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Patriarchal Returns: A Study of The Symbolic Order of The Mother

Supervisor
Professor Filomena Mitrano

Second Reader
Professor Eva-Sabine Zehelein
Otto-Friedrich Universität Bamberg

Graduand
Katherine Arias Alprecht
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880132

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To my family and friends for the constant motivation and support, even as I embarked on my rants about feminism. To my professors, Dr. Zehelein, Dr. Brähler, and especially to my supervisor, Dr. Mitrano, for enlightening me on this academic journey. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the teachings and guidance. You have inspired me and helped me find my passion.

ABSTRACT

Why is the emancipation of women nullified in moments of historical crisis? This is the case of the current pandemic crisis, which thrusts into relief a historical regression in terms of women's emancipation. Women are experiencing what might be called a "patriarchal return" to the past. This thesis attends to such a return. The discussion takes its cue from the Covid-19 Pandemic, which has created a childcare crisis and clearly revealed that motherhood is still construed as a substitute for services that institutions and the community should provide. The study launches a re-examination of motherhood: it (i) asks what a mother is; (ii) discusses the paradox at the root of a woman's identity, whereby, no matter what their social identity is, women who are mothers are seen first and foremost as the main child-caregiver; (iii) reconsiders the symbolic order of the mother, an order of fixed beliefs, images and ideas, that presents mothers as the glue to what holds a society together.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1986 introduction to her groundbreaking book, *Of Woman Born,* Adrienne Rich claims that her motivation and drive for embarking on such a research in 1972 was that "it seemed to [her] that the devaluation of women in other spheres and the pressures on women to validate themselves in maternity deserved exploration" (Rich ix). Forty-nine years later, I find this statement still relevant. Even though, now there is a lot of research on the negative effects of motherhood, often related to guilt, exhaustion, stress, etc., there seems to be a lack of research questioning why motherhood has detrimental effects on women. I do not mean to suggest that motherhood is bad for women; rather, I am interested in the reason why motherhood is still largely perceived as a solo gendered act.

This thesis is not just another account of women in a patriarchal world. Discussion presents motherhood not from an emotional but from an analytical perspective, advancing the view that women's subordinate position is rooted in motherhood and reinforced by social expectations about motherhood. My analysis explores how the task of child-rearing, for decades, has forced upon women for decades as a pattern of patriarchal social control and domination. The aim of the thesis is to connect the dots across continents and decades of motherhood theory and research, and to uncover how years of patriarchal motherhood has prevented and is *still* preventing women from becoming fully emancipated. Despite the years of feminism, motherhood still functions as a patriarchal institution which is resistant to change because it is built on a gender hierarchy. Consequently, social constructs such as the gender division of labor and the family structure have remained stagnant throughout the years, and they do not match the status of the modern woman.

Just like Rich, who that her book, "is not an attack on the family or on mothering, except as defined and restricted under patriarchy" (Rich 14), I find myself wanting to make the same

claim. Rich was not advocating for women to stop mothering altogether, but simply pointing out how patriarchy has taken over motherhood, a concept that fundamentally should belong and benefit the woman - the mother. In the same way, in this analysis I do not engage in the act of bashing motherhood; rather, I, acknowledge how, even after all these years, women, as mothers, are not fully liberated from patriarchal constraints. This thesis is not meant to persuade women to stop having kids, but it is simply an analysis of how many things have not changed, despite society's constant propaganda about women's progress.

Structurally, this thesis is divided into three chapters: the first chapter aims at describing motherhood, as it is now within patriarchal terms, and as it can be defined under feminist terms. Especially, it dives deeper into two major works in feminist theory, Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and Luisa Muraro's *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*. Rich's work argues that women have been indoctrinated into believing that motherhood and child-rearing are a woman's path to self-realization. By studying motherhood under a patriarchal light, she also highlights the gender inequalities between fathers and mothers. Muraro's psychoanalytic work reveals that patriarchy defines motherhood in negative terms and calls for a social revalidation of mothers. I specifically combine Muraro's psychoanalytic approach with French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray's theories on motherhood and gender, and with American sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow's work on motherhood and family structures. *Of Woman Born and The Symbolic Order of the Mother,* revolutionary and, at times controversial, works have deeply influenced this thesis and provide its theoretical framework. The second chapter deals with the role of the mother in society, and it is subdivided into two sections, Private and Public Spheres, and Maternal Affects. This chapter analyses in depth women's intrinsic and ever-lasting association to the private sphere and its negative consequences, even today, for the modern working woman and her mothering

experience. I discuss how patriarchal motherhood has remained unchanged over the years, and how it hinders women's efforts for emancipation. This thesis concludes with the third chapter which is again subdivided into two sections: Mothers in History and the Covid-19 Maternal Crisis. First, this chapter analyses patriarchy's pattern, throughout historical crises, of using motherhood as a tool for social control and oppression. Both the chapter and the thesis end with the current historical crisis, the Covid-19 Pandemic, which serves as the original motivation for this thesis. The Pandemic, with its childcare crisis, became an "indication" of women's current social status and it emphasized how women's identity, no matter the progress, revolves around motherhood. It also served as another example of patriarchy using motherhood to force women to regress in terms of emancipation, or what I call "patriarchal return".

It bears stressing that this thesis focuses on heterosexual women who are professional career women by decision and not by necessity. The women at the core of this thesis are in traditional heteronormative families (wife, husband, kids). No single-parent household is taken into account for the purpose of this analysis. The thesis focuses on a traditional division of gender, female and male, and my analysis will make gendered generalizations, without focusing on social class, race or ethnicity.

Chapter 1

What is a mother?

"Why so many people feel mad at their mothers;
because whatever childhood was or wasn't,
they're the ones who made it.
Fathers loomed above it all, high trees."
Mona Simpson, My Hollywood (2010)

1.1.What is motherhood?

Society claims motherhood to be intrinsic to a woman's identity. In many ways, society defines one in terms of the other. Dr. Talcott Parsons, a renowned American sociologist, writes that "the woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children, and traditionally the person responsible for a complex of activities in connection with the management of the household, care of children, etc." (Parsons 609) Throughout history, motherhood has been viewed as one of the main life goals of a woman, besides finding a suitable partner. Society advertises motherhood as a woman's natural role, what society calls maternal instinct. Taking care of children has long been associated with femininity because parenting is done in the domestic sphere, and according to patriarchal society, that's the place of the woman. Dr. Patrice DiQuinzio, a scholar on mothering theory, states that "being a mother means possessing and exercising those attributes of personality or character and/or engaging in those activities or practices most closely associated with femininity as traditionally defined in Western patriarchal cultures" (DiQuinzio 10). In other words, the shared assumption is that it's in every woman's nature to become a mother; indeed, motherhood seems to be part of every woman's biological make-up. Motherhood is

something women were born to do, and not only do, but excel at it. If motherhood is a woman's nature, she is inherently predisposed to be a devoted mother; Barbara Welter states in "The Cult of True Womanhood" that "a true woman naturally loved her children; to suggest otherwise was monstrous" (Welter 171). A true woman knows how to provide care and comfort without the need for instructions; she knows instinctively how to mother.

For decades, the mother has been defined as a loving and gentle creature since women inherently already possess these attributes. Because motherhood is so ingrained in femininity, Nancy Chodorow, a feminist psychoanalyst and sociologist, states that "women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure" (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 39). Motherhood, as defined within patriarchy, becomes a woman's calling, and therefore there are no sacrifices; her kids are supposed to be her main priority, her entire world and the most important project of her life. These gender expectations put pressure on women to fulfill their natural role and become mothers. In a society that defines women by their reproductive function, women have felt the need to embrace motherhood in order to gain agency and power. This idea that only through motherhood women can validate themselves in society is something that deserves more exploration.

Motherhood is not defined the same way as fatherhood. There are clear structural and symbolic differences between what it means to be a father and what it means to be a mother. Society defines motherly love as unconditional, selfless, self-sacrificing and never-ending. Even in literature, mothers are often the symbol of nurture and care while fathers are often not in the picture. Since the beginning, a woman's responsibility was to learn how to perform her domestic duties and be the best caregiver for her husband and her family. Hélène Cixous, a French feminist

philosopher and literary critic, states in her revolutionary text, "The Laugh of the Medusa," that according to society "in women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation" (Cixous 882). What I am calling patriarchal motherhood dictates that women are meant to provide the sole, primary care for children. Consequently, children grow up knowing that if they need something, mothers are the first responders: "if something needs to get fixed, Mom is the name they know" (Collins, Is Maternal Guilt a Cross-National Experience? 21). This results in women engaging in more childcare work because children mostly rely on mothers. At first glance, given these scenarios, motherhood seems to be more important, hence the saying "there's nothing like a mother's love". However, this importance does not equal social value. Patriarchal motherhood is paradoxical: on the one hand, it glorifies motherhood and praises mothers; on the other hand, it takes maternal work for granted, and, as a result, maternal work is devalued. In the eyes of society, fatherhood operates in a public setting; fathers are considered the main bread winners and are identified with the public sphere. Motherhood, on the other hand, operates exclusively in a private setting, and society does not recognize household labor as real work. As a result, the work of motherhood continues to be largely invisible in the eyes of society and therefore it remains unpaid.

Dr. Margaret Polatnick states, "men as a gender enjoy a superior power position in relation to women as a gender. That is, they are in control of the major sources of societal power (political, economic, social, physical), their superordinate position and the subordinate position of women buttressed by an ideology of male supremacy and female inferiority" (Polatnick 46). So, it comes as no surprise that this brand of patriarchal motherhood, by definition, it is not meant to benefit women but rather men; it is in many ways oppressing and has detrimental effects on women. This sentiment is echoed by several scholars, such as Sara Ruddick, a feminist philosopher and

mothering theorist, who states that "in many societies, the ideology of motherhood is oppressive to women. It defines maternal work as a consuming identity requiring sacrifices of health, pleasure, and ambitions unnecessary for the well-being of children" (Ruddick 29). Because motherhood is ascribed to the domestic sphere, patriarchy rules over it; after all, as feminist and political historian Joan Kelly-Gadol states "patriarchy, in short, is at home at home. The private family is its proper domain" (Kelly-Gadol 821). The home - the sphere that is essential to the gender division of labor - is where patriarchy thrives, and so motherhood becomes a patriarchal device to subjugate women and confine them to the home. This limited existence restricts women's opportunities and delays their progress, making them dependent on men.

Over the years, many scholars have argued that patriarchal motherhood, which is embedded in gender essentialism, is used as a means of social control and discrimination. In her 1916 article titled "Social Devices for Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children", Leta S. Hollingworth, a renowned American psychologist and feminist thinker who pioneered the psychological study of women, argues that maternal instinct and natural maternal desire are unfounded concepts prescribed by those in control of social power:

> There is, to be sure, a strong and fervid insistence on the 'maternal instinct,' which is popularly supposed to characterize all women equally, and to furnish them with an all-consuming desire for parenthood, regardless of the personal pain, sacrifice, and disadvantage involved. In the absence of all verifiable data, however, it is only common-sense to guard against accepting as a fact of human nature a doctrine which we might well expect to find in use as a means of social control. (Hollingworth 19)

Hollingworth questions the foundation of patriarchal motherhood in order not only to highlight its flaws but also to expose motherhood as a patriarchal device for domination. As a result of

patriarchal motherhood, women – as mothers – have been confined to the home, outside of the real economy; this has had long-lasting negative effects on the lives of women. In 1994, Chodorow openly discusses how motherhood negatively shapes a woman's life and hinders her future: "a crucial differentiating experience in male and female development arises out of the fact that women, universally, are largely responsible for early child care and for (at least) later female socialization" (Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" 243). In 2014, Dr. Martha Fineman, a feminist jurist and legal and political theorist, argues that "the potential for the experience of motherhood is what has historically differentiated female from male public existence in our society. Motherhood has been the basis for discrimination and devaluation" (Fineman 27). Clearly, despite the large gap in years, there has been a consensus that simply by associating women to motherhood, women have become socially disadvantaged compared to men. In the end, the more we examine motherhood, the more we realize that it benefits patriarchy since it demands a gender division of labor and a specific family structure where the father is the provider who participates in the public sphere, while the mother stays in the private, taking care of the kids.

The purpose of defining motherhood for this thesis is not about purely criticizing motherhood or stopping women from mothering; it is about analyzing the way motherhood has been outlined and regulated by patriarchy, and how it has been used in a patriarchal society. As French feminist, Luce Irigaray, argues in 1985, "what remains to be done, then, is to work at 'destroying' the discursive mechanism. Which is not a simple undertaking...For how can we introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity?" (Irigaray 76)

In this chapter, the concept of motherhood will be studied through feminist theory: first, with the help of the American poet and feminist writer, Adrienne Rich, and her emblematic and revolutionary feminist book, *Of Woman Born*; and secondly, with the help of Italian feminist

philosopher Luisa Muraro and her controversial book, *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*. I will read Muraro's work face-en-face with Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*. In this manner, we can have a broader picture of motherhood through American and European points of view combining American feminism with European psychoanalytic feminism.

1.2. *Of Woman Born*

Society tends to see young women as future mothers. Women in their late twenties and early thirties are constantly being reminded of their "expiring biological clock" and their imminent duty. In *A Woman Born* (1976), Adrienne Rich highlights how, for women, the concept of having a family, has been forced upon them due to social expectations. Rich discusses how for women motherhood symbolizes self-realization; it is simply the next step in adulthood - the most important chapter of their lives. Society teaches the woman that her key status depends solely on whether she becomes a mother. If she cannot reproduce, she loses her significance, her useful role. Her name gets erased and suddenly she is the "barren" or "childless" woman. She loses her identity as a woman since she cannot fulfill her womanhood. By contrast, Rich points out, "the term 'nonfather' does not exist in any realm of social categories" (Rich 12). Any discussion about motherhood must initiate with the revolutionary distinction that Rich made in her book; Rich tackles the concept of motherhood through a feminist lens, emphasizing how motherhood for the most part is defined and restricted under patriarchal terms: "throughout this book I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (Rich 13). By making this distinction, Rich acknowledges that motherhood does not *have* to be oppressive. She is not rejecting motherhood altogether, but pushing society, especially women, to revise the concept of motherhood and to reclaim the power of motherhood and control over women's reproductive decisions.

One of Rich's main arguments, "child-care is still the individual responsibility of the individual woman" (33), is one of the main focal points of this thesis. The notion that the mother is the only one "held accountable for her children's health, the clothes they wear, their behavior at school, their intelligence and general development" (Rich 53), forces the mother to feel an immense amount of pressure to make sure the child is receiving the best care, even when sometimes the mother herself is still trying to figure out how to deal with an external environment outside of her control: "under the institution of motherhood, the mother is the first to blame if theory proves unworkable in practice, or if anything whatsoever goes wrong" (Rich 222). Nancy Chodorow agrees with Rich's analysis. She, too, finds that there's the universal assumption that women are the real parents: "child care, on the other hand, is considered to be her crucially important responsibility. Our post-Freudian society in fact assigns to parents (and especially to the mother) nearly total responsibility for how children turn out" (Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" 263). Furthermore, I would add that because childcare is viewed as the woman's main job, then women are often made to believe that, once they become mothers, they will not need to have jobs outside the home. Without an identity outside the private sphere, motherhood becomes their sole identity. Consequently, they also become dependent on men.

The idea that "in the eyes of society the mother is the child's environment" (Rich 53) contributes to the mother assuming the sole responsibility of parenthood, while the father is simply a background figure. Because the father is not held up to the same social standards, he does not feel the same amount of concern or obligation to answer for the sake of the child. Society does not hold him accountable. Whenever the father *does* show up to the kids' doctor's appointment, dance recitals or simply to put the kids to bed, it becomes this admirable action; fathers get praised for

doing the bare minimum. In patriarchal society, a father can forfeit his childcare duties, as long as the child has a mother:

> the meaning of 'fatherhood' remains tangential, elusive. To 'father' a child suggests above all to beget, to provide the sperm which fertilizes the ovum. To "mother" a child implies a continuing presence, lasting at least nine months, more often for years. Motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage—pregnancy and childbirth—then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct. (Rich 12)

Both Chodorow and Rich highlight the evident bias between motherhood and fatherhood, proving that motherhood contributes to gender inequality.

Rich points out how this biased ideology creates a false sense of gratitude in women when men start to share the household chores, including childcare. It is crucial, Rich claims, for women to stop feeling grateful and instead hold men responsible. Fatherhood should consist of equal share of the household responsibilities, including the "full-time, universal child-care as a social priority" (Rich 211). If the goal is also for future generations to grow up knowing that childcare should not be based on gender roles, there is a need for them to experience nonpatriarchal manhood. As society, we should stop blaming the mothers, and instead analyze how the absence of "the traditional fathers who—even when they live under the same roof—have deserted their children hourly and daily" (Rich 211) affects our children and their behavior in society. For men, having a family is "a decision". A man can "choose" whether to be a father and stay, or to simply walk away for his responsibilities. For the most part, this abandonment is not censored in society, and it is not that uncommon. On the contrary, mothers don't have this luxury. If a mother decides to abandon her duties and responsibilities as a mother, this constitutes as a social crime (Rich 216). The mother/the woman cannot break away from this vicious cycle by herself; she needs

men/fathers to start assuming their share of the responsibility. Only if men stop neglecting their duties and their active roles in the household, that's when equality for the woman and for the mother can finally be achieved: "Since fathers can parent, too, we should not start from the assumption that mothers, and mothers alone, must choose whether to work, cut back, or hire a replacement caregiver. Instead, we can change our approach to seeking ways to provide babies the best start in life, at the same time, giving mothers *and* fathers the best opportunity for happiness, individually and together" (Rich 19).

Something that Rich does brilliantly, and at the time, quite revolutionary, is her deconstruction of the universal notion that the mother has no other identity besides being a mother: "a 'natural' mother is a person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace tuned to theirs; that the isolation of mothers and children together in the home must be taken for granted; that maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfless" (Rich 23). The issue arises when motherhood, as a patriarchal institution, requires women, and only women, to use their "maternal instinct", but demands nothing of the father. Patriarchal motherhood expects women to be selfless and self-sacrificing, to be completely devoted to others and for her identity to be completely attached to another. Michele Pridmore-Brown, a scholar on Gender Studies, points out that "this 'good mother' has been a powerful cultural icon - for several centuries the image of her selflessness symbolically guaranteeing the family, not to mention a moral universe" (Pridmore-Brown 26) has been used as the standard for mothers. When society defines a mother - a good mother - as selfless and self-sacrificing, women are indoctrinated into thinking that they must fulfill these societal expectations - the role of the domestic angel of the house.

However, as Rich points out, nothing about being a parent comes more naturally to us than it comes to men. There are no innate motherly qualities in a woman, and everything about parenting takes hard work. The only difference is that society only compels one gender to deal with the results of reproduction: "to have borne and reared a child is to have done that thing which patriarchy joins with physiology to render into the definition of femaleness" (Rich 37). These impossible standards of patriarchal motherhood cause detrimental effects physically and emotionally to the mother. Women are constantly exhausted, frustrated and unhappy since they can never meet these standards. In a way, they only have one job, and they can't even do it right. This often leads to feelings of guilt and isolation, which I will be discussing further in chapter two. Rich's goal is not to forsake motherhood, but to simply destroy the standards and limitations that patriarchal motherhood has created. If the goal is for mothers to truly enjoy motherhood, not because they are expected to, but because of the job stops being draining, then mothers need more support, primarily from the fathers, but also from institutions, so they stop being society's backup plan. Mothers not only need help, but they also need to feel less judgment from society. Rich also adds that this judgement leads to feelings of anger and resentment against the mother, "easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her" (Rich 235), and this is something Muraro discusses as well in her book and will be discussed in detail in the next section. This tendency towards criticizing and hating the mother makes the children want to distance themselves from the mother and create for daughters in particular feelings of matrophobia, the constant fear of making sure she doesn't become her mother (Muraro 235).

Since women are made to believe that their identity is first and foremost the one of the mother, what life goals and objectives besides reproducing can women aspire to have? If women's primary goal is to find a husband and procreate, once they have fulfilled both goals, what else is

there for them to look forward to? Society tells women that once having become mothers, this is the only identity they will have for the rest of their lives. However, this results in identity and existential crisis for the woman when suddenly, when the children leave the home, she's "out of a job"- she is lost. What else is there for a woman to do if not to mother? It is not enough to let the children go – there needs to be something more for women to do after mothering. Rich is very vocal about the need to form an identity outside of the domestic realm. It is not enough for women to just become mothers, but to develop their individuality and self-realization.

Rich demonstrates that patriarchy dictates the value of women in society. The patriarchal consensus states that "the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway'" (Rich 34), so single women, who reject participating in the art of reproduction, are condemned in society. The only way for a woman to redeem herself is to become a mother; only this way can a woman become "beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood—that same body with its bleedings and mysteries—is her single destiny and justification in life" (Rich 34). Women have been indoctrinated into believing that these two versions of the female are the only possible outcomes, and this is what we need to break away from. Even though, women's conditions have improved considerably, and now women have many more opportunities and access to the public sphere, education and labor force, still there's a discrepancy on how society sees and treats women, especially women who are mothers. Modern society supports and seems to encourage women's emancipation; however, since society is also fixated on the idea that women are first and foremost mothers, and that childcare is their main responsibility, once women become mothers, there's little time left for anything else. Feminism strikes for women's liberation, but are mothers really free the same way fathers are? Nowadays,

most mothers have jobs, but society is keen in reminding these women that, even though they are *more* than just mothers, still this should be their primary job. If society doesn't start encouraging men to take part in the raising of the kids, the idea of "the working mother" becomes an illusion. At first impression, the woman appears to be free - to work, to get educated, to make her own decisions – as long as she never neglects her primary job, the childcare and the household chores; she must always maintain her femininity. This concept will be further discussed in chapter two.

1.3. *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*

In *The Symbolic Order of the Mother,* Luisa Muraro calls for a transformation in the way we, as society, think and view the mother; she calls for a transformation of the symbolic order – the pre-determined structure of social and sexual roles which constructs family and society. The symbolic order is patriarchal, and therefore it has produced patriarchal motherhood. Muraro believes that the way to heal the effects of patriarchal motherhood is to change the way we treat and love the mother. Instead of hostility, we as society, especially the daughters, need to readjust our emotions toward our mothers in the form of love. The key is for society to see mothers as real people, and relearn to love them, the same way we as children did. In the eyes of children, especially those first years, the mother has a divine status; children worship her and everything related to her. It is only during childhood that we can attest "to the non-metaphorical symbolic [value] of the mother" (Muraro 19). Muraro maintains that when we speak about the symbolic figure of the mother, during those early years we mean the mother in the literal sense. The actual mother, not the metaphorical one, is the one who provides us with knowledge, meaning and the one who gives us emotional support. Yet, something happens along the way, and all this admiration is lost. This change, however, does not happen by accident:

> Since culture separates itself and ourselves from nature (the agent of such separation being the father), it is also necessary that we separate ourselves from the mother. It is necessary that we turn our back on the experience of our relationship with the mother in order to enter the symbolic and social order. In other words, symbolic independence is necessarily paid for with the loss of the point of view of the couple creating the world. (Muraro 39)

Muraro describes accurately how patriarchal society perceives the relationship with the mother and her role. Once the mother is "done" with her job of raising the child, she is discarded by society - she has lost her purpose. Muraro argues that the problem is that the symbolic order does not approve or endorse the power of motherhood. Instead, this authority and cultural power is allocated in the figure of the father. This is, once again, at the core of the structural difference between motherhood and fatherhood. This notion leads society and consequently children to find no "need" for the mother. By creating a hierarchy within the household, one element will be considered inferior and will be oppressed, in this case, the mother. Instead of just focusing on the need of shared responsibilities in the household in order to repair the issues of patriarchal motherhood (like Rich and many other feminists), Muraro claims we first must recognize the authority of the mother: "only this affirmation can give back to society, and first of all to women, the symbolic power contained in the female relationship with the mother, which is neutralized by male domination" (Muraro 20).

The reason behind Muraro's argument on recognizing the authority of the mother is based on her understanding of the mother as the main civilizing agent. It is through the mother that children learn speech; their early life experiences are all first learned and experienced through the mother: "language can be given to us only by means of that negotiation with the mother because language is nothing other than the fruit of that negotiation" (Muraro 46). Due to this key role, Muraro argues that the mother should be recognized as the vital and influential figure she is. According to Muraro's theory, it is contradictory for the symbolic order to be patriarchal, since children learn language from the mother, and language and the symbolic order are intimately connected. In other words, when we enter the symbolic order, we gain access to language, therefore the devaluation of the mother is incongruous with the true meaning of symbolic order. By teaching

us how to speak, the mother awards us the most essential tool to communicate with the world – she teaches us meaning and truth. By teaching us how to behave, she is introducing us into society and culture and into the symbolic order. She is our guide and authority in those early years on how to experience life. Accordingly, Muraro sees the mother as the principal civilizing agent.

Before Muraro, Rich had already proclaimed the mother as our main "interpreter" in our early years; she is the one who provides us with "continuity and stability… it is with a woman's hands, eyes, body, voice, that we associate our primal sensations, our earliest social experience" (Rich 12-13). Rich argues, however, that this job comes with a price. Because the mother is the first contact we have with the external world, it is also through her that we experience the first rejections and adversities (Rich 13). Unlike Muraro, Rich recognizes that the fact that "most of us first know both love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman" (Rich 11), is due to the gendered division of labor. We all learn from the mother and see her as the main civilizing agent because women have been segregated to the domestic sphere, so they have been responsible for the raising of children. It's important to acknowledge this important distinction between Muraro and Rich's work. Our mothers became "our eyes and ears" not by accident, but because mothers have had no other option but to raise us. This is simply the result of gender roles.

Muraro maintains that it is necessary that we learn language from our mothers, but by asserting this belief, she is essentially suggesting that only through mothering can women gain authority in the household and in society. With this claim, she reinforces the long-lasting association of women to the maternal role. By stating that mothers gain symbolic authority just by teaching us language, Muraro engages in a form of "cultural feminism" which "names the devaluing of women's essential differences (whether biologically derived or culturally constructed) as problematic and at the root of sexism" (Bobel 784). As a result, Muraro's argument

contributes to the same patriarchal narrative women are trying to escape from. While Muraro resists cultural constructions, she stops short of resisting patriarchy. In a way, she accepts the image of the mother as it is socially constructed.

If mothers have more of an authority and more of an influence in the raising of the kids than the fathers, society perpetuates the notion that women *should* be the ones in charge of parenting. Muraro is not wrong by awarding authority to the mother for teaching the children language and meaning; however, this could be an argument for adding value to women's unpaid labor and keeping women confined to the private sphere. Certainly, mothers need to be recognized for the labor they do, even if it's outside of the traditional labor force, but we should not push mothers to believe that women have value only if they are the sole childcare providers. Another good counterargument comes from the feminist psychologist Rochelle Paul Wortis. She argues that "it is scientifically unacceptable to advocate the natural superiority of women as child-rearers and socializers of children when there have been so few studies of the effects of male-infant or father-infant interaction on the subsequent development of the child" (Wortis 745). If the goal is for women to enter the public sphere on the same level as men, then the mother *must* lose her special domestic authority. This symbolic authority needs to be shared with the father, and fathers would also need to give up their patriarchal advantages.

Luce Irigaray, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, also agrees that the problem lies in the symbolic order and how the symbolic order has been used to reinforce male supremacy. I use Irigaray's gender theories to draw similarities between her and Muraro. Irigaray notes that patriarchy awards value to a woman "from her maternal role, and, in addition, from her 'femininity.' But in fact, that 'femininity' is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and

loses herself by playing on her femininity" (Irigaray 84). It is the symbolic patriarchal order that has organized society and monopolized the place of private property to value the father (Irigaray 83). In patriarchal society, women have no power: "the only thing really required of her is that she keep intact the circulation of pretense by enveloping herself in femininity" (Irigaray 194). Consequently, the father is the head of the household, the authority, and the wife and children remain subordinate. It is, after all, the wife and children who bear the father's last name. In a patriarchal society, where women "are assimilated to commodities and signs" (Muraro 58), "there is no possible place for the 'feminine,' except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured" (Irigaray 68). The inequality comes also from the fact that so much is required from the woman and the mother, but she is never rewarded for her arduous work. She is supposed to feel grateful for being the male designated object of consumption and desire (Irigaray 194).

Since women are perceived as commodities, they are "in a situation of specific exploitation with respect to exchange operations: sexual exchanges, but also economic, social, and cultural exchanges in general" (Irigaray 85). However, if society, as Muraro suggests, starts viewing women as speaking individuals, then the symbolic order must change. If society stops exploiting women and burdening them with reproductive obligations, then this will challenge this patriarchal discourse and modify the symbolic order. However, because patriarchy diminishes women's value to the one of the mother, and currently there is "no value" in the domestic sphere, women remain inferior to men. We return to the idea that a woman has only one actual role in society, the role of being a mother. In patriarchal society, Cixous argues that "a woman is never far from 'mother' (I mean outside her role functions: the 'mother' as nonage and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink" (Cixous 881). This outdated patriarchal notion that a woman "can find fulfillment only in motherhood, by bringing a

child, a 'penis substitute' into the world" (Irigaray 87) pushes the social narrative that a baby is the end goal and the only road to happiness. Even in her journey to emancipation, she cannot forget her place: "the man, by virtue of his effective participation in public exchanges, has never been reduced to a simple reproductive function. The woman, for her part, owing to her seclusion in the 'home,' the place of private property, has long been nothing but a mother" (Irigaray 83). Despite the progress, it seems almost impossible for women to escape this ever-lasting female linkage to motherhood. This is because, in a patriarchal society, motherhood is a fundamental element of a woman's identity. In a patriarchal society, the woman has not developed a sense of self; she is not meant to. She simply acts upon stimuli that push her to become a mother. As Irigaray claims, "the mother stands for phallic power; the child is always a little boy; the husband is a father-man. And the woman? She 'doesn't exist'" (Irigaray 194). In other words, the concept of a woman, by herself, does not exist in patriarchy; she is just a future mother.

Society is entangled in an ideology of the patriarchal type which comes with a power structure that situates the mother under the father. According to Muraro, this negative outlook on the mother comes from the symbolic order, always benefiting the father, and not granting maternal power to the mother: "if the authority of the mother has no place in the symbolic order we obey, the result is that the behavior of the mother will regularly be considered intrusive or, vice versa, yielding, or, more often, both intrusive and yielding at the same time" (Muraro 87). According to Chodorow, most psychoanalytic and social theorists state that, to her children, especially to the daughter, the mother represents "regression, passivity, dependence, and lack of orientation to reality, whereas the father represents progression, activity, independence, and reality orientation" (263). Both women and men take part in the patriarchal symbolic order, and women become complicit when they also start disregarding the mother's authority and perceive her "as a formless

power and/or an obtuse interpreter of established power" (Muraro 87). Especially, in the mother-daughter relationship, the current symbolic order creates animosity which forces women to loathe their mother, and to feel loathed by her: we, as women, are simply not taught to love the mother. The symbolic order uses the daughter as a tool to repress and further reject the mother; it creates this kyriarchy that leaves the daughter fighting against the mother, with a constant fear of becoming her, but in the end, the daughter cannot escape her fate of becoming the mother, the person she tried the most to reject.

Muraro is not alone in denouncing the abjection of the mother; Chodorow also acknowledges that "the daughter, for her part, makes a rather unsatisfactory and artificial attempt to establish boundaries: she projects what she defines as bad within her onto her mother and tries to take what is good into herself" (Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" 258). For the daughter, this is a conscious decision since she does not want to be identified with "the devalued, passive mother" (Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" 264). If women want to defeat this patriarchal order, according to Muraro, then we must recognize the mother's power. The only way to break free from this symbolic order, therefore, is for society to value both the father and the mother. Only this way, then the children can develop an emotional connection with both parents and identify with more than one parent. On one hand, it is important for boys to have a non-patriarchal role model of a father, who participates in childcare. On the other hand, it is also important for girls to grow up with a confident mother, whose responsibilities go beyond the domestic (Chodorow 265). It's important to clarify that Muraro's goal is not to just reverse the symbolic order and start hating on fathers, instead to overcome this issue we must recognize the mother as a thinking individual and accept her power and authority (Muraro 62). In the end, Muraro argues that the only way to give reparation to the mother is by changing our

emotional relationships with our mothers: “translate into our adult lives the early relationship with the mother in order to experience it again as the principle of symbolic authority” (Muraro 32)

Chapter 2

The Role of the Mother in Society

"A great open secret—the bargain: together they would make a family.
The women would raise children;
the men would go out into the world and provide money.
Why did that contract do so little for me?"
Mona Simpson, My Hollywood (2010)

2.1. Public and Private Spheres

Motherhood, in the eyes of society, is a solitary gendered endeavor. Such notion stems from the belief that motherhood takes place, according to society, in the traditionally female-identified private sphere. Over the years, women's social position has changed; however, motherhood seems to have stayed the same, and consequently, women's situation in the private sphere has remained unchanged. Many scholars have pointed out how the cultural role of the mother and cultural maternal expectations, as defined within patriarchy, are influential factors of women's oppression. In 1973-74, Margaret Polatnick, an American sociologist and scholar of Women's Studies, in her article titled "Why Men Don't Rear Children: a Power Analysis", states that "women's responsibility for children in the context of the nuclear family is an important buttress for a male-dominated society. It helps keep women out of the running for economic and political power" (Polatnick 69). In 1976, in her monumental text, *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich argues that motherhood (in contrast to mothering) is "the institution, which aims at ensuring that (that potential—and) all women—shall remain under male control" (Rich 13). Ten years later, in

1989, American mothering theorist and sociologist, Barbara Katz Rothman, theorizes American motherhood as "resting on three deeply rooted ideologies—capitalism, technology and patriarchy" (Katz Rothman 26). Despite the gap in years, Polatnick, Rich, and Katz Rothman find that motherhood is an intrinsic dispositive of patriarchy used to confine women to the private sphere.

Patriarchy assigns women to the household, and with it comes domestic labor and childcare; it's how patriarchy keeps women, submissive and inferior, confined to the private sphere. So, when the modern woman started stepping out of the domestic sphere to participate in the public, it presented a problem to the patriarchal status quo. As a result, the catchphrase "I can do it all" became society's motto: "when confusion about the identity of the working woman created a cultural vacuum in the 1970s and 1980s, the image of the supermom quietly glided in" (Hochschild and Machung 59). This idea indoctrinated women into thinking they *had* to both work and take care of the house because "a 'good' woman was one whose primary concerns were her home and family and who was, perhaps most importantly, a nurturing mother" (Feldstein 87).

Society requires working mothers to negotiate the continuous demands of both their professional and domestic lives in order to survive. Nowadays, women have free access to the public sphere; however, they must never forget to always fulfill the impossible criteria of perfect mother and housewife. In 2014, Catherine Rottenberg, a feminist thinker and scholar of American and Gender Studies, stated that "the Balanced Woman, after all, includes the injunction that women keep one foot firmly planted in the private sphere" (Rottenberg 164), suggesting that womanhood and motherhood have yet to completely escape patriarchal constructions. Even though women can now become successful in the public sphere, they still face housework, including child-care, mostly alone.

The way motherhood is presently viewed and performed is limiting for women: women are supposed to be the primary caregivers and responsible for the household. Despite the years of women's fight for emancipation and much progress, especially in the public sphere, the fight in the private sphere seems to have remained stagnant, and therefore is still centuries behind. In chapter one of this thesis, we extensively discussed Adrienne Rich and saw that she describes motherhood as a patriarchal institution; it was also mentioned at the beginning of this chapter for emphasis. Despite the years that separate *Of Woman Born* from more current research like Rottenberg's, modern motherhood is still conceived as such. As Rottenberg argues, patriarchal motherhood rests upon a gendered binary opposition between public (men) and private spheres (women), therefore on "the presupposition that men circulate in civil society while women are stationed in the family" (Rottenberg 165).

This presupposition has been noticed throughout the years by many scholars, even before Rich's revolutionary text. There is a chronological pattern that proves that patriarchal motherhood has been a continuous issue, and that many female impediments are nothing but the result of an endless struggle. In 1942, Talcott Parsons, one of the most important figures in sociology in the twentieth century, emphasizes that the long-standing association of womanhood with domesticity prevents women from fully entering the public sphere on an equal footing with men:

> it is, of course, possible for the adult woman to follow the masculine pattern and seek a career in fields of occupational achievement in direct competition with men of her own class. It is, however, notable that in spite of the very great progress of the emancipation of women from the traditional domestic pattern only a very small fraction have gone very far in this direction. It is also clear that its generalization would only be possible with profound alterations in the structure of the family. (Parsons 610)

Parsons recognizes that the structure of the family, where the mother takes care of the well-being of the family and home, is the culprit of women's social stagnation. It's even questionable how much "great progress" Parsons was referring to, considering only "a very small fraction" of women managed to follow the "masculine pattern". Ultimately, what Parsons emphasizes is that as long as women are linked to domesticity, they can never fully participate in the public; they will always be one step (or a few) behind.

In 1969, another scholar, Margaret Benston, an academic in Women's Studies and labor activist, in her article "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" points out once more that women cannot escape domesticity, even if they manage to join the labor force, reinforcing the established notion that domesticity hinders women's lives:

> At all times household work is the responsibility of women. When they are working outside the home they must somehow manage to get both outside job and housework done...Women, particularly married women with children, who work outside the home simply do two jobs; their participation in the labor force is only allowed if they continue to fulfill their first responsibility in the home. (Benston 25)

Benston suggest that, whether women want it or not, a woman's core identity is grounded on the idea that the female gender is linked with the domestic sphere. Naturally, whenever we talk about the domestic sphere we are also talking about motherhood. In the end, women are expected to always assume the responsibilities of the home on top of their jobs, solely because of their gender. This concept called "the second shift", a term coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in 1989, is used to describe how the modern woman, after concluding her first shift in the public sphere, returns home to her second shift, full of domestic labor and childcare. Even though many decades have gone by, most women still partake in "the second shift". This persisting gendered expectation

can best be explained due to women's participation in the labor market being inappropriately understood "as an extension of their roles as housewives and mothers" (Sokoloff 221). Until today, women have seemed unable to abandon these fixed gender roles.

The patriarchal motherhood that Rich, Benston and Rottenberg help describe creates a rigid gender economy, based on fixed gender roles, which makes it difficult for women to occupy the public space in the same way that men do. Not only are women burdened with an unequal amount of work, but also, as Benston emphasizes, "in a society in which money determines value, women are a group who work outside the money economy. Their work is not worth money, is therefore valueless, is therefore not even real work" (Benston 16). In a patriarchal society, where women, as mothers, operate mostly in the private sphere, their value is diminished since patriarchal societies see no value in maternal work. For the most part, caring for the children takes place in the private sphere, outside of the "real economy". Women's work is therefore socially devalued: "in sheer quantity, household labor, including childcare, constitutes a huge amount of socially necessary production. Nevertheless, in a society based on commodity production, it is not usually considered 'real work' since it is outside of trade and the market place" (Benston 15). Despite housework being challenging and time-consuming, because it is performed at home, it is not economically remunerated, and therefore women are seen as unemployed.

Consequently, in a society where status is evaluated from the principle that money awards value, women are continuously perceived as inferior beings. Unpaid household labor creates inequality inside and outside the home, causing women to be financially dependent on men and "remain under male control" (Rich 13). Nancy Chodorow, an American sociologist and psychoanalytic feminist, echoes this sentiment by emphasizing that "since the public sphere dominates the domestic…men dominate women" (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 10).

As Chodorow argues, women remain inferior due their confinement to the domestic sphere, and in society, nothing links women more to the domestic sphere than motherhood; it is exclusively because "women mother" that women have a lower social status (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 110). Thus, women's unpaid labor is and should be seen as a central cause behind women's oppression since it reinforces the gender hierarchy.

However, despite this misconception, "contrary to myth, mothers do not work in private. They are always in public, in doctors' offices and clinics, supermarkets and welfare offices, courthouses and schools, movie houses and amusement parks" (Ruddick 35). Mothers do not only operate in the private sphere; however, society wants women to be believe they do. If women identify themselves first and foremost with the private, the sexual division of labor will remain in place. Motherhood is and will be seen as a private issue, and therefore a solo gendered endeavor, as long as womanhood is exclusively identified with the private sphere.

The pressure to merge women's new role in the public sphere and the patriarchal gender vision of labor is illustrated by the idea of "the supermom": the woman who is supposed to give a hundred percent at work, while still giving her hundred percent at home. The image of "the superwoman" became a social ideal, the ultimate path to happiness. It tells women what they have to do if they want to excel in society and achieve happiness. As Rottenberg claims, "the notion of pursuing happiness through finding the right work-family balance thus becomes a normalizing matrix and a form of governmentality that interpellates all aspiring middle-class women and helps shape and direct women's aspirations, desires, and behavior. Women, in other words, are compelled and encouraged to want to 'have it all'" (Rottenberg 163). And so, the pattern of using motherhood as a device to control women continues.

These patriarchal ideologies of motherhood, however, are impossible to achieve since they are construed on a paradox: "there is the strain of maintaining the two roles that (these) women experience as they attempt to be cool-headed and competitive at work but warm-hearted and nurturing at home" (Hays, *Why Can't a Mother Be More Like a Businessman?* 415-416). In the public sphere, the supermom is supposed to show full commitment to her work without ever showing her maternal identity; however, she must always be a devoted, selfless mother. She must *never* neglect her duties as a mother and housewife. This means women must always try to please and cater to everyone's needs in the household, engage in "intensive mothering", a term coined by Sharon Hays (1996), while performing the role of the unstoppable workaholic woman in the public sphere, and as a result, "negotiating a balance between the public and the private thus becomes symptomatic of a profound disavowal, since it attempts to do the impossible — suture a gendered split that is constitutive of the very way space is established and organized in the liberal imaginary" (Rottenberg 167). The creation of the perfect work-family balance ideal can therefore be read yet as another effort to rearrange the social structures without eliminating the patriarchal system.

Once again, women are left with just *one* single approach on how to be a *proper* woman: in the nineteenth century, "the debate over women's education posed the question of whether a 'finished' education detracted from the practice of housewifely arts" (Welter 166), now, women are faced with different situations but with the same kind of dilemma. The same patriarchal doubt of whether a full-time career detracts women from household chores remains. The fact that women's concerns and domestic conditions haven't really changed that much, raises the question of whether women have really achieved emancipation, or if society's promises for women have been nothing but a smoke screen in the end. Society now "allows" women to enter the work force but with conditions: "we have agreed that mothers can expand the scope of their focus, that they

should be able to have meaningful work outside the home while simultaneously raising their children, but this has not significantly lessened the burden of the ideological baggage of mothering" (Driver McBride 47). This ideal becomes overbearing and draining for many women, as they end up having to give up part of themselves in order to achieve these humanely impossible expectations.

The modern working mother struggles trying to balance how to participate in both spheres, without neglecting either. In a 2010 article titled "Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation", published in the feminist philosophy journal *Hypatia*, Kelly Oliver states that "although career women have made tremendous advances in recent years, it is still difficult for women to juggle family and career" (Oliver, "Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation" 768) Now the main question that arises is, why are only women the ones trying to "balance it all"? While the modern woman is constantly trying to juggle both of her identities, mother and professional, society never demands the same labor from the man. The anthropologist Sheila Kitzinger highlights how the media plays a huge role in enforcing unachievable goals to women. Many articles and magazines are designed to teach women about how motherhood in the modern world takes superhuman abilities if they expect to successfully fulfill the normative requirements of womanhood: "charting a path between norms of 'intensive mothering' and professional success — has become normative, the new ideal of progressive middle-class womanhood" (Rottenberg 158). The woman is the one constantly showered with advice on self-care, on balancing work and home life, on "keep[ing] the romance in her relationship with her man, cook gourmet food and produce candlelit dinners, and at the same time be a perfect mother" (Kitzinger 7). The woman is supposed to fulfill all these expectations and demands and look flawless while doing it. Modern motherhood revolves around

balancing it all, which generates famous (supposedly) complimentary lines like "I don't know how she does it all". Lines such as this become a symptom of women's unequal condition; they reveal how women are still expected not only to "do it all" but that they *must* do it all by themselves.

The Patriarchal society does not operate on the basis of shared responsibility, and therefore it relies on women performing all the work. Instead of trying to find collective solutions to these social problems, women are left to figure out how to satisfy both spheres' expectations, so "balancing private and public aspects of the self thus becomes the telos of the progressive narrative with respect to emancipated womanhood" (Rottenberg 155). The woman might have entered the workforce, but she has not fully abandoned "the angel of the house" role. She is still somehow expected to fulfill nineteenth-century True Womanhood standards, the "four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter 152), while simultaneously being the modern career-oriented woman. As Rottenberg suggests, "in this critique, the Balanced Woman ideal, where women are encouraged to be hands-on mothers as well as professionals, becomes the latest—if unwitting—incarnation of a longer genealogy of ideals, such as the Feminine Mystique and the Beauty Myth, whose ultimate purposes are to keep women down" (Rottenberg 164). Angela McRobbie, a British cultural theorist and feminist, also suggests that the entire concept of work-family balance "tends to reinstate hierarchical gender norms in the heterosexual household" (McRobbie 155). These social standards, which are forced upon women, solidify the patriarchal belief that motherhood represents a woman's true purpose, and at the same time, they stablish the power inequality intrinsic in the concept of separate spheres.

Even more current discussions on motherhood like Tatjana Takseva's 2017 *Hypatia* article titled "Mother Love, Maternal Ambivalence, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering", find

modern motherhood predominantly patriarchal. In this article, Takseva, a scholar in Women's and Gender Studies, argues that patriarchal maternal ideologies only reinforce traditional gender roles:

> They [set of maternal ideals] propagate standards of maternal perfection that are impossible to achieve, and they suggest that the only truly enlightened choice to make as a 'real,' 'decent' woman is to realize one's personal potential through the role of mother, while bringing to it an impossible combination of selflessness and professionalism. They are also based on still prevalent patriarchal ideas about the primacy of the nuclear family and continued inequities in household and childcare labor, divided along traditional, gendered lines. These ideologies thus assign mothers what Rich calls a 'powerless responsibility' in which mothers carry all the responsibility for mothering, but are denied the power to define and determine their own experiences of mothering. (Takseva 156)

A continuum emerges across the decades. Society is constantly reminding women that they are first and foremost mothers; they must not forget *this* part of their identity - they must always keep in mind that they have a house and a family to take care of. These impossible standards create feelings of guilt, anxiety, isolation, emotional and physical exhaustion in the modern mother, at least in Western culture. The way motherhood is construed now causes many physical and internal conflicts for the mother, which will be discussed in further details in the following subchapter.

Unfortunately, women's emancipation is accompanied by traditional gendered ideals; there is a "collision between new social and economic realities and traditional conceptions of gender relations in work and family life" (Collins, "Is Maternal Guilt a Cross-National Experience?" 3). It is true that now women have more opportunities, however, becoming mothers is always expected and rarely an option. Motherhood is an essential part of the feminine identity – it's a woman's nature: "intensive mothering discourse suggests that women are naturally gifted at and inclined to

raising children and maintaining a home" (Collins, Is Maternal Guilt a Cross-National Experience? 3). The question is never "are you having children?" but "when are you having them?" Whatever a woman decides to do with her life, it has to always include domesticity, which naturally includes motherhood. Becoming a mother is not an easy decision, especially for professional women; they have to worry about knowing how to manage and excel at both their domestic and professional work: "although the myth of 'having it all' is still alive and well – as evidences by some of these Hollywood films in which career women get babies and families and apparently live happily ever after – real women continue to grapple with how to juggle career and family in the face of ever shrinking social services and support" (Oliver, "Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation" 769). In contrast, men never have to plan carefully to become fathers; besides considering whether they can afford to, financially, in many cases, society does not expect them to do much more than just provide their DNA. Fathers are never asked to choose whether to have a career or be a parent. Society expects them to become fathers and the next day go back to work. On the other hand, the mother *must* stay home with the kids, and this ultimately hinders her career: "'mother love' is not priceless; the earlier in her career a mother has children the greater the cost in terms of her lifetime earnings" (Pridmore-Brown, Professional Women, Timing, and Reproductive Strategies 26).

The modern idea that women are fully emancipated is contradictory considering the act that society continuously reminds women that they must always preserve their femininity and never forget that they belong in the domestic sphere. Even in the workplace, many times the "mother identity" gets pinned on women and they are the ones who often get asked about the kids' well-beings. Men, on the other hand, are hardly ever identified as parents, and therefore the home is not part of their responsibility (Hochschild and Machung 93). Even the women who manage to

work and become mothers, they can never fully advance at the same pace or rate as their male counterparts. In 1973-74, Polatnick already claimed that motherhood represented a professional setback: "while women are occupied with domestic duties, men consolidate their resources in the outside world and their position of command in the family. By the time most women complete their child- rearing tenure, they can no longer recoup their power losses" (Polatnick 69). Currently in 2021, many years after Polatnick's statement, patriarchal motherhood is still hindering women's careers, and now with the Covid-19 Pandemic, as many women had to reduce their working hours or quit their jobs, we will see even more of these setbacks. The negative effects of the Pandemic in women's lives will be discussed in further details in chapter three.

There is no doubt that, in many ways, women's conditions have improved, but instead of reimagining ways to deal with household and family's responsibilities and reorganize the family structure, women have been left stranded to figure out how to "balance it all" and be the main caretakers of their families and their homes: "as societies develop, many female tasks are taken over by men, but the sexual division of labor for the hardcore nonagricultural work within the house (what we commonly regard as purely domestic tasks, i.e., cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, care of the old and sick, care of children) remains rigid" (Raj and Patel 17). Consequently, women still take on more of the household chores and childcare, compared to their male counterparts. These unresolved social issues, which in principle require society to reexamine the conditions of labor and transform the societal notion of success that devalues domestic work, lead many women to look for part-time, usually low-income, jobs just to guarantee that they will be able to fulfill their maternal duties. Women, who are already at a disadvantage in the job market due to sexism and the gender wage gap, put themselves even more at a disadvantage when, as mothers, they encounter the "maternal wall" and have to take on jobs with more flexible working

conditions, even if they are overqualified or get paid less, just to satisfy their "mom role". This ultimately worsens the gender economic disparity (Hochschild and Machung 141). Mothers either have to spend more time or more money than their male counterparts on childcare. Either of these choices result in a money gap, whether it is solely based on working less, earning less or having to spend more on childcare services. The truth is, becoming a mother does not come for free: "mothers experience disadvantages in the workplace in addition to those commonly associated with gender…employed mothers are the group of women that now account for most of the 'gender gap' in wages" (Correll 1297). Also, since women are most commonly the ones earning less, they are also the ones more willing to give up working, which reinforces the pattern of women spending more time in the domestic, causing a vicious cycle: "the income inequality between men and women makes it more rational, and even necessary, in any individual conjugal family for father, rather than mothers, to be the primary wage-earners. Therefore, mothers, rather than fathers, are the primary caretakers of children and the home" (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 35). This vicious cycle becomes in many households the reason why men do not do their share of the second shift. Many men believe that since they provide most of the household income, they deserve to not do the work at home (Hochschild and Machung 139).

Hochschild's groundbreaking 1989 book, *The Second Shift*, exposes how the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s along with new job opportunities had transformed many women (in theory) but left most of the men pretty much the same, unwilling to do the household work. Hochschild's work also exposed how many husbands claim to want a wife who works; however, in no way does this mean sharing the household chores. According to these men, the household chores belong to her and her only. One of Hochschild's male subjects goes far enough to compare career women to virgins; he claims: "an educated woman's commitment to her career, he felt, was

like an attractive woman's commitment to her virginity—if a man makes the right moves, she will give it up. The virgin says, 'No, no, no … yes.' The career girl says over and over, 'I'm serious about my career,' but ends up saying, 'Really, a family comes first'" (Hochschild and Machung 127). This comparison is rooted in misogyny. It shows that many men do not take a woman's word, let alone her "no" seriously and believe that women can easily be persuaded. It also reveals how certain men never expect women to seriously commit to their careers, so they will never really have to worry about doing their share of household chores. For the patriarchal man, no matter how career-oriented a woman is, she will always know "her true place". Because no matter how matter how much progress the modern woman has achieved, "the 'on call' nature of 'mothering' responsibility militates against any kind of sustained, serious commitment to other endeavor" (Polatnick 69).

Besides the men who refuse to share the chores, there are also the women who are accomplices in patriarchy, women who consciously or subconsciously identify themselves with the private sphere. Many modern women believe in equality and identify themselves as feminists, however, they end up confining their ideas of equality in order to live peacefully with partners who do not want to do their share of the bargain. For many women, the idea of equality in the household never comes to life. *The Second Shift* reveals how equality for the modern woman seems to be more symbolic than political. Despite the progress, it's hard for career women to abandon old patterns and leave the traditional gender division of labor behind. In the end, women, whether consciously or subconsciously, engage willingly in patriarchal ways of organizing the household, what Deniz Kadiyoti, an academic in the field of Gender Relations and a feminist thinker, calls "bargain with patriarchy". Hochschild's findings appear to be a phenomenon that both her and Kandiyoti noticed in the 80s, and which residues are still visible in the twentieth-first century.

Kandiyoti describes the concept of "bargain with patriarchy" as "set rules and scripts regulating gender relations to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated" (Kandiyoti 286). In other words, modern motherhood adjusts to patriarchy. Modern women, given their strong link to domesticity, try to maneuver within patriarchal constraints, defying patriarchy where and when possible, without fully denouncing it. They may be modern women, with more opportunities than their mothers and grandmothers, but still find themselves identified with the domestic work. They still believe it's their job.

Being an emancipated woman means living a life of full of contradictions, "for subjects interpellated into society as women, there will always be a remainder, a constitutive 'primary' failure, given the discursive identification of womanhood with domesticity, family, and the private realm…[so,] when the question of children enters into the equation, this constitutive remainder or failure rears its head more forcibly and becomes increasingly unwieldy" (Rottenberg 165-166). Rottenberg's sentiment coincides with Benston's claim that "there is a material basis for women's status; we are not merely discriminated against, we are exploited. At present, our unpaid labour in the home is necessary if the entire system is to function" (Benston 16). The relationship of the mother with her husband, her economic dependence on him and her understanding of male dominance contribute to the patriarchal social control. The way society is set up, with the heteronormative family structure at its core, is designed to have the woman at home taking care of the kids, and thus confines the woman to the private sphere. Contrary to the social agenda, the idea of the "balanced woman", the "supermom and the superwoman", does not signify liberation, but actually highlights the prevailing gender inequality. It reveals how women are the ones who always

have to adapt to patriarchal demands and expectations, and how even after many years, women are still struggling to escape patriarchal maternal constrictions.

The problem is that the emancipation of women too often means the opportunity for women to enter the male-identified public sphere. In other words, women are entering a space not designed or meant for them, so they can never and will never fully belong. Because the public sphere is still construed as male and the domestic is still identified as female, women must constantly prove that they also belong in the public. This hierarchy of values associated to both spheres perpetuates the vicious cycle of inequality, of women being the inferior sex and gender. Women have to fight over and over to be taken seriously in the work force and prove continuously that they take their careers seriously. Allowing women to enter the public sphere is not enough when, in a patriarchal society, domesticity remains an intrinsic part of the female identity: "women's role as mother in the patriarchal capitalist home reinforces their treatment as mothers in the labor market organized to benefit men and capital, which in turn reinforces again their work as mothers in the home" (Sokoloff 221). Women won't break away from the nurturing role, from the primary caregiver role, as long as the private is still identified as the place of the woman.

If the goal is to achieve equality, in both spheres, borrowing from Muraro, besides reexamining the way the public perceives the mother there's also the need to reevaluate the private and its identification with the woman. As Benston claims, back in 1969, "equal access to jobs outside the home, while one of the preconditions for women's liberation, will not in itself be sufficient to give equality for women; as long as work in the home remains a matter of private production and is the responsibility of women, they will simply carry a double workload" (Benston 25). As the Covid-19 Pandemic has proven, access to the public sphere was not enough to keep women's emancipation unharmed. Over the course of the years, Rich and many other feminist

thinkers like Benston, have advocated for "a radical reorganization of the sexual division of labor in the family and kin networks" (Ferguson 4) to combat patriarchy both inside and outside the home. The best way to stop being the only parent responsible for the children and the home is to demand an equal distribution of household responsibilities which must include the raising and nurturing of the kids: "since fathers can parent, too, we should not start from the assumption that mothers, and mothers alone, must choose whether to work, cut back, or hire a replacement caregiver" (Shields 19). Motherhood does not have to be a solitary gendered act, nor does it have to hinder women's professional careers, but without women's full power and control over their way of mothering this cannot be accomplished.

2.2. Maternal Affects: Ambivalence and Maternal Guilt

Western cultural ideologies of motherhood suggest not only certain behaviors that are perceived as suitable and necessary for practicing good mothering, but they also outline the emotional framework suitable for the mother–child relationship. It dictates the type of love the mother is supposed to feel - the nature of mother love. Now, fulfilling these societal expectations on motherhood is no easy task. As Takseva suggests, when it comes to parenting, society puts all the pressure on women's shoulders. Mothers must prioritize their mother roles above anything else:

> according to traditional maternal discourse, the best mothers always smilingly put their children's needs ahead of their own, do not mind suppressing their own needs and desires, are never tired and never lose their patience, and their children are the center of their universe; the best mothers experience untroubled love toward their children in every second of every day. Those mothers who fail to deliver on these expectations are "bad" mothers either in their own eyes or the eyes of society, and often both. In its mythic dimensions, mother love is constructed as a perfect blend of continuous self-sacrifice and the experience of unadulterated joy in always fulfilling the needs of one's children. (Takseva 156)

Women are expected to engage devotedly in the work of mothering, but without any of the perks, incentives, or compensation that a low-paying or undesirable job usually has. Maternal work, as any domestic work, is already undervalued, and yet we expect mothers to always feel pride and pleasure from being mothers. Nevertheless, women are expected to engage in it without any hesitation. Society asks mothers to fully and selflessly immerse themselves in their maternal work,

but it is not willing to recognize it as real work. How can women feel like productive members of society when mothering does not constitute as productive work?

Many sociologists agree that motherhood, as it is currently construed, has many harmful traits. In *The Cultural Contradictions Of Motherhood*, Sharon Hays states how "intensive mothering", the dominant parenting ideology of the Western culture, is "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays 122). This parenting archetype sees mothers as the best, preferred caretakers of children and it sees children as sacred, "their price immeasurable" (Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* 54). In *The Mommy Myth*, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels state that "the new momism" is socially defined as "the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children" (Douglas and Michaels 22). This impossible set of ideals, which are constantly represented in the media, reinforce traditional, True Womanhood characteristics. Both, Hays' intensive mothering and Douglas and Michaels' new momism, recognize that current motherhood is defined within patriarchal terms, and despite the idea of the progressive modern working mother, current motherhood rejects feminism, since it constrains women. These high demands and the continuous maternal devaluation cause feelings of ambivalence, powerlessness, resentment and even anger in the mother. At the same time, not fulfilling the "good maternal standards" causes feelings of guilt- "a socially induced feeling of negative self-judgment" (Collins, Is Maternal Guilt a Cross-National Experience? 3)- and insufficiency in the mother. Mothers who try to engage in intensive mothering end up feeling intense guilt when they cannot fulfill these impossible expectations: "the guilt

mothers feel today is part of a long cultural history of gendered discourses that frame children as mothers' responsibility" (Collins 3).

Women face constant predicaments: on the one hand, society is constantly reminding them that this is part of their "nature", that motherhood is instinctive, and they are basically born to be mothers; on the other hand, it is constantly telling them that they're not doing enough, that they're not doing a good job. Because of these unattainable standards, the modern mother now struggles to develop herself as a professional since she's busy spending too much time and energy performing her maternal role. These impossible ideals are damaging for mothers; they leave women feeling exhausted, defeated and resenting their maternal role. At the same time, intense mothering contributes to the cycle of inequality by requiring overwhelmingly more demands from mothers compared to fathers. Caitlyn Collins, an American sociologist who conducts cross-national qualitative research on gender inequality in the workplace and family life, states that "guilt tends to be more prevalent for mothers than for fathers because cultural standards of good parenting are far more intensive for women (Borelli et al. 2017; Simon 1995). Even when mothers and fathers divide caregiving equally, a 'guilt gap' remains: mothers still feel much more guilt than fathers" (Collins 3). Patriarchal motherhood asks unevenly more of the mothers' time, feelings, love, and wallets, things that many fathers are completely unaware of: "the burdensome costs of intensive mothering cannot be overstated. Day care programs, nannies, baby-sitters, psychologists, and even licensed social workers, as well as the children's outside activities, are expensive and require nightmarish logistics regarding pickup and drop-off times" (Gross 271). It's important to highlight also that all these pickups and drop-offs require the mother to get permission to leave from work early or get a job with flexible hours. In the end, intensive mothering leads to a decline in women's status because

it either pushes women to cut back on their professional careers and personal time, or it leaves them feeling inadequate and frustrated, or both – ultimately, motherhood comes with a price.

Since the beginning, women have been indoctrinated to believe that motherhood is continuous happiness; however, all mothers can agree that motherhood is not all roses. One of the reasons Rich's work was so revolutionary in motherhood studies was because she dared to speak the "unspeakable": the realization that motherhood is not always picture-perfect. It is not always full of warmth and love. In motherhood studies, this is what is called maternal ambivalence. Like in any other relationship, motherhood is a combination of both positive and conflicting, negative feelings. Maternal ambivalence is comprised of both psychological and social aspects; it arises from contradictions and inconsistencies at the individual level and at the level of patriarchal social constructions that are specifically oppressive to women. The patriarchal conditions of motherhood, including the images of the "good mother" and "supermom", and the contradictory cultural expectations women face every day are among the central reasons of maternal ambivalence:

> conflict arises between a male-dominated capitalist system that on the one hand advocates individualism, freedom, and the pursuit of personal gain and fulfillment for men and women, while on the other hand expects a good mother to show complete selflessness and unconditional, round-the-clock devotion to her child. Coupled with the relatively low status our society accords the work involved in mothering, and the devaluing of feminized domestic care in general, this context is particularly relevant to the maternal ambivalence felt by white, educated, middle-class women with careers or commitment to work outside the home, whose sense of self prior to having children has been defined in relation to a more public and professional identity. (Takseva 157)

The problem is that patriarchal motherhood characterizes mother love as self-sacrificing, unconditional, and a cause of continuous happiness. Of course, most mothers love their children and do find motherhood gratifying, but the reality, and the *real healthy balance*, is that for many women, their children are not their *only* source of joy. In contrast, motherhood, outside of the patriarchal scope, does not consume a woman's whole identity.

However, in a world that keeps pointing out to the mother her failures in mothering, maternal guilt becomes a constant feeling. Collins states that "maternal guilt is a type of internalized oppression, one regulatory mechanism by which intensive mothering discourses reproduce mothers' feelings of inadequacy" (Collins, Is Maternal Guilt a Cross-National Experience? 23). The pressure and burden women feel daily, stemming from the unrealistic "supermom" ideal, causes distress and disappointment in women when they realize they cannot "do it all". The modern working mother is constantly being pulled from all directions, living with stress and anxiety, trying to engage in intensive mothering while simultaneously excelling outside the home. Often, this struggle becomes too much to tolerate, and it forces women to give up on some of their personal goals, relationship time or even on healthy habits (exercise, sleep).

Rich herself called attention to the problem of maternal guilt when she wrote that "the institution of motherhood finds all mothers more or less guilty of having failed their children" (Rich 223). Society requires so much from mothers, but hardly ever takes the time to reward the mother or to praise the mother for the hard work. It's a constant battle where "nothing is ever (good) enough". Particularly, working mothers feel guilty when they have to leave their children in the hands of babysitters, childcare establishments, or even sometimes alone. Contrary to men, mothers are the ones expected to reconsider how soon should they return to work, or for how long to depart from the private sphere. Issues also arise when the modern working woman "defies"

societal expectations and develops an identity outside the realm of the house. A mother's sense of success in their professional lives and other spheres is often demoralized by enduring ambivalence about their choices and competence as mothers.

Based on psychoanalytic theory, Chodorow claims that one of the reasons women are frequently overwhelmed by guilt is because women tend to lack an adequate sense of self, and therefore their identities are developed ingrained in others: "women in most societies are *defined* relationally (as someone's wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law; even a nun becomes the Bride of Christ)" (Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" 256). Parsons also echoes this sentiment when he states that "the woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children" (Parsons 609). By not being able to distinguish herself clearly from the rest of the world; the mother is not "complete" unless she is attached to someone, and for mothers, children, especially their daughters, become an extension of their identity:

> a mother, on the one hand, grows up without establishing adequate ego boundaries or a firm sense of self. She tends to experience boundary confusion with her daughter and does not provide experiences of differentiating ego development for her daughter or encourage the breaking of her daughter's dependence. The daughter, for her part, makes a rather unsatisfactory and artificial attempt to establish boundaries: she projects what she defines as bad within her onto her mother and tries to take what is good into herself. (This, I think, is the best way to understand the girl's oedipal "rejection" of her mother). (Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" 258)

Here Chodorow observes the same pattern that Muraro writes about on *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*. The bad qualities are projected onto the mother because, as an undervalued member of society, the mother is always identified with the negative. Instead of breaking away from this

vicious cycle, maternal rejection is reinforced. To counter that, Chodorow suggests that women must attain and maintain a selfhood outside of and beyond motherhood.

Unfortunately, this tendency gets transferred from mother to daughter as part of a vicious gendered cycle. According to Chodorow, when answering her central theoretical question "how and why women come to mother", she states that, "the sexual and familial division of labor in which women mother and are more involved in interpersonal, affective relationships than men, produces in daughters and sons a division of psychological capacities which leads them to reproduce this sexual and familial division of labor" (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 7). In this gendered cycle, or what Muraro calls "the structure of the maternal continuum" (52), Chodorow argues that, women, who are mothers, keep producing daughters with the aspiration and abilities to provide nurture and care. On the other hand, the sons are raised to be detached from their emotions; "this prepares men for their less affective later family role, and for primary participation in the impersonal extra-familial world of work and public life" (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 7). While Muraro sees this maternal continuum as positive and explains this cycle by stating that "the female child [creatura] is situated at a central and at the same time conclusive place on the continuum…whereas the male child is outside this continuum" (Muraro 52), Chodorow juxtaposes this notion and lists the negative consequences:

> As long as women mother, we can expect that a girl's preoedipal period will be longer than that of a boy and that women, more than men, will be more open to and preoccupied with those very relational issues that go into mothering— feelings of primary identification, lack of separateness or differentiation, ego and body-ego boundary issues and primary love not under the sway of the reality principle. (Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 110).

Consequently, women feel responsible for everyone around them, especially their family and children. Because everyone's well-being is considered the woman's responsibility, she feels the constant pressure to do everything right. So, when things go wrong, feelings of guilt and insufficiency come into play. Women are continuously being held liable for anything that happens inside the household. And even when the husband's and child's environments are out of the woman's control, she is still accountable for every outcome - society always blames the mother.

The popular notion that "motherhood is eternally fulfilling and rewarding, that it is always the best and most important thing you do, that there is only a narrowly prescribed way to do it right, and that if you don't love each and every second of it there's something really wrong with you" (Douglas and Michaels 21) has detrimental and oppressive effects on the mother. Women are haunted daily by whether they're doing a good job or the right thing. These insecurities and worries only add anxiety to the mother. However, it does not have to be this way. Takseva suggests that the key to a healthy mothering practice is to recognize its flaws and make amends with them: "acknowledging and accepting maternal ambivalence by the mother herself can enrich the mothering experience by allowing her to mother from a position of greater agency and authenticity, without suppressing potentially vital aspects of her subjective experience" (Takseva 153). By admitting the ups and downs of motherhood, women can regain control over their own maternal experience and reduce feelings of guilt. At the same time, by lowering the social standards and expectations, motherhood can become a less isolating experience. Women can find comfort in each other if we, as society, allow mothers to communicate freely about the struggles and hardship that come with motherhood. Mother love is not perfect, and we shouldn't expect it to be so. It is essential for society to acknowledge a healthy maternal ambivalence as a fundamental part of mother love. By recognizing the mother as a real human, with flaws and different emotions, society

can view mothers from another angle and break away from the stereotype of the "always smiling, never frustrated perfect mom". Taking the pressure off mothers can lead to a redefinition of mother love, one which empowers mothers instead of bringing them down.

Decades later, the fight for full equality continues. While it is certain that women have now more choices than other women from previous decades, including being able to participate in the public sphere, women have yet to achieve the status of fully emancipated since patriarchy still defines women in maternal, domestic terms. According to patriarchal society, in the end, "the only truly enlightened choice to make as a woman, the one that proves, first, that you are a 'real' woman, and second, that you are a decent, worthy one, is to become a 'mom' and to bring to child rearing a combination of selflessness and professionalism that would involve the cross cloning of Mother Teresa with Donna Shalala" (Douglas and Michaels 23). The ideology of the supermom revolves around the idea that women now have a choice: they *can* and *choose* to be both mothers and working women. But, if according to society, motherhood is the natural path for women, is it really a choice after all?

Chapter 3

The Return to Nurture:
Women, Wars and the Pandemic

"Government and industry must not assume
that all women can be treated
as a reserve group during war only"
Women's Advisory Committee (1943)

3. Motherhood in History

The word "mother" belongs to a common lexicon of the West; motherhood is a particular concept which describes the situation society is in. The way society treats mothers becomes a type of "symptom", an indication of the state of society. Throughout history, motherhood has been manipulated and used to society's advantage. Whatever society needs in that specific moment, mothers become *it*. In this chapter, I discuss how during moments of historical crisis, motherhood becomes the tool through which society maintains social order and it is used to fulfill social needs. Subsequently, this occurrence validates the idea that, during the pandemic, as childcare services closed around the world, women ended up going back to their nurturing roles to satisfy society's need childcare-givers.

Scholars have observed that the role of women, especially motherhood, becomes society's primary concern during and after times of war. During times of historical crisis, mothers become the instrument to fight and treat society's illness. As sociologist Patrizia Albanese shows, in the case of wars, when nationalism dominates the environment, "women are expected to be

reproducers of nations or walking wombs. They are expected to give up/sacrifice their bodies and shut down their minds, desires, needs, etc. to be and do 'motherhood,' for the sake of the invisible, seemingly homogenized collective—the nation" (Albanese 835). In moments of crisis, women tend to go back to their nurturing role as biological reproducers. Albanese concurs with other sociologists and anthropologists, in believing that nationalist regimes become fixated on the role of the woman. Nationalism, as Craig Calhoun states, is "a distinctly gender-biased ideology" (Calhoun 231) which dictates that men and women assume stereotypical gendered roles "men as future martyrs, women as mother" (Calhoun 231). Family becomes "the source of the nation's continuity in time" (Calhoun 231). Consequently, when society finds itself in a predicament, it becomes important for women to be fully committed to the task of conserving humanity and maintaining a sense of normalcy.

During times of turmoil, women are seen as mothers of the nation, responsible of passing down traditions and culture. Historically, this phenomenon can be observed transnationally. For instance, during Fascist Italy, "the Italian state encouraged pronatalist policies, for example, mobilizing ideas of romantic and familial love and images from the Virgin Mary to the spinster sacrificing herself for the nation to produce an emotionally compelling narrative of national cultural identity" (Calhoun, Nationalism 120). In Nazi Germany, when Hitler rose to power, "he ordered women to relinquish their jobs and dedicate themselves to feminine virtues… 'Kinder, Kirche und Kuche,' part of the back to the home movement were promoted as the ideal for women" (Albanese 832).[i] Germany saw motherhood as the only way women could contribute to society and awarded them with loan credits for each child and medals of honor: "gold for mothers of eight, silver for mothers of six, and bronze for mothers of four children"[ii] (Albanese 832). Sociologists, Robert Kunovich and Catherine Deitelbaum, studied traditional gender attitudes during a period

of social conflict in Croatia between 1985 and 1989, and they discovered a growth in the numbers of men and women who were in favor of women adopting more traditional roles (Kunovich and Deitelbaum 1090). Such studies like such show a recurring pattern, in moments of disorder, of what one might call "patriarchal returns" – of women returning to patriarchal roles.

As mentioned earlier, Albanese exposes how women are expected to return to their *natural* role, relinquishing their independence and freedom, all for the greater good of the nation; their unequal treatment is justified within these frames. In a way, society's future relies on the mother. In moments of chaos, patriarchy needs to make sure the patriarchal symbolic order stays intact, and thus it encourages women to become mothers to keep reproducing the patriarchal symbolic order. Wars end up reinforcing patriarchal models of the male as the fighter and hero, and the female as the innocent, pure, devoted woman whose only job is to reproduce to create stronger men. Once again, women are expected to be selfless and self-sacrificing. This image of the traditional mother becomes a symbol of prosperity and becomes a part of the patriarchal war propaganda. In the end, in moments like these, motherhood is used as a tool for social control.

3.1 The American Mother and World War II

There is a deeply rooted political tie between motherhood and the American nation. In the eighteenth century, the term "Republican Motherhood," coined by American feminist and political historian Linda Kerber, became an American standard (Kerber 188). "Republican Mothers" were mothers who were politically responsible for teaching their children, especially their sons, good American values and virtues. Republican mothering became a civic duty, an American feminine ideal and an example of patriotism. Kerber states that "Republican Motherhood was a very important - even revolutionary - invention. It altered the female domain in which most women had always lived out their lives; it justified an extension of women's absorption and participation in the civic culture" (Kerber 204). To a certain extent, this concept of motherhood resembles Muraro's thought on the authority of the mother: republican motherhood is grounded on the idea that mothers are in charge of child-rearing, which reinforces the distinction between the private, female, domestic sphere versus the public world of men. Nonetheless, it highlights the authority of the mother in educating the children; it prioritizes women's influence in society and awards importance to the mother's work, something that had been lacking from previous conceptions of motherhood. As Kerber points out, "the ambivalent relationship between motherhood and citizenship would be one of the most lasting, and most paradoxical, legacies of the revolutionary generation" (Kerber 205). Republican Motherhood presents a paradox in a woman's identity due to its roots in patriarchy: while it encourages women to get more educated and could be seen as small steps toward gaining more social power in patriarchy, it simultaneously reinforces women's confinement in the private sphere. These mothers "took pride in their ability to mold citizens" (Kerber 203): even though a mother was not considered a citizen, she was expected to raise a son

who would become one. By assigning mothers the responsibility of teaching public morality, society justified women's confinement to the domestic sphere. It was this continuous adherence and commitment to Republican Motherhood which kept women exiled to the domestic sphere until the 1940s.

When we look at the historical crises of recent human history, we notice the endless practice of using women as substitutes for whatever is missing in society at the time. Wartime pushed American women out of the private sphere into the masculine public. During World War II, as men departed their home countries to fight, society needed human capital. This absence of American men generated a unique demand for female labor, so American women were encouraged to join the work force as an act of patriotism.[iii] William Chafe, an American historian, claims that "no class of people experienced more change as a consequence of the [Second World] War than American women" (Chafe 2003), 11). Previously, in the 1930s, women had been encouraged to stay home and care for the family, yet, by the 1940s, the American mother had defeated social expectations and moved into paid employment: "over 6 million women took jobs, increasing the size of the female labor force by 57 percent…in addition, wages skyrocketed, as the number of married women who held jobs doubled" (Chafe 2003, 11). As part of War era propaganda, the notion of working became romanticized and incited women's entry into the labor force: "instead of frowning on women who worked, women and mass media embarked on an all-out effort to encourage them to enter the labor force" (Chafe 2003, 11). Figures like "Rosie the Riveter" became a national star, the epitome of the super woman. She appeared on many national magazines to exhibit woman power. The war time appeared to have disrupted traditional gender roles and changed the social fabric, at least for some time.

During World War II, a growing number of women went to school and entered the public sphere. Despite taking over masculine roles, however, women still had to take care of the home and domestic tasks. The state of affairs discussed on chapter two, where women are allowed to enter the public sphere without renouncing their responsibilities in the domestic, was already evident in the 50s. For the women with children, whose part of their identity remained within the domestic sphere, the role of motherhood was saturated with responsibilities of civic importance. Despite the quick growth of the number of women in the work force, motherhood remained women's most important role. There was a social and political hesitancy about having full-time mothers enter the public sphere due to the effects of Republican Motherhood. There was the social concern that the United States could no longer raise good citizens without the full-time presence of the mother that even the Children's Bureau stated, "'a mother's primary duty is to her home and children. This duty is one she cannot lay aside, no matter what the emergency'" (qtd. in Chafe, *The Paradox of Change* 146). Sonya Michel, a historian and scholar of American and Women's and Gender Studies, suggests that motherhood is the most noteworthy patriarchal weapon used to uphold traditional gender roles and suppress female advancement during World War II. According to Michel, "official recognition of the significance of home and family reassured the American public that society had not lost its grip on the essential values of civilization. Women as mothers were charged with perpetuating the culture that men were fighting for; abandoning this role in wartime would not only upset the gender balance but undermine the very core of American society" (Michel 160).

This cultural discourse of neo-republican motherhood failed to address all the changes in women's lives, and therefore few of the actual progresses of women manage to infiltrate popular media. Instead, the same stereotypes of the good mother kept circulating in the mass media. In

1945, in an article called "A Call to American Women," Dorothy Thompson, the famous American journalist and radio broadcaster, told her female readers "to look upon this world with the eyes of a mother, realizing that mothers and housewives are perhaps the most important national and international society on earth" (Thompson 6). Despite women's new responsibilities in the public sphere, the idealized image of a woman revolved around motherhood: "television moms like June Cleaver projected images of good white mothers onto recently acquired screens across the country; these representations of motherhood retained their power despite increases in women's labor-force participation and the alternative gender roles that popular culture offered" (Feldstein 87). In the end, it showed that no matter the progress, women could not escape the eternal linkage to motherhood.

Patriarchy used Republican Motherhood to emotionally manipulate mothers to bring women back to the home. By grounding a woman's identity to motherhood and assigning her the sole role of educating good citizens, patriarchy puts the burden of the welfare of society on women's shoulders. Here is where the everlasting notion that women are always responsible for their children's environment and outcomes, mentioned already in the two previous chapters, resurfaces in this chapter. This method holds mothers accountable for their children's disobedience:

> Indeed, precisely because motherhood was considered the ultimate form of womanhood, any woman might be judged and found wanting based on her maternal capacities. Over the course of the 1950s, experts in psychology, sexology, sociology, and other interdisciplinary areas continued to interpret motherhood as the source for a range of social and political problems ranging from communism and homosexuality to juvenile delinquency and feelings of racial inferiority. (Feldstein 90)

This ideology essentially insinuates that men are naturally decent, and only due to bad mothering can they become immoral. In other words, a mother can leave the domestic sphere for work; however, she risks being blamed for her kid's wrongdoings. In a 1946 article for American Home, titled "Parents: Architects of Peace," the journalist Louisa Randall Church stresses that "upon the shoulders of [mothers] everywhere, rests the tremendous responsibility of sending forth into the next generation men and women imbued with a high resolve to work together for everlasting peace" (Church 19). Another media example which draws inspiration from Republican Motherhood is the 1944 article called "Mothers...Our Only Hope" by J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. His article accentuates the eighteenth-century belief that a citizen's values and virtues are derived from maternal education. At the time, in 1944, the nation was trying to push women back to the domestic realm so that the men returning home from war could have their jobs back. Accordingly, Hoover preached about war jobs not being suitable for mothers:

> the mother of small children does not need to put on overalls to prove her patriotism. She already has her war job. Her patriotism consists in not letting quite understandable desires to escape for a few months from a household routine or to get a little money of her own tempt her to quit it. There must be no absenteeism among mothers...Her patriotic duty is not on the factory front. It is on the home front! (Hoover 46)

Hoover's statement encouraging Republican Motherhood after the war is simply another attempt by patriarchal society to erase any advancement women might have obtained when they entered the public sphere. He uses motherhood to justify exiling women back to the domestic sphere, even after women proved to be capable of participating in the public sphere just like men.

Just like Hoover, many American men were afraid that women would be unwilling to relinquish their jobs, jobs that at one point had been reserved for men. Once women were no longer needed, would they quit the public sphere? Simply the possibility of it frightened men who were used to the traditional gender roles, with men as provider and women as housewives and mothers. An alteration in gender roles could endanger patriarchal society, for if women occupied the public sphere, women would no longer be dependent on men. Instead, they would become men's competition in the labor market. To stop this from happening, American society needed to constantly prepare women for their postwar return to the private sphere. In her book, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, Susan Hartmann, an American historian, states that "as women moved into the public sphere they were reminded that their new positions were temporary...and that their familial roles [took] precedence over all others" (Hartmann 23). In other words, society told women not to get too comfortable in their jobs because as soon as the war ended, so would their jobs: "for many women, these were to be precisely 'wartime' jobs; within two years after the war ended, two million women had been displaced from their jobs by returning veterans" (Walker 12). In her book, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, historian Mary Ryan emphasizes how, once women were not needed anymore, they were discarded back to the domestic sphere: "women were directed right back to where they had been a century earlier—in captivity of the cult of motherhood…exiling her not only to the bedroom and the maternity ward, but to the kitchen, nursery, and dressing table" (Ryan 266).

We can see how despite the temporary changes in gender roles, this did not have a long-lasting impact in society. By the time the 1950s arrived, the United States had engaged in what Dr. Ruth Feldstein, a political and feminist historian, calls "gender conservatism": "a glorification of domesticity and nuclear families; and a celebration of traditional heterosexual gender roles in

which the healthy male citizen was understood to be the paternal breadwinner, and the healthy female citizen was consigned to the role of wife and mother" (Feldstein 3). And just like that, women regressed back to their traditional role; they made a Patriarchal Return. William Graebner, an American historian, argues in his book, *The Age of Doubt*, that "women spent the decade meeting the needs of men and capital; filling the factories as producers, then, after the war, soothing the fragile male ego, doing housework, and heading the family's department of consumer affairs" (Graebner 1-2). Despite all the progress women had achieved during World War II, women remained as first and foremost mothers, exploited by society at its convenience.

In one of the early issues of the feminist journal *Hypatia*, previously called *Women's Studies International Forum,* Margaret Simons states that "few women in our society experience motherhood as a real choice because so many women do not have other opportunities for personal development while others feel that by becoming a mother they must sacrifice other opportunities" (Simons 357). Surely many things have improved since Simons wrote that article in 1984. Currently, in the twentieth first century, there are many more opportunities for self-development available to women; nevertheless, motherhood is still perceived as a synonym for self-sacrifice. Once women become mothers, they are expected to sacrifice their professional and personal goals. Mothers are more likely to be the ones who take time off from work to take kids to the doctor, to pick them up from school, to go to parents-teachers conferences, to say no to business trips just so she can be home for the baby. Once women fall victims of patriarchal motherhood, their careers and personal growth come to a halt or slow down drastically. In the end, this shows that no matter the progress, women are subject to patriarchal returns, all in the name of motherhood.

Ultimately, what this analysis shows is the pattern of female exploitation. Whatever society needs at the moment, women are there to satisfy its demand. Patriarchal society depends on

keeping women captive in the domestic, and it seems that patriarchy's oppressive tool of choice is motherhood. No matter the context, motherhood appears to be a constant justification for keeping women exiled in the private sphere. Even after changes in the public sphere, motherhood never loses its importance, and patriarchal maternal expectations remain the same. We see a similar pattern with the COVID-19 pandemic, but the opposite. If during the last historical crisis women had to leave the domestic sphere to fulfill society's needs, this time during the pandemic crisis women needed to return full-time to the private sphere. Society could no longer provide childcare services, so women stepped in once again as society's backup plan. In this case, society needed women to return to the nurturing role and stay at home to watch the kids, so they quit the work force and went back to the private sphere. I will discuss this issue in more detail in the next subchapter.

3.2 The Covid 19 Maternal Crisis

The Covid-19 Pandemic is more than a healthcare crisis, it's also a gender one. Scholars have argued that "the crisis has worsened gender inequality" (Mahelona, Heine and Jabola-Carolus 223). The Pandemic has disrupted our lives in many ways, and one of the areas mostly affected by it has been childcare. As the world went under lockdown, places started to shut down, and this included schools and childcare services. Once society failed to provide these services, women were the ones who had to deal with the consequences. The lack of childcare during this time has deeply affected the lives of women causing the emancipation of women to become Covid-19's silent victim. As the childcare crisis emerged, women were forced to make a patriarchal return to the nurturing role. In the previous subchapter, I discussed how patriarchy has managed to push women back to the domestic sphere in the name of motherhood, and the case of the pandemic is no different. Using motherhood to drive women back to the private sphere is nothing new; however, this crisis reveals that no matter how many decades have passed and how emancipated women seem to be, they remain tied to the domestic sphere through motherhood[iv]. Not only has the Pandemic exacerbated gender issues, but it has proven that society still holds the patriarchal belief that women are the primary child caregivers.[v]

At the beginning of the Pandemic, there was an eager discourse that saw the quarantine as the perfect time to get creative and learn new skills. By confining society to the home with nothing but time, people saw this as the ideal occasion to produce something meaningful. After all, many prominent figures came up with their best inventions during the last plague (Newton's Annus Mirabilis in 1666 or Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 1606). Then again, men have never had to worry about childcare responsibilities, a time-consuming and never-ending activity. For those with caring

responsibilities, free time is a rare concept, and Covid-19 only made matters worse. Even before the Pandemic, as discussed in chapter two, household chores were already disproportionally divided between men and women, and women struggled "to juggle career and family in the face of ever shrinking social services and support" (Oliver, Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation 769). Now, with the pandemic, and with schools and day cares closed, the number of responsibilities on women's shoulders has skyrocketed, and unfortunately their working hours. Women report having very little to no time for themselves: "sixty percent of mothers say they do not have time for themselves, compared to just 41 percent of fathers" (Cox and Abrams). Even though Covid-19 is a worldwide Pandemic, not everyone has been affected the same way. Scholars have established that "COVID-19 has disproportionally affected women in a variety of terrible yet predictable ways. In dissolving the boundary between public and private spheres, this pandemic has highlighted significant gender imbalances in the division and production of domestic labor" (Watts 126). Compared to men, women's professional lives have been disproportionately disrupted, which will negatively impact women in both the short- and long-term.

Women do more of the domestic work and child-rearing because of the patriarchal gendered expectation that it is a woman's duty. Modern society, however, has increasingly been providing services that act as a maternal substitute to allow modern women to participate in the public sphere. Many families, but especially mothers, rely heavily on schools and childcare centers to provide their children with the education and care they need while mothers are at work. By eliminating these crucial support systems, Covid-19 has hindered women's progress in the public sphere and endangered women's partial advances on gender equality. Many women report having to reduce their working hours to accommodate childcare and online schooling: "mothers with young children have reduced their work

hours four to five times more than fathers. Consequently, the gender gap in work hours has grown by 20-50 percent. These findings indicate yet another negative consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the challenges it poses to women's work hours and employment" (Collins, Landivar and Ruppaner 101). The pandemic has shown that, even though many fathers are now working from home and could easily help out with the children, women remain the ones in charge of child-rearing: "the greater childcare and family demands brought on by day care and school closures throughout the pandemic appear to have caused a major reduction in work hours for mothers, while fathers' work commitments were relatively unchanged" (Collins, Landivar and Ruppaner 110). It is because of this inequality in the home, that women feel the need to sacrifice part of their growth, all while men continue to live their lives, unbothered. Even after so much progress, twentieth-first-century men are still refusing to take part in domestic labor and share the household responsibilities; perhaps because society simply does not expect them to. Without these services, women are unable to join the workforce since many men refuse to engage in shared parenting: "school and childcare closures have also demonstrated the significant economic contribution that these services make and how undervalued traditionally and/or predominantly female occupations continue to be" (Watts 126).

Covid-19 has also worsened economic inequalities. Women, an already marginalized group, are suffering economically at a higher rate in this pandemic because they are in charge of most of the unpaid work, from cooking to cleaning, including childcare and elderly care. Unpaid labor has only increased during the pandemic; parents abruptly are faced with having to provide additional hours of childcare and schooling for their kids, on top of their full-time jobs. Having to assume more childcare and household responsibilities meant for women either having to quit their jobs, reducing their working hours, or assuming even more overwhelming obligations and hoping to balance it all: "the number of women in the labor force fell by 2.1 million, compared with a decline of 1.7 million for men. Black

women's labor force decline has been particularly strong: 645,000 fewer Black women were in the labor force in February than in December; Latinas' numbers in the labor force declined by 506,000, and White women's by 1.3 million" (Institute for Women's Policy Research). It's important to acknowledge that the industries affected the most during this Pandemic are retail and hospitality, which tend to generally employ more women than men due to the flexible schedules, especially women of color. Considering women are spending even more time doing unpaid labor, they are either earning less or have stopped earning an income completely, reinforcing woman's economic dependency on men.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has taken its toll in many different areas, including mental health. During the early days of the pandemic, it became increasingly overwhelming to deal with so much uncertainty. Emotions like isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression became universal during these uncertain times; however, mothers seem to struggle the most Not only are mothers fully aware of the lack of any real support at home or in the public sphere, but they also feel like they have lost a piece of themselves. For many women, losing their jobs meant much more than losing their income; it meant losing a part of their identity. This loss represents a loss of autonomy and agency – a historical regression. No matter the type of jobs these mothers had, losing their "membership" to the public sphere meant grounding their identity in the private.[vi] Before the outbreak, "familial, cultural, and societal obligations [left] [women] with little to no room to think about [themselves] and [their] own well-being" (Mahelona, Heine and Jabola-Carolus 225), now with the pandemic, mothers are trying to manage all the newly added responsibilities, like helping kids cope with virtual learning which leaves zero time for their psyche. Mothers are taking care of everyone's needs and health, but the question is, who is taking care of them? If previously, mothers struggled to prioritize their health and personal interests, now with the pandemic, women completely lost sense of their needs. These struggles, along with regular health and economic

concerns, only further aggravate gender inequality and affect women's physical and mental health: "the pandemic is driving mothers to scale back employment" (Collins, Landivar and Ruppaner 110).

Throughout history, in one way or another, women have always been held captive in the private sphere, but during quarantine, for the first time in modern history, the whole world suddenly became also confined to the private sphere. Sadly, only women made a patriarchal return. Not only have mothers lost their place in the public, but the private appears to have fully taken control over the lives of women. On top of that, the quarantine triggered the private and public spheres to merge causing all boundaries to disappear. Women are circulating solely in the private, which means women are back to being full-time mothers; one of the most noticeable effects of the pandemic is the return of the 1950s housewife convention. Covid-19 forced many women to take on the role of stay-home moms. Most of them did not make the conscious choice of quitting their jobs, but it was simply expected of them to take care of the kids while fathers remained as the breadwinner. Historical crises like this one force us to reflect why, even after all the progress women have accomplished, society still expects women to act as mothers, to do all the work and sacrifice. Modernity has made women believe that emancipation has been achieved, that is until a historical crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic occurs, and women revert to traditional nurturing roles.

When the pandemic created a childcare crisis, mothers became the default solution, and it became clear that society, when unable to deliver, relies on women to do its job. The pandemic not only has made evident that women are still perceived as first and foremost mothers, but that for mothers it is very easy to regress in terms of emancipation. Mothers rely on childcare support, so when the usual childcare support is missing (schools and day care centers) and other support networks (family or friends) are also not available, women are forced to take over. Patriarchal society, after all, believes that women can give up their careers more easily than men because it's not an intrinsic part of their identity,

not like motherhood. This historical crisis suggests that women's emancipation can never fully be accomplished as long as women are identified with the private sphere. This pandemic has exposed inherent flaws in our society and aggravated gender issues. Women losing more jobs than men reveal that society expects women to always be ready to abandon everything and return to their nurturing role. When a childcare crisis arises, women are the first responders, since according to patriarchy, motherhood is instinctive for women. The Covid-19 Pandemic drove many working mothers into crisis mode, and like the army reserve, mothers were ready to assume positions and prioritize their maternal role above anything else. The emancipation of women became a Covid-19's casualty.

These threats to women's progress, however, have not derived from the Covid-19 crisis; they have only been amplified as a result of it: "while the pandemic has changed the nature of labor, it will not change gendered labor imbalances without a significant shift in male behavior or significant economic restructuring" (Watts 126). If the goal is to achieve meaningful, long-lasting social changes, it is crucial to reevaluate both the public and the private and create more maternal support both inside and outside the private sphere: outside, in the form of government policies and employer assistance; inside, in the form of feminist male partners engaging in equal share of responsibilities. Advocating for change in the public sphere does not do much if the private remains female. The Pandemic did not create these gender inequalities, but simply exposed them. The lack of vital government policies and recognition of unpaid labor has left women economically susceptible long before the pandemic. Defeating the Covid-19 Pandemic and returning to "normal" is not enough considering "normal" never really worked for women in their favor. Women cannot keep being society's backup plan in times of historical crisis. This statement is not a new idea or revelation; even the Women's Advisory Committee in 1943 had stated that "government and industry must not assume that all women can be treated as a reserve group during war only" (Pidgeon 22). This must remain a

constant fight because, in fight the end, "no society can boast of democratic ideals if it utilizes woman power in a crisis and neglects it in peace" (Pidgeon 23).

CONCLUSION

Patriarchal motherhood, with its unrealistic standards of perfection, reinforces the idea that women have a maternal instinct, and therefore women should always be the primary caregiver. This maternal ideology is detrimental to women and mothers, especially to the modern woman. Motherhood has not evolved to adapt to women's new conditions. Even after changes in the public sphere, the conditions and labor of the private sphere have remained unchanged. Despite the fact that most women now work in the public sphere, mothers still do most of the domestic work and childcare, often to their own disadvantages. Patriarchal maternal ideology, even in the twentieth century, is rooted in gender essentialism. Consequently, the maternal instinct, a term meant to reflect a woman's natural predisposition for mothering, is still widely accepted and embraced, even by some women. This term is hardly ever questioned or challenged, even despite the evidence that this popular belief benefits patriarchy. Patriarchal motherhood is used to exploit women and their "free labor".

The hopeful goal is for women to move past patriarchal expectations and restrictions. In the current world that we live in, not only are women still fighting for reproductive rights, but also women who choose to mother by choice are still fighting for equality in the home, in the workplace, and in society. The problem still lays in how we perceive motherhood through patriarchal terms and how women still adopt motherhood as an individual task instead of a shared activity. Over decades, scholars, from different fields, have constantly agreed that fathers need to assume more responsibility for reproductive labor if the aim is to end gender inequality. If one of the current goals of feminism is to advocate change in the public sphere, it also requires a revolution in the private sphere. Motherhood needs to stop being used as a tool to justify exiling women to the private domestic sphere.

This analysis exposes the lingering gender essentialism still attached to the concept of motherhood. It suggests a revision of the concept of motherhood and the need for change in terms of government and work policies as well as parenting practices. What Rich, Chodorow, Benston, and many other feminist thinkers have done, in terms of motherhood studies, is to challenge patriarchal motherhood practices that keep oppressing women. Women cannot achieve full equality in the public sphere and full access to it without achieving equality in the private. Mothers require more social support and less judgment if motherhood is to become a healthy experience for women. Defying patriarchal motherhood conditions, whether that is through shared parenting or less maternal guilt, becomes essential if women are to obtain satisfaction in motherhood. Only by uncovering and getting rid of the patriarchal foundations of motherhood can society succeed in achieving maternal empowerment.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

[i]"In Weimar Republic, for example, before Hitler's rise to power, women rose from six percent of all university students, just after the First World War, to 35 percent. They made up about one-third of the labour force, and women in Germany at the time, were the most unionized in Europe. In passing the 1927 Maternity Protection Act, Germany became one of the first nations to endorse the International Labour Organization's rulings on the rights of women workers" (Albanese 832)

[ii] In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declared, "German boy, do not forget you are a German, and little girl, remember that you are to become a German mother" (Hitler 12). He did not only promote misogynist rhetoric but also made sure to create laws to ensure that women would be nothing but reproductive machines. In 1933, he passed the most severe anti-abortion and anti-birth control legislation in all of Europe, making abortion a "crime against the race" (Albanese 833). Interestingly enough, currently during another historical crisis, we see abortion rights being taken away from women in places like Texas, US.

[iii] Although women were needed in factories during wartime, government officials never openly encouraged mothers of school age children (Weatherford 161). In a similar way, in a 1942 decree, Paul McNutt, Chairman of the War Manpower Commission, claimed that "no women responsible for the care of young children should be encouraged or compelled to seek employment which deprives their children of essential care until all other sources of supply are exhausted" (Michel 159).

[iv] This subchapter focuses solely on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on professional women.

[v] This analysis does not claim that women's lives have not changed over the course of the years, however it appears that women's maternal role has remained unaffected.

[vi] While it is important to recognize that the women I am referring to, do not depend on their income for survival, this statement is about much more than that. Instead, it's about highlighting how women's emancipation hangs on by a thread, and how easily society manipulates women's lives.

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