approach, individuals can achieve personal fulfilment while maintaining familial harmony by stressing the importance of integrating tradition with modern values for holistic growth.

This study suggests for future research. Modern playwrights can draw on the techniques in the play to create characters who reject or reshape maternal expectations, thereby contributing to the ongoing evolution of women's roles in contemporary theatre. By embracing complexity, ambiguity, and emotional depth, playwrights might

create more multifaceted maternal figures who challenge the traditional boundaries of motherhood. As feminist playwrights such as Caryl Churchill have shown, challenging gender norms and maternal expectations can result in more authentic and empowering portrayals of women (Churchill, 1982: 5-8). This study suggests that maternal themes in modern drama can be used to address broader social issues, such as gender inequality, personal autonomy, and the impact of societal expectations on individual identity. Examining plays like Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* or Tennessee Williams' *the Glass Menagerie* could provide a further understanding of how maternal rejection functions within different narrative frameworks. Churchill's *Top Girls* challenges traditional maternal roles by presenting a narrative where women's professional ambitions and personal lives conflict, similar to the tensions depicted in this play. The character of Marlene in *Top Girls*, who sacrifices her relationship with her daughter to achieve professional success, mirrors Jackie's decision to prioritize her education and career over traditional maternal duties. Both plays critique the societal pressures that force women to choose between personal ambition and maternal responsibilities, exploring the complexities and sacrifices inherent in these choices (Churchill, 1982: 47). Similarly, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams portrays the complex dynamics between Amanda Wingfield and her children, reflecting themes of maternal control and the impact of societal expectations on family relationships. Amanda's overbearing nature and her attempts to impose her values on her children resonate with Doris's traditionalist approach in *My Mother*. By comparing these works, researchers can explore how different playwrights address the tensions between maternal expectations and individual autonomy, offering a broader perspective on the representation of motherhood in literature (Williams, 1945: 22). Additionally, the exploration of maternal rejection in the play can serve as a valuable framework for modern drama, encouraging playwrights to experiment with non-traditional portrayals of motherhood that explores its complexity, difficulty, and potential for shifting. This approach can inspire new waves of drama that reflect contemporary concerns about gender, identity, and family dynamics, contributing to a more diverse and dynamic theatrical landscape. Future research could benefit from comparative analyses of maternal themes in other works of contemporary drama. Comparing *My Mother* with plays that examine maternal rejection or conflict enables scholars to attain a more profound understanding of the representation of maternal roles and relationships

across many cultural contexts. For example, Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916) is a play that examines the tension between maternal duty and women's autonomy. Glaspell's play critiques the roles that women are confined to, particularly in relation to motherhood and the expectations placed upon them. While *Trifles* deals with the oppression of women's voices, this play presents the rejection of maternal expectations as an act of feminist liberation. Judith Butler (1990: 25), in *Gender Trouble*, argues that "gender is not something one is, but something one does." In both works, maternal expectations are deconstructed and challenged in favour of personal agency, making them ideal candidates for a comparative study on the rejection of maternal wisdom. Additionally, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) offers a feminist critique of traditional gender roles, including motherhood. Woolf's call for women to pursue independent careers and intellectual freedom challenges the maternal ideal that confines women to domesticity. As Showalter (1991) writes in *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*, "Woolf challenges the constraints placed on women by their roles as mothers, arguing instead for women's independence and creativity" (Showalter, 1991: 28). A comparative study between Woolf and Keatley would help elucidate how maternal rejection in feminist texts can be a rejection of societal norms that limit women's self-expression. Furthermore, comparing *My Mother* with plays from different cultural backgrounds can reveal how maternal roles are constructed and challenged in different societies. Examining maternal themes in African or Asian dramas can provide insights into how cultural norms and values shape maternal identities and the generational conflicts that arise from them. This comparative approach can enrich our understanding of the universal and particular aspects of maternal rejection and contribute to a more global perspective on motherhood in literature. Incorporating cross-cultural approaches into the analysis of empirical rejection will significantly enhance maternal and empirical studies. While *My Mother* reflects a British context, similar themes of maternal rejection and the negotiation of maternal roles can be found in literature from various parts of the world. As Abu-Lughod (2013: 171) discusses in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, within postcolonial and global contexts and critiques, Western feminist frameworks often impose universalized narratives of autonomy, neglecting the diverse ways in which women navigate cultural and maternal roles within these contexts. Investigating the depiction of maternal rejection in Western and non-Western literature and drama could

provide new insights on the cultural construction and experience of motherhood. In this framework, examining maternal figures in works by authors such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which explores the traumatic legacy of slavery on maternal bonds, or Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which presents the complexities of maternal love and societal taboos in India, can offer rich comparative material (Morrison, 1987: 78; Roy, 1997: 45). These works can present how maternal roles are shaped by cultural, historical, and personal contexts, and how maternal rejection can serve as a powerful narrative device. Researchers could examine how cultural norms, societal expectations, and historical contexts shape the ways in which maternal rejection is viewed and expressed in different cultural, societal and historical contexts. Such research could ultimately contribute to a more holistic understanding of motherhood as a complex and culturally specific phenomenon. Another important area for future research is the influence of performance and audience reception on the depiction of maternal rejection. Performance studies could investigate how various performances of *My Mother* could modify or emphasize particular aspects of maternal rejection based on the interpretation of actors, directors, and designers. Specifically, studying how younger generations perceive the rejection of maternal roles, as represented by Jackie, can help illuminate the evolving social attitudes towards motherhood and women's autonomy. How does a younger feminist audience interpret Jackie's decision to reject motherhood? In contrast, how might older audiences, those who grew up in an era where traditional maternal roles were more rigidly upheld, respond to the rejection of maternal wisdom? According to Belsey (2002: 49) in *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction*, the meaning of a text evolves from the interaction between the text and its audience, who bring their own experiences and social contexts to their understanding. This suggests that the reception of *My Mother* could vary significantly across generations, offering a fruitful area for investigation into how gendered performances of maternal rejection are interpreted differently depending on societal values. Research in this area could employ focus groups, surveys, or post-performance interviews to examine how different demographic groups, especially those in feminist or more traditional environments, interpret Jackie's rejection of maternal wisdom and its implications for autonomy and empowerment. Traditionally, maternal wisdom has been framed as inherently rational and central to women's identities. However, this study challenges this normative view

by presenting maternal wisdom as flawed, and sometimes restrictive, for the women who must perform it. Future research could explore feminist critiques of maternal rationalism, particularly how rejecting maternal roles is part of a broader effort to dismantle patriarchal systems. This work corresponds with these critiques by presenting maternal roles as socially constructed and rejecting them as a means of asserting individual autonomy. Moreover, further research could investigate the psychological and emotional implications of rejecting maternal rationalism in literature and theatre. The rejection of motherhood is not only a rejection of a societal expectation, but also a process of reclaiming control over one's body, identity, and future. In this framework, the feminist interpretation of maternal rejection in this play, where the act of rejecting maternal wisdom becomes a means of empowerment and self-determination. Consequently, research on the empirical rejection of maternal wisdom offers exciting new ways for further exploration in feminist literary and performance studies. Whether through comparative studies, audience reception studies, cross-cultural analyses, or feminist critiques of maternal rationalism, scholars can deepen our understanding of how maternal roles are constructed, rejected, and redefined in feminist literature and drama. These future studies will contribute to ongoing conversations about gender, identity, and empowerment, helping to reshape how maternal expectations are represented and challenged in contemporary cultural narratives. One significant implication of this study lies in its potential influence on gender equality policies, particularly in the realms of family law, education, and workplace policies. By challenging traditional views of motherhood as a universal and self-sacrificial role, the study can help pave the way for policies that support women's autonomy and choice in both family life and the workplace. Gender equality policies must account for the diverse ways women experience and express motherhood and recognize the empirical rejection of traditional maternal wisdom as a valid and empowering choice. Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000: 7) in *Sexing the Body* argues that policies aimed at gender equality should recognize the diversity of women's experiences, rather than enforcing rigid definitions of gender roles that constrain women's choices. As such, future policies should ensure that women have the freedom to choose their paths without being restricted by the traditional expectations of motherhood. For example, family leave policies could be reformed to focus on parental equality, offering both parents the same opportunities to bond with their children,

without expecting women to bear the entire responsibility of child-rearing. Additionally, policies that support single mothers or those who reject traditional maternal roles should be strengthened. Policies could offer access to affordable childcare, career flexibility, and mental health support for women who may be facing challenges related to the rejection of maternal expectations. This study also suggests important implications for educational practices and social work. Teachers and social workers who work with young women can be encouraged to recognize the empirical rejection of maternal roles as a legitimate expression of feminist autonomy. Educators and social workers can play an important role in supporting young women as they navigate conflicting expectations from their families and society regarding motherhood. Programs that aim to support gender equity in education should emphasize women's right to choose their paths and reject imposed maternal rationalism that limits their potential. MacKinnon (1989: 127,226) in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* argues that the state should recognize the autonomy of individuals to make personal decisions free from the constraints of traditional gender roles. By incorporating feminist theories of maternal autonomy into educational curricula and social work training, practitioners can better equip young women to make empowered decisions about their motherhood and career paths, thus fostering a more supportive environment for self-expression and choice. The rejection of traditional maternal wisdom also holds significant implications for healthcare policies, particularly in the context of reproductive rights and maternal health. By addressing the societal pressures placed on women to conform to traditional maternal roles, this research could contribute to more comprehensive healthcare services that respect women's autonomy in their reproductive choices. Policies could be designed to support women's health by providing accessible information about birth control, fertility, and maternal health while ensuring that women are not socially pressured into becoming mothers. For example, healthcare providers could offer counselling that acknowledges diverse reproductive choices without judgment, supporting women who decide against having children or those who experience difficulties reconciling motherhood with their personal and professional goals. In reproductive rights advocacy, feminist scholars like Ross (2017) emphasize the importance of reproductive autonomy as integral to gender justice. In *Reproductive Justice*, Ross and Solinger (2017: 61–62) argue that achieving reproductive justice requires addressing

broader systemic issues, such as socioeconomic inequality, racial disparities, and access to basic human rights like healthcare and education. By ensuring that healthcare policies recognize the empirical rejection of maternal roles as a valid feminist stance, the healthcare system can provide more inclusive care that respects women's reproductive freedom. This study's exploration of the empirical rejection of maternal wisdom can also inform policies that support families with non-traditional maternal roles. In modern families, where traditional roles are often redefined, it is important to recognize the value of diverse family structures. Policies should reflect the reality that not all women fit the traditional maternal mold and that fatherhood, co-parenting, and shared caregiving should be equally supported. For instance, policies could be enacted that promote equal sharing of child-rearing responsibilities between men and women, ensuring that both parents have the opportunity to participate equally in the early stages of child development. Hakim (2000: 18), in *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century*, stresses that societal policies must recognize the diverse lifestyle preferences of women and address the evolving dynamics of family and work responsibilities, where both partners take on responsibilities that were once solely defined as maternal. Additionally, single-parent families or those that reject traditional gender roles should be provided with greater support. Policies could include financial assistance, access to mental health services, and programs that facilitate economic independence for women who reject traditional maternal roles. The empirical rejection of maternal rationalism is a theme that challenges not only traditional motherhood ideals but also the broader societal structures that define women's roles. It is concluded that the findings of this study display the importance of recognizing maternal autonomy and feminist resistance as critical components of women's liberation. Future research and policies can build on these findings by supporting gender equality, women's reproductive autonomy, and non-traditional family structures. Through thoughtful changes in policy, education, and healthcare, societies can move closer to achieving true equality, where women are free to define themselves outside the constraints of maternal inheritance and societal expectations. Research by Carrasco et al. (2019: 8) supports the depiction of maternal rejection in the play, demonstrating that children experiencing high levels of maternal rejection face emotional maladjustment, particularly when combined with parental power dynamics. Similarly, Meaney (2001: 1168) emphasizes the long-term impact of maternal care variations, noting that

insufficient maternal care can heighten stress responses and emotional vulnerabilities in offspring. These findings correspond with the play's depiction of intergenerational conflict, where the rejection of maternal guidance reflects a broader struggle to balance personal growth with societal expectations.

This study analysed and concluded key research questions regarding the topic. The play subverts traditional maternal wisdom by showing how it fails to meet the evolving needs of younger generations, leading to rejection. Each character; Doris, Margaret, Jackie, and Rosie, demonstrates this rejection in different ways, illustrating the complexities of intergenerational relationships. Rather than fostering understanding, the rejection of maternal guidance often deepens emotional divides, though it also acts as a stimulant for the daughters' development and independence. The rejection of maternal wisdom in the play reflects wider societal and cultural shifts, challenging stereotypical perception of motherhood and promoting a more inclusive understanding of female agency. The evolving dynamics of mother-daughter relationships in contemporary society form the cornerstone of this thesis, which sought to explore the implications of daughters rejecting empirically the traditional maternal rationalism and wisdom. The hypotheses posited that this rejection reflects daughters' pursuit of autonomy and self-identity and arises from generational conflicts as societal values shift. The findings of this study confirm these hypotheses, demonstrating a significant transformation in how daughters view and interact with their maternal figures against the backdrop of changing societal norms. This validation of the hypotheses presents a broader cultural shift towards greater independence and self-determination among younger women. It demonstrates how traditional expectations and guidance from mothers, rooted in a different era's norms, often clash with the modern realities faced by their daughters. The successful validation of these hypotheses enriches our understanding of the contemporary mother-daughter relationship and signals a shift in how women negotiate their roles within the family and society at large. As these young generations seek to define their identities on their terms, they challenge the status quo, paving the way for a re-evaluation of the roles and expectations traditionally assigned to women. This thesis captures the essence of this shift, reflecting the deep generational conflicts and the transformation of societal values that shape these important relationships. As a result, the play provides a fundamental critique of maternal rationalism, depicting motherhood as a contentious and evolving role. By

examining the interplay between rejection, personal agency, and societal constraints, this thesis has shown that maternal guidance is not inherently wise or effective but is shaped by the complexities of human relationships and cultural evolution. This study contributes to feminist literary criticism, maternal studies, and the broader understanding of intergenerational dynamics, emphasizing the need to reconsider traditional maternal roles in the context of modern realities. Ultimately, this thesis has demonstrated how *My Mother* subverts traditional ideas of maternal rationalism and wisdom by portraying their empirical rejection in complex and nuanced mother-daughter relationships. Through its characters, the play reveals how maternal guidance is questioned, challenged, and ultimately disregarded by daughters seeking to establish their own identities. This rejection is not an act of resistance but a necessary response to the constraints of inherited wisdom in addressing contemporary challenges and societal transformations. Furthermore, this study suggests that a complete severance from tradition may lead to emotional dissatisfaction and a sense of disconnection. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the reconciliation of inherited experiences with modern perspectives. A harmonious reconciliation of maternal wisdom, individual self-expression, and autonomy emerges as a compelling approach. The findings advocate for a balanced strategy that promotes mutual understanding and reconciliation between generations. By blending traditional values with modern perspectives, individuals can achieve a more cohesive and supportive framework that nurtures both personal fulfilment and collective understanding.

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