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**The Experience of Motherhood among Immigrant
Women in Vanessa Hua's *A River of Stars*
(2018).**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirement for an M.A. Degree in English Literature
and Civilization**

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this work to,

My parents who have always supported me,

Brothers and sisters,

Amer,

Dahia Ouari.

Kahina Issaad

Dedications

I dedicate this modest work to my beloved parents,

My siblings, my lovely niece and my family,

My dear best friend, Hannah, who has been a constant source of encouragement and support,

And lastly, to my friend Kahina Issaad.

Dahia Ouari

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to explore the experience of motherhood among immigrant women in the United States. It also aims at exploring the exploitation of women under capitalism and patriarchy in Vanessa Hua's novel *A River of Stars*. This study relies mainly on Eco-feminist and Marxist feminist theories to investigate the themes of domination, exploitation, patriarchy, immigration and motherhood. In addition, some concepts from psychoanalysis theory are used in the analysis of the novel when necessary. This study aims to reveal the mothers' adaptive skills, and their ability to face challenging situations, through the main female characters. Moreover, this study demonstrates the role of female solidarity and unity in empowering women.

Key Words: Asian-American Literature, Motherhood, Immigration.

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General Introduction

The enemy of feminism is not men. It is patriarchy, and patriarchy is not men. It is a system, and women can support the system of patriarchy, just like men can support the fight for gender equality. Justine Musk (2017).

The world, since its inception, has been ruled and run by prominent powers. Men have formed these powers in order to establish a system that serves their interests solely. However, the selfishness of these men has caused the marginalization of not only the second half of humanity, women, but also other minorities and weak groups of the society. The socio cultural foundations and men have imposed on them all types of control through the patriarchal system. However, it is not possible to deny the fight of women and these marginalized groups for their freedom. They have fought to weaken the strength of ruling powers and reach equality and justice.

Women's movements have been long considered as the result of the entrenched patriarchal system that devalues women's position in society. For years and centuries, feminism has been concerned with the resolve of social injustices. This movement has also been struggling to reach the equality with the other sex. Women, during their fight, have faced other issues such as government policies and the capitalist ruling powers that dominate the majority of the world. Consequently, feminists after all their fight have gained some rights in multiple domains and have made their voice heard.

Female participation in the labor sphere side by side with men was one of the most

significant social changes worldwide. However, other kinds of patriarchy still exist in China as well as other parts in the world. These latter are instigated by the social myths and the different traditions and customs. Moreover, society denies the rights of women to work and to be treated equally to the male workers, which led to the mistreatment of the working women by forcing them to work in poor conditions and circumstances and paying them low wages. On the other hand, women are socially conditioned, trained and prescribed so as to assume the role of mothers. The society has enforced the idea that being a mother is a divine role as Pramod K. Nayar asserts in his book, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*, that “the woman is made to accept the idea that she is made or born to be a mother, a device for procreation and nurture” (126).

Women, to this day, are still fighting to overcome the challenges, obstacles, and the oppression that are imposed on them. While fighting for their emancipation, there are always new types of oppressions that appear. Oppressive ideologies are linking the female gender to the concept of the natural mothers. Still, women want to break free from these conceptualizations. The patriarchal society has, thus, set strong ties between women and nature. Therefore, men are exploiting both women and nature in a way that serves their own benefits.

Overall, women have been expected to devote themselves only to the role of mothers; similarly to nature, which is, in its turn conceptualized as “Mother Nature” in order to take profit from its resources. Furthermore, women have been fighting for the right to control their own bodies. They desire to show that their bodies are their own properties, and that they are the only ones who can decide to be mothers or to reject the idea.

Problem Statement

This study intends to conduct a research about a subject that matters women in general and Chinese women in specific. The interest of the current work is focused on the Chinese historical background and the different patriarchal systems that exist in the Chinese society, in order to examine the selected themes. Furthermore, it also seeks to reveal how women could distance themselves from the detrimental links that tie them to nature. Authors such as Vanessa Hua promulgate the idea that a woman can be a mother not because it is the natural course of life, but because it is an intimate choice.

Review of Literature

Hua's debut novel, *A River of Stars*, explores and captures various crucial themes, mainly issues that concern women, which offers readers the freedom to study, discuss and analyze the novel from different standpoints and perspectives.

In her article "Mothering across Borders: Narratives of Immigrant Mothers in the United States," Hether Hewett asserted that despite the huge media coverage and the growing visibility that the image of motherhood has gained in the United States and despite the cultural and background diversity among these mothers, yet, none of these narratives include or represent the experiences of immigrant mothers (121). She revealed that this lack of representation of immigrant mothers is the result of the negative stereotypes that are made against immigrants, as well as the increase of anti-immigration sentiment among the United States population.

Similarly, Fang Gao and Xia Li in their article "From One to Three: China's Motherhood Dilemma and Obstacle to Gender Equality," discuss motherhood and the effect of the Chinese

reproductive policies on mothers, causing them a huge social and cultural pressure. Additionally, they affirm that motherhood as a concept cannot be separated from the gender discourse. They explain that the “Ongoing debate on motherhood and gender equality in China has become an important source for researchers to understand the prevalent ideology of motherhood and the current situation of women and to examine the social and cultural pressures they face” (252).

In a relevant article “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” Sherry Ortner discusses the issue of female subordinate position in society. She claims that it is a universal concern and a phenomenon that occurs in every existent society and culture “the search for a genuinely egalitarian, let alone a matriarchal, culture has proved fruitless” (8). Furthermore, she explains that this universal devaluation of women is, in fact, the outcome of the belief that culture is superior to nature. While women are identified with nature, because of their biology that allows them to give birth, men are largely linked to culture; hence women are deemed of a less value than men. She explains that, “In short, the postulate that woman is viewed as closer to nature than man has several implications for further analysis, and can be read in several different ways” (17).

Val Buris in “The Dialectic of Women’s Oppression: Notes on the Relation Between Capitalism and Patriarchy,” argued that the subordination of women in society can only be analyzed, when both patriarchy and capitalism are related to each other, thus, women’s subjugation discourse is only relevant, when both these oppressive systems are included. The scholar claims that “Capitalism and Patriarchy are thus posited as two “relatively autonomous” structures, neither of which can be subsumed under the other, but which interact to determine the concrete position of women in society” (52).

In “The Subjugation of Women under Capitalism: The Bourgeois Morality”, Marlene

Dixon discussed how capital regimes control and supervise women's labor power, which results in them controlling their reproductive power as well, because in capitalist view, motherhood is reduced to nothing more than a mere way or source to produce future human labor, who in their turn, will be exploited. She further unveils that, capitalists are unwilling to let women control their own bodies, as for them, a woman's body is a property that belongs to them and the main tool of reproduction, "Thus the laws make clear that it is not desirable, from capital's point of view, for women to control their own bodies, i.e., for women to control the means of reproduction" (19).

Olivia Lee, in her article "Review: *A River of Stars* by Vanessa Hua," reviews and gives a general insight about the novel and its characters by providing a general summary. She proposes in her review, some major themes and different perspective via which students can analyze and study the novel. She explains that the "The diversity of immigrant characters presented in Hua's work, make her novel a useful study in an Asian American course—or any American literature course that wishes to broaden its scope to examine characters from the periphery of mainstream society" (69). Lee praises as well, Hua's ability to draw and create such a set up that can be both "hilarious and heartbreakingly honest" (69).

Significance of the Study

From the above literature review, one can deduce that *A River of Stars* has not been the object of many critical works, more specifically the themes that are selected to be examined in this research. Therefore, this paper undertakes the study and analysis of the mentioned novel from an Eco-feminist and Marxist feminist perspective, and aims at reading the experience of immigrant mothers, as well as, the exploitation of women under the different oppressive

systems.

Methodology

To fulfil the aim of this paper, this research studies *A River of Stars*, from an Eco-feminist and Marxist Feminist perspective, in order to examine the different selected themes from the novel. Both these approaches are relevant in terms of discussing the themes of motherhood among immigrant women, the relationship between women and nature, as well as, the exploitation of women. In addition to that, it demonstrates women's empowerment through sisterhood.

Outline of the thesis

In terms of structure, this study is divided into two chapters. The first chapter introduces the author, Vanessa Hua, her literary works and influences, as well as, a summary of her novel. It also deals with the historical, social background of the novel, along with the psychological effects of the postpartum practices. Additionally, it provides an overview of the two selected theories that are used to conduct this paper.

The second chapter is devoted to examine the main issues that are addressed in the novel, using the Eco-feminist and Marxist feminist theories to analyze the themes in relation to motherhood, immigration, and the exploitation of women under patriarchy and capitalism.

Chapter One: Biographical, Socio-Historical, Psychological Background, and the Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter is devoted for introducing the writer Vanessa Hua and her literary works. This part is dealing with the social, historical and psychological background of the novelist and their significant influence on her novel, *A River of Stars*. It also provides the plot summary of the novel under study and discusses the most significant topics tackled in Hua's novel. Moreover, this chapter presents a general overview of the theories that are used to analyze the text, namely, Eco-feminism and Marxist feminism.

I- Text in Context

I.1. Vanessa Hua's life

Vanessa Hua is a journalist, writer and a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. She is the author of short stories collection entitled *Deceit and Other Possibilities* and the novel, *A River of Stars*. She is a member of the San Francisco Writer's Grotto. She produces content for blogs, websites, and other social media and writes case studies and executive summaries. In addition, she is a recent Steinbeck Fellow in Creative Writing at San Francisco's James D. Vanessa Hua is a graduate of Stanford University and UC Riverside's MFA program. She has joined the school newspaper and has interned at newspapers and magazines. A few years after graduating, she has focused on journalism and she worked at the LA Times and the Harper Current.

Vanessa Hua lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her mother, husband, and twin boys. She is an Asian-American woman and a daughter of Chinese immigrant parents. Hua has grown up in the eastern suburbs of San Francisco, in a town that is not diverse ethnically or economically. In an article published by The New York Times under the title “The Complexity in Where Are You From,” Vanessa Hua admitted that she never got a straight answer from her father concerning their origins. Hua acknowledges that her parents were born in China, and then they fled to the Island of Taiwan at the close of World War II. After that, Hua's parents have come to the United States and they have graduated school in science and engineering. Still, her parents were from a military family so they have moved around so much during their childhood due to the conflicts with Japanese forces in the years before and during WWII.

I.2. Literary Influences

Vanessa Hua, at an early age, has always dreamt of being a writer. In an interview with Jared Jackson for "The Pen Ten," Hua confessed that the first books that have a profound impact on her were Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House Series*. Vanessa Hua admitted that the novels' heroines were all strivers. She also admitted the similarities found between her and the headstrong main characters of both novels. Consequently, these books have an enduring impact upon her development. The stories made her feel more at home because she could recognize characters of these novels who shared her dreams of becoming writers.

In an interview with Melissa Sipin for “The Rumpus Interviews,” Hua acknowledged that the desire to understand drives her fiction. Hua has always tried to get at the inside of things, of people, and of thoughts. She believes that writing satisfies her curiosity. She is particularly interested in exchanging with people from all walks of life in order to share their stories through journalistic writings. Furthermore, in her interview with Jared Jackson for “The PEN,” Hua

stated that her journalism helped with her fiction in terms of discipline to write every day, to work with deadlines, and be open to editing. Her fiction, on the other hand, has helped her journalism; it has made her more mindful of having a scene of facts or fleshing out a character. Still, Hua agrees that her fiction flourishes where the official ends and then she can take the imaginative leap of empathy. Meanwhile, she always attempts to shine a light onto untold stories that might inspire a change in thinking.

Vanessa Hua spent two decades writing about Asia and Diaspora. She has always been interested in writing about what it means for someone to leave behind their culture, family, and language and try to manage living in the adoptive homeland. In an interview with Melissa Sipin, Hua has said that the double consciousness underpins the writer's identity. Vanessa Hua is an American born daughter of Chinese immigrants, and she could understand at an early age that the world inside her home was different from that world outside of it. In other words, the writer who comes from one region and lives in another foreign region could distinguish the differences which lead her to better understand and create characters who share the same conditions with the writer. Hua assumes that her family is peculiar and different. The food types that they use to take for breakfast are not similar to the ones her neighbors eat generally.

Vanessa Hua works and novels have won plenty of rewards. In fact, she received a 2015 RonaJaffe Foundation Writers' award. Her novel *Deceit and Other Possibilities*, won the 2015 WillowBooks Literary Award. Adding to that, it is worth mentioning other rewards such as the Phelan Literary Award, Steinbeck Fellowship in Creative Writing, and James Madison Freedom of Information Award. She also won a reward for her journalism namely Asian American Journalists Association's National Journalism Award.

Vanessa Hua, as it is mentioned earlier, wrote a list of novels and a plethora of articles that

are published in San Francisco Chronicles. In August 2018, Hua published her novel *A River of Stars*. Two years later she published her novel *Deceit and Other Possibilities*. In the same year and recently, she published *Forbidden City*. Adding to that, Hua has produced other novels as follow: *The Deal*, *California Prose Directory*, *American Santa*, *Nothing but the Truth so Help Us God*, and *Falash in the Attic*.

I.3. A River of Stars: A Plot Overview

A River of Stars is a debut novel by Vanessa Hua and it was published in 2018. Chelsea Leu in her novel's review entitled "A River of Stars' by Vanessa Hua" has acknowledged that the novel's title, *A River of Stars*, was taken from a well-known Chinese legend where a Weaver and a Lowly Cowherd are in love and they were tragically separated by the Milky Way, meeting only once a year when a flock of magpies forms a bridge between them.

This novel is about an unwed 36 years old Chinese woman called Scarlett Chen. She is from a small poor Chinese village. Scarlett is pregnant with Boss Yeung child. Boss Yeung, her lover, sent her to Perfume Bay, a maternity centre located in Los Angeles to offer American citizenship for their child. Upon her arrival, Scarlett found that there are so many other Chinese pregnant women waiting to give birth and obtain American citizenship for their babies once they are born. Additionally, Boss Yeung believes that America is a land of rights, privileges, protection and opportunities (Hua 94).

Boss Yeung is a 60 years old man, already married a father of three daughters. He always mentions the name of his eldest, Viann, but systematically ignores the youngest daughters' names. He owns a biscuit factory where Scarlett used to work. The man has always wished to be a father of a son so as he could be an heir to his name and business. Therefore, when Scarlett got pregnant, he has been overjoyed and extremely excited to find out that she is carrying a boy.

For this reason too, he starts to manipulate and overprotect her. First of all, he has forced her to leave Hong Kong to give birth in Los Angeles in a secret maternity centre. He, then, begins to play the role of wise man who knows everything about all the subjects. In addition to that,

During her pregnancy, he'd begun scrutinizing her, prescribing advice—some backed by science but most by superstition—to protect the baby. She shouldn't eat mangoes, as their heat would give the baby bad skin; no watermelon, whose chill would cool her womb; no bananas, which would cause the baby to slip out early. No water chestnuts, mug beans, or bean sprouts, either. The list of traditional prohibitions grew each time she attempted to eat. (Hua 10)

Perfume Bay is headed by a Chinese woman called Mama Fang. She, as well as other nurses, used to take care of the future mothers. This centre is a five-star accommodation located outside of Los Angeles. Still, the occupants learn mothering tasks and childrearing; this centre was considered as a crash course in mothering. During her eighth month, Scarlett gets to know the gender of her baby. After an ultrasound scan, the nurse informs the expecting woman that she will be a mom to a baby girl. Meanwhile, Scarlett finds herself in confusion and fear of Yeung's reaction which obliges her to bribe the nurse to hide the truth from everyone and specifically from Boss Yeung. In fact, Scarlett is the only one who knows that Scarlett is reviving the dream that had died with the birth of Boss Yeung daughters; she is the only one who knows how the son she holds is meant to him, the prince of the family who will carry on his father's legacy. Now the dream has been ruined and gone.

Mama Fang tells Scarlett that Boss Yeung is going to have custody of their unborn child.

This news leaves her with feelings of extreme betrayal. Scarlett has decided to leave Perfume Bay after securing as much money as she could from Boss Yeung for herself and for her future child. Consequently, as the story goes on, Scarlett has succeeded in escaping the maternity centre. She has stolen a business van and escaped. She is joined by Daisy, another occupant of perfume Bay. She is a Taiwanese American teenager exiled by her parents to the USA after she got pregnant with her boyfriend's child, William. The two pregnant women have found their way to San Francisco's Chinatown, where many Chinese immigrants are offering safety.

Scarlett and Daisy have failed to get back in touch with William. Consequently, they were obliged to rely on themselves and raise their children by themselves. On the other hand, Boss Yeung went to America to look for Scarlett after her escape. Doctors have diagnosed him with a chronic blood disease and he is in need for a bone transplant. Boss Yeung has discovered, after a medical check-up for surgery that Viann, the eldest daughter, is not his daughter but the daughter of a close family friend named Uncle Lo. While staying in the hospital, Yeung has realized that his daughter Viann treats him the same way he has treated Scarlett during her pregnancy. He has confessed that “Being pregnant wasn’t like being sick, not exactly, but both conditions offered up your body for public discussion and put you at the mercy of people who thought they knew what was best for you” (Hua 133).

Scarlett gives birth to her baby girl and she has given her a name of Liberty. She hopes that her neighbour, Old Wu, who has accumulated knowledge in his decades of living in Chinatown’s restaurants, would give her one of his food recipes to start her trade. She gets to master preparing *Hanbaobao* (A Chinese word for hamburger) and sells it at night. At the same time, Daisy stays at home taking care of the two babies, Liberty and Didi. She also is trying to reach William by sending him mails and messages. Scarlett sells *Hanbaobao* to save up enough money in order to

fix her papers after her Visa expired. When the two women could not save money, Scarlett got the idea from the marriage of *Lalas* (a Chinese word refers to same sex marriage) so she asked Daisy (who has the American citizenship) to marry her in order to obtain the Green Card.

At the end of the story, Boss Yeung finally meets Scarlett and their baby Liberty. He tells Scarlett about his blood cancer and Liberty saves her father by stem cells transplantation. The couple planned to go back to Hong Kong where Yeung invests a half million dollars in Scarlett's name to open *Hanbaobao* pop-up shop. Whereas, Daisy meets her boyfriend and they have decided to live in William's parents' house. The happy and disappointing ending of this novel reduced the opportunity to believe that women could be totally free one day, except if the men saved them.

II. Historical background of Chinese immigration to The United States

Chinese immigrants have settled in The United States, or as they have called it "The Golden Mountain", around mid-19th century. The process of Chinese immigration is divided into three major waves; the first one starts in 1815 to 1882. The second one is from 1949 to 1980. And finally, the third wave that lasts from 1980s to this day.

The early Chinese immigrants have swarmed the United States in hopes of fleeing the Chinese economic crisis and securing good jobs. In the beginning, only a handful of them have arrived in the USA, and they are mostly men. They have worked as miners, farmhands, and gardeners and they have helped in building the transcontinental railroad. Nonetheless, they still faced all sorts of racial discriminations by white supremacists and are victims of exploitation.

The first Chinese immigrant woman is Afong Moy. She has been brought to the United States from her home town in China in 1834, in order to be exhibited as “The Chinese Lady”. It was a dehumanizing act in which John Haddad has commented about. In his article “The Chinese Lady and China for the Ladies” he unveils that, “Unlike most acts from this period, Afong Moy did not juggle, work with trained animals, or profess to communicate with the dead—yet American audiences did not seem to mind. For they required only that the Chinese Lady is exactly that: authentically Chinese and a woman of affluence, elegance, and refinement” (5). Indeed Afong Moy is victim of racial fetishization. Her race, ethnicity, and gender are made objects of aesthetic and sexual desires.

Unlike Chinese immigrant men, who came to the USA to work and improve their economic state, Chinese immigrant women did not have the same motivations. While few of them came to escape the harsh conditions in china, the majority are either pushed to leave and join their family ties or, are kidnapped and sold through sex-trafficking. Judy Yung in her book, *Unbound Feet: a Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* affirms that “most Chinese women had either been sold into prostitution or domestic slavery, or they were coming to join their husbands” (24).

II.1.The Chinese Exclusion Act

When an economic crisis hits the USA, around the nineteenth century, which led a tremendous number of Americans to lose their jobs, an anti-Chinese movement has appeared. Chinese immigrants are therefore, considered as threats, and are blamed by the white supremacists for the economic crisis. Later on, discriminatory laws were passed, which made it difficult for Chinese immigrants to find jobs or to own lands. Additionally, the laws also have denied citizenship to those who are already settled.

In 1882, The United States federal law decided to restrict Chinese immigration, where they prohibited the entry of all Chinese people to the USA. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, this law was the first and only major federal law to explicitly suspend immigration for a specific nationality. Erika Lee explained in her book *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During The Exclusion Era 1882-1943* that the: “Chinese exclusion introduced gatekeeping ideology, politics, law and culture that transformed the ways in which Americans viewed and thought about race, immigration and the United States’ identity as a nation of immigrants”(24). This law has, therefore introduced and set up new immigration regulations, and in a way changed how Americans view immigration.

In fact, seven years prior passing the Chinese exclusion act, another major law was passed, that prevented Chinese women from immigrating to the United States; unless it was proven that they have come willingly. This law was made after the rise of prostitution and sex trafficking. However, it has been particularly severe and extreme towards Chinese women. Sucheng Chan in “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943,” states that:

Discrimination against Chinese prostitutes was made explicit and state wide when the California legislature passed, on March 21, 1866, “An Act for the Suppression of Chinese Houses of Fame” The statute declared Chinese prostitution a public nuisance, made leases of real property to brothel operators invalid, provided for retaking of such premises and charged landlords who allowed their properties to be used with misdemeanor that carried maximum penalty of \$500 or six month in jail. (97)

As a consequence, the number of Chinese immigrant women in the US has decreased dramatically in the years that followed this new legislation.

It was not until 1943 that the congress had finally lifted the discriminatory exclusion act, to permit only a small number of Chinese immigrants to enter the USA, with a quota limited to 150 people per year, and allowing them to become naturalized citizens. The decision to repeal this act was based on the fact that the United States and China are allies in World War II. XiaohuaMa commented about it in “The Sino-American Alliance during World War Two and the Lifting of the Chinese Exclusion Acts”:

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked on Pearl Harbor. That sudden attack let directly to reversal of America’s anti-Chinese immigration policy. The day after the attack, the United States together with China declared war on Japan and the two countries became allies immediately. The special wartime alliance between China and the United States initiated a far-reaching transformation in America’s East Asian policy, especially its China policy (41).

This alliance and the repealing of the Chinese exclusion act, has paved the way to terminate restrictions that are made towards other Asian countries. By 1952, Asian exclusion acts have ended. And finally in 1965, the quota system is lifted and more Chinese immigrants are allowed to the United States.

III- Social Background

III.1.Chinese One Child Policy

The one child policy, which became a two child policy in early 2016, is a family plan policy that restricts Chinese families, mostly the poor masses, from having more than a single

child per couple. This program was introduced, for the first time, between late 1970s and early 2016, and was recently officially abolished in July 2021 by the Chinese government. Families who violate this policy have to face strict penalties and pay large amount of fines. However, in some cases exceptions are made. For instance, when a family's first born child is a female, they are allowed to have a second child.

III.1.a. Effects and Consequences

The initial rational of this policy was to reduce and control the Chinese population growth. Yet, in a way, this policy has led to many other consequences. One of the consequences that have resulted from these laws is the imbalance of the sex ratio in China, which is caused by the growing amount of sex selective abortion in China. Women, either willingly or unwillingly, undergo abortion when they find out that the fetus is a female, or in order to end unplanned pregnancies. In *Fertility, Family Planning and Population Policy in China*, Juan Wu and Carlo S. Walther, state that “son preference in china is a major reason for ending a pregnancy with an abortion” (23). They added that the family planning responsibility system pushed parents to opt for abortion, as it is the main alternative that families can afford to avoid paying fees and in case an unplanned pregnancy occurs (23). They added furthermore, that the various social taboos against single or widowed women bearing children, is another factor that lead Chinese women to seek abortion (24).

Another consequence of the one child policy is the rise of female children who are abandoned or put in orphanages. The internalized sexism that is rooted in the Chinese society,

promotes the belief that girls are inadequate or are of a lesser value than boys, which leads parents to sacrifice their daughters. Avraham Ebenstein affirms, in his article “The Missing Girls of China Unintended Consequences of One Child Policy”, that “in China parents have historically preferred sons to daughters and in some circumstances, discarded daughters upon birth” (89).

Female infanticide was also a common practice in China, although it has decreased, thanks to the firm laws that are made against this practice. Yet, despite the very low cases, it is still one of the reasons of the imbalanced sex ratio. Zeng Yi stated, in his research “Causes and Implications of the Recent Increase in the Reported Sex Ratio at Birth in China,” that the “underreporting of female births, an increase in prenatal sex identification by ultrasound and other diagnostic methods for illegal purpose of gender specific birth control, and very low level of female infanticide are the causes of the increase of sex ratio of birth in china” (285).

III.2 Son Preference in China

Sex preference or gender preference is a global issue since it exists in so many societies and cultures. The Chinese society is definitely no exception, as it has long favored sons over daughters. This gender preference is without doubt linked to the patriarchal nature of the Chinese society. The most notably common reasons of this phenomenon are the belief that men are far stronger and superior than women, as well as, the influence of the Chinese agrarian society.

Men are deemed to be superior to women in Chinese society because they are the ones who carry the family line and name, while women get married and adopt their husband’s family name. Quanbao Jiang explains, in “Demographic Consequences of Gender Discrimination in

China: Simulation Analysis of Policy Options” that “China’s traditional culture is based on Confucianism, which entails that continuity of the family line is an indispensable part of china’s traditional child bearings culture leading to the preference of male descendants” (622).

As mentioned above, this biased gender preference is also linked to the Chinese agrarian society, and since agriculture demands physical strength, sons were preferred over daughters. Zhang Wenhua states in “Son Preference and Second Birth in China,” that “agricultural economy was determined in china historically, and sons were preferred as an important force in agricultural production” (5).

The great Chinese famine as well as the natural catastrophes and the economic crisis have contributed in the increase of gender imbalance in china. Isabelle Attané in *The Demographic Masculinization of China: Hoping for a Son* reveals that, “in periods of famine, war, drought and economic crisis saw an increase in female infanticide”. She adds that “in these periods of crisis, the poorest families were often forced to sacrifice some of their family members, usually daughters” (16).

In short, the one child policy, and gender preference have backfired disastrously on the Chinese society causing numerous horrible consequences and leading several families to commit all types of crimes against their own children, most notably female infants.

IV- Psychological Background

Hua in her novel, *A River of Stars*, has covered so many emotional and psychological themes. However, the themes that stand out the most are motherhood and everything that relates to pregnancy and parenting. She, undoubtedly, takes these themes seriously as mother herself.

In an interview “Motherhood and Migration: An Interview with Vanessa Hua on ‘A

River of Stars” by Melody Schreiber; Hua talked about the process of writing *A River of Stars*. She mentioned that the experience of going through her postpartum period while writing the novel has extremely inspired her in the process of creating the character Scarlet. Furthermore, in the same interview, she revealed that the death of her father has opened her eyes and made her aware of mortality, which is reflected in the book, where she explores questions of legacy, afterlife, and mortality.

Child Birth and Chinese Traditions

Unlike westerners practices that make women get back to work few days right after their delivery, Chinese women have to submit to a variety of postpartum traditions. Postpartum confinement is one of these traditions. New mothers are expected to stay at home, avoid cold water, and refrain from doing any activity that requires physical strength to recover from childbirth.

Chinese society recognizes, way back since the Han dynasty, that the month after childbirth is important and crucial to the future health of both the new born and the mother. In an article by Xuajuan Zheng “Chinese Primiparous Women’s Experience of the Traditional Postnatal Practice of “Doing the Month”: A Descriptive Study,” the author explained that this practice is derived from the Chinese belief of the Yin-Yan principle, that women follow for one full month. It is called Zuo Yue ZI, which translates to “doing the month” or “sitting the month” (253). Moreover, this tradition is not solely practiced by local Chinese women. It is surprisingly well accepted and practiced by Chinese immigrant women. In the same article, it is explained that this practice is believed by almost all Chinese population worldwide. Additionally immigration studies have showed that Chinese immigrant women, still think that this traditional practice of “doing the month” is very important (259).

Despite the huge acceptance of this customary practice, it still can have negative effects on women who experience postpartum depression. The new experience and all those restrictions new mothers are forced to follow, might contribute to provoking postpartum depression. Sharron S. K. Leung in her article, "Perceived Stress and Support of the Chinese Postpartum Ritual 'Doing the Month,'" asserts that postpartum rituals do not necessarily protect nor support postpartum women. They furthermore, stated that, postnatal confinement would only create spatial pressure and intensify the new mother's psychological stress (220).

V- Ecofeminism and Marxist Feminism: Historical Background and the Principles

In the late 1990s, the writings of Judith Butler changed many views on gender. Thus, the third wave of feminism, feminist philosophers and theorists have begun requisitioning the definition already given to gender. However, they argued that "men" and "women" are social categories that can only be defined in relation to each other. Butler, on the other hand, believes that the stable values and roles were imposed by society. This means that the performances of each gender should not disrupt to the accepted norms of the society. For instance, women are said to be wives, mothers, and housewives. Therefore, a new branch of feminism known as ecofeminism has appeared.

VI. Ecofeminism: Origins, Development, and Principles

Ecofeminism, also called ecological feminism, is a branch of feminism. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, the term was coined by the French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974. The modern Eco feminist movement is born out of a series of conferences and workshops held in the United States by a coalition of academic and professional women during the early 1980s. Furthermore, they have met to discuss the ways in which feminism and environmentalism

might be combined to promote respect for women and the natural world. Additionally, these women have found motivation due to the historical notion that has associated women with nature and which lead to the oppression of both. Greta Gaard in her book *Ecofeminism Women, Animals, and Nature* states that

Women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the western intellectual tradition and have resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body. While simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture and the mind.
(Gaard 5)

Adding to this, women and nature were often depicted as chaotic, irrational, and in need of control, while men have been frequently characterized as rational and ordered, therefore, capable of directing the use and development of women and nature. This idea grants power to men and allows for the exploitation of both women and nature.

A series of activities and a publication of academic articles led to the expansion of ecofeminism to a wider scope in the world and it became popular on a global level. In 1983, the first collection of essays on ecofeminism was published. The movement now is expanding and a plethora of texts are devoted exclusively to deal with the relationship of Ecofeminism, third world women, and international development. In the same year, 1983, the feminist theorist Ynestra King wrote an article entitled “What is Ecofeminism?” Still, this article has been considered by many scholars as a cause of the popularization of this movement.

The eco feminist Warren Karen describes Ecofeminism in her book's introduction *Ecological Feminism* as follow: “is an umbrella term which captures a variety of multicultural

perspectives on the nature of the connections within social system of domination between those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of non-human nature” (1). Moreover, Ecofeminism is an oppositional force against patriarchy; this movement criticizes historical, political, cultural, and spiritual associations between women and nature. Ecofemists desire to deconstruct the false binary between the human and nature. They work also to find alternative solutions to decrease the oppression and stop the violence against women, marginalized groups, and nature.

Ecofeminism has continued to develop, and it was branched into variant distinct schools of thoughts: radical ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, and cultural ecofeminism. Meanwhile, socialist ecofeminism, also called materialists, aim to liberate women from the stereotypes that have associated women with nature for centuries and that have been used as justification for exploiting women and other marginalized groups. That is to say, women have been historically and socially conditioned and they have been linked with nature, and the materialists now fight to undo these links.

The current research paper is studied by applying one of ecofeminism branch namely the spiritual and cultural ecofeminism. Additionally, in the late 1970s, spiritual and cultural ecofeminism have emerged. It is based on the emphasis that gender is constructed by society and culture. Still, Spiritual cultural eco feminists tend to welcome the notion of associating women with nature and they believed that this association is something to be proud of rather than viewed with suspicion. They described this connection, as well, as biological which is based on the shared characteristics and abilities of women and nature; spiritual and cultural ecofeminists contend that women have a more intimate relationship with nature due to their gender roles such as nurturing and procreation.

V.1.a Ecofeminism Principles:

Ecological feminism is based on the premise that the environment and females are both suffering from oppression by shared enemy which is the man. Roszak commented on this issue in his book *Person/Planet*: “both person and planet are threatened by the same enemy” (Roszak 32). Besides, Gaard notes that ecofeminism is based on the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders, a revaluing of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic process (Gaard 1).

Greta Gaard in *Ecofeminism Women, Animals, Nature* , cited some goals and principles of ecofeminism. Eco feminists called for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature (1). They also have highlighted a number of connections between the oppression of women and of nature that are significant to understanding why the environment is a feminist issue (4). This means that eco feminists take the responsibility of protecting nature because nature is linked to women and they are conceptualized historically. Another goal of ecofeminism is to provide a clean and liveable environment for women all over this world arguing that toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and pollution take their first toll on women, women's reproductive system, and children (05).

IV-Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism is another variant of feminism that rose to prominence in the United States alongside the new left in 1960s. It is a theoretical framework that states that capitalism and patriarchy are the major causes of women’s oppression. It analyzes women’s oppression on a structural level via applying the principles of the Marxist ideology.

Although both Frederick Engels and Karl Marx classify the categories of male and female as the natural division of biology, and thus, locating women's oppression solely on their biology, they still have managed to showcase women's oppression, both in the public and private spheres. Engels in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) writes that "The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for production of children." He also states that "The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between men and women in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male." Meaning that men consider women as a possession or a form of property; her sole purpose is reproduction and serving the male superior.

In capitalist and patriarchal societies, men take over both the public sphere, as well as the private sphere; which allows the perpetuation of the division of labor. To Marxist feminists, gender is the division of labor between men's work and women's work, which means tasks are assigned to people according to their gender. While men's work tends to be in the work place, women's work takes place at home as unpaid domestic labor. Therefore, Marxist feminists advocate that housework or domestic labor must be considered as a real productive job, and thereby, women should be paid. Angela Y. Davis in her book *Woman, Race and Class* (1981), states that house chores consume more than three thousand hours of the average housewife a year, without including taking care of children. She concludes by saying that the only way to end domestic slavery, is by socializing housework.

Despite the fact that women in the twentieth century have started to move into the work place alongside men, thanks to the industrial revolution that brought them employment

opportunities, yet, their labor is still not equal to men. Women are overrepresented in the wage gap, and the harassment and mistreatment they face from their male superiors at their work place. Zohreh Emami, in “Ideological Conceptions of the Basis for the Sexual Division of Labor” affirms that even if women are engaged in a wage work, they are still expected to take care of their family, especially children, while at the same time, they suffer from limited range of occupations, low pay and poor job conditions (212). Therefore, one can only deduce that men take advantage and exploit women’s labor power, because, the unpaid domestic labor benefits them.

Heidi Hartmann, in “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union”, lays out the tensions between Marxism and capitalism and attempts to resolve them. She states that Marxism does not take into account the sexism and does not provide an analysis of sexism in a capitalist system. Additionally, she argues that Marxism mostly looks at women’s struggles in a capitalist society, in relation to the economic system instead of looking at it in relation to men (2).

Certainly, misogyny and sexism have existed way back before the emergence of capitalism; however, Marxist feminists believe that the only way towards women’s liberation is by destroying capitalism. Bell Hooks in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre* asserts that:

Most people in the United States think of feminism or the more commonly used term “women’s lib” as a movement that aims to make women the social equals of men. This broad definition, popularized by the media and mainstream segments of the movements, raises problematic questions. Since men are not equals in white

supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share common vision of what equality means? Implicit in this simplistic definition of women's liberation is a dismissal of race and class as factors that, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against exploited oppression. (17)

hooks here argues that seeking gender equality in the current social system would only result in equality between men and women from the same social class and race. For instance, a poor woman of color would only be equal to a poor man of color whereas a white woman from an upper class would enquire the same privileges as a white upper class man. For hooks, the fight for gender equality must also be anti-racist and anti-capitalist. She insists that changing laws and policies in the current system is not affective, so she urges for transforming the structure of society itself.

hooks, in her other book *Feminism is for Everybody*, offers a definition to feminism. She defines it as: "A movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." She elaborates in the same lines, that she loves this definition, because it states that feminism goes beyond gender equality. She recognizes that feminism is not anti-men, and that women's real enemy is in fact, sexism (5).

Overall, the goal of Marxist feminism is the complete dismantling of capitalism, patriarchy, and sexism through a socialist revolution. Nonetheless, while it is true that gender oppression is linked to capitalism, Marxist feminists believe that sexism has existed prior capitalism, and is enforced and practiced by different systems. Moreover, Marxist feminists understand that it is not possible to separate those systems from analysis.

Conclusion

The first chapter is an opening to the whole dissertation and it is the doorway which will enable the analysis of the novel under study. This part of the thesis has spotted the light on the biography of the writer, Vanessa Hua, and her literary career. Indeed, the chapter provides an insight on her life and the works she has realized, as well as, an overview of the novel's plot, by highlighting the main events and the main characters that the novel has been built upon. Additionally, it has presented the backgrounds in which the novel has been brought up; namely the historical background, social background, and the psychological background. Another important element in this chapter is the theories that are used in order to conduct the analysis of this novel by providing the origins and the historical background along with, the aims and principles of both Marxist feminist theory and Eco-feminist theory.

Chapter Two: An Eco-feminist and Marxist Feminist Analysis of Vanessa Hua's Novel A

River of Stars

Introduction

This chapter is meant to be the core analysis of this work. It is devoted to introducing the selected themes that are discussed in our selected novel *A River of Stars*. This part highlights the most significant issues Vanessa Hua addresses in her novel by applying Marxist feminist theory in addition to social and cultural ecofeminism theory. The current chapter is divided into two parts; the first section is dealing with the Ecofeminism study of the female characters in this novel whereas the second one is devoted to the Marxist feminist study of the character.

I-Motherhood and Immigrant Women: A Socio-Cultural Eco feminist Study of the Female Characters

A River of Stars is dedicated to explore the meaning of mile stone experiences and events in the life of a woman whose reality is complicated by questions of displacement and economic austerity. Motherhood is the major theme on which Hua focused the most in her novel. Actually, the author has started writing the story in the months that followed the delivery of her twin boys. Therefore, a lot of her own experiences are reflected in the main character Scarlett, and to a lesser degree in Daisy. In an interview with Melody Schreiber under the title “Motherhood and Migration: An Interview with Vanessa Hua on 'A River of Stars,’” Hua explained that having kids has made her see the world in a different way. Her maternity drove her to create characters who share not only her own experiences but also the circumstances any mother faces during her pregnancy, the transformation women go through in this peculiar period of time, the switch from

feminine identity to a maternal identity, the relationship they form, and the families they make.

Pregnancy has been regarded of as a developmental stage that results in great feelings of happiness and fulfilment (Keating-Lefler 28). It has been considered as well a period of crisis and development precisely when it concerns the first reproductive event. However, expectations are not often matching the reality, especially when the mother is single. The novel mirrors the sufferings that unwed and single mothers face during their life journey. Scarlett Chen, the main character of the novel, is a 36 years old pregnant woman; she is not married to the father of her baby, Boss Yeung. The controlling boyfriend, Yeung, sends her to a posh private accommodation for expectant Chinese mothers in Los Angeles to offer the American citizenship for their child. Boss Yeung believes that America is the best place to give birth in thanks to the rights and privileges that exist there; he admits that “no greater certainty existed than the rights, privileges, and protections of every U.S citizen” (Hua 94). In addition to that, Scarlett has never been prepared to leave her country and live with other pregnant mothers at the maternity centre, she is forced into it.

Boss Yeung always dreamt of having a son, and because Scarlett is expecting a baby boy, the future father wants to pay Scarlett in order to desist from her parental rights after the birth of the baby so that he can take him to be raised within his “legitimate family.” Fuqin Bian in his article entitled “Intergenerational Relations in Urban China: Proximity, Contact, and Help to Parents” claims that family lineage is a crucial concern in Chinese society because according to the Chinese social beliefs only sons can carry the family name, the emphasis on lineal continuity in China intensifies the importance of producing male heirs (116).

Single and economically disadvantaged mothers all over the world are not considering motherhood as a source of joy, but a cause of agony and pain. In “The Experience of Becoming

a Mother for Single, Unpatented, Medicaid-Eligible, First-Time Mothers,” Rebecca Keating-Lefler and Margaret Wilson, argue that single mothers are facing various life challenges during and after giving birth. In the same paper, Keating-Lefler and Wilson found out that women in their journey of being mothers encountered what are called social psychological problems (23). Among these problems, the researchers explain, is that the pregnant women have a tendency to lose contact with their parents and family due to the complete rejection (25).

Hua in her novel addresses to this issue by creating a rejected pregnant character who is Daisy. Moreover, Daisy, the exiled daughter, is a teenager from Taiwan who is forced by her parents to go to Perfume Bay to give birth to her baby far from her country. The Taiwanese American woman, after getting pregnant, has found herself among other strange mothers in the Perfume Bay. Her boyfriend William does not know that she is expecting a child which makes Daisy feel depressed all the time; her only hope is finding him back and reuniting with the father of her child. The rejection of her parents has also weakened Daisy. Throughout the story, the only thing Daisy thinks of and focuses on is to escape the maternity centre and look for William. She wants her boyfriend to save her not because she loves him but because she is in need of protection from a man. She believes that he is the only one who will provide her a secure life and an economically well-established life. Daisy, as well as some other women, is victim of social dictates of gender roles and they willingly accept the dominant role of men. It has been believed, as Schopenhauer explains, that women had a natural need to be controlled and lead by man: “Woman is by nature meant to obey” (19).

Victorian woman is the best depiction of this cultural law that was spread during this era. Meanwhile, man had domesticated woman and he has made her dependent on him. According to the general beliefs that are spread during the Victorian era is that the women's life is centred

solely on family and home. Guma Abakar in his article that is published under title "The Image of Victorian women as Depicted in Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte" asserts that "The ideal Victorian woman's life revolved around her family's domestic sphere and home ... woman did not have her own rights and was supposed to get married and become a servant to her husband" (50). Furthermore, this notion of domesticating women is a patriarchal system that has appeared after the naturalization of women and feminization of nature. Historically, nature holds the feminine values and the culture is related only to men as Pramod K. Nayar explains "in western thought and literature, one of the oldest binaries has been nature versus culture and the two sides of the binary carry gender values, further nature is feminine and culture is masculine" (19).

Consequently, from this idea plenty of societies have built a patriarchal inclination towards both women and nature, arguing that women's functions and roles are similar to those of nature: reproduction and nurturing only. Moreover, social Eco-feminists, rather than believing that women are closer to nature through their bodily functions, they argue that it is the social role ascribed to women which identifies them more closely with nature (Hatfield 36). That is to say, the closeness to nature is the product of the socialization of women's role through generations (37).

Women were treated like immobile indoor properties, confined to a suffocating, domestic environment. In the novel, the maternity centre of Perfume Bay epitomizes this belief and idea that women's freedom should be restrained for the sake of reproduction. In Perfume Bay, the women are treated as weak creatures or as children who need specific treatment and care. Mama Fang, the manager of Perfume Bay has established a severe program in order to take care of the pregnant women, usually sent by their "lovers." Perfume Bay is considered the worst place for pregnant women to go to and Scarlett described it as a legal jail. Mama Fang, "the

watcher” forbids pregnant women from eating certain foods and she only allows them to take healthy nutriments. She also hides all of their identity cards and passports from them. Mama Fang, following the orders, isolates them from the outside world, as the mothers cannot leave the clinic. In addition, they have been prohibited from having communication with their relatives; they do not even have the right to use the internet or phone. Adding to that, Mama Fang sends a daily report of Scarlett to Boss Yeung. Yeung, on the other hand, is the other watcher of Scarlett that is to say he calls every day through a video calls so as he could see her and judge whether she is taking a good care of his baby.

Family system in China affects women's choice of motherhood strategies and gender selection. By taking a closer look into the Chinese family system, it could be understood that severe traditional rules had taken a major factor in family construction. According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, the family is defined as the basic unit in any society and it consists traditionally of a father and a mother rearing their children. However, family dynamics vary from one society to another and from one culture to another in terms of construction, scheme, and laws. In the traditional Chinese society, individuals have to follow long-established laws and customs passed down by their ancestors to get married and construct a family. Marriages according to the ancient Chinese family system require parental consent, and the age of marriage is fixed by customs; thirty for men and twenty for women. Sing Ging Su in his book *The Chinese Family System* acknowledged that girls at age of ten learn the arts of speech and good manners to be docile and obedient. They learn as well all female’s work such as making garments, watching the sacrifices, and serving the liqueurs and sauces. On the other hand, boys of the same age learn the different classes of characters and calculations; they also learn music and dance (36). Similarly to the Western Ideology, China follows the same basics by putting women in

certain social roles as Freud said “women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization become more and more men's business” (Pramod k 80). Hegel also maintains that a woman's sphere is marriage. Ma, the mother of Scarlett, has always wished to see her daughter getting married. However, Scarlett is always refusing to do so. Ma is a widow who refuses to remarry as Scarlett comments, "for no one wanted a widow with a vinegar disposition" (Hua 113).

Traditional Chinese families have long been characterized as patriarchal, patrimonial, patrilineal, and patrilocal, putting women at a harsh social disadvantage in comparison to men (Thomton). That is to say, the family lineage is very significant in Chinese society and for preserving the family name, so son heirs are required. Daughters are not desired because they do not serve their natal families for a long time, so once they get married they become a part of another family. Nonetheless, sons are permanent and they provide financial support for their parents. Besides, male heirs carry the family name and protect the notion of multi-generational families. The Chinese policies supervise and control choices related to motherhood; therefore, women are oppressed not only by the social beliefs but also by the policies established by the government. In 1980, China launched a new policy to control the population growth, namely one child policy. The families prefer to keep the males and get rid of the females before their birth. Also, parents tend to hide the new born girls from the government which simply means the girls live without any right to be citizens.

Additionally, other parents have gone as far as killing their own female children so that they have another opportunity of keeping only the sons. Feng Wang in his statistical research entitled "Can China Afford to Continue its One-Child Policy" notes that, according the data he has collected, an "excess female mortality at young ages has been on the rise ever since the

implementation of the one-child policy" (6). Vanessa Hua in her novel attempts to deal with this social issue which is the son preference by referring to the interesting life of Ma. Ma is a widow who is working in a clinic, and she used to abort women who are supposed to carry a girl by force. Scarlett recounts: "two men ran over the bridge to the other side, blocking her escape. She'd wept, begging, pleading that her mother in law would beat her until she had a son" (Hua 227).

Women who carry girls are threatened by sterilization. Doctors would abort their baby and then sterilize them. This custom is passed down among the villagers in Hong Kong where old women abort young pregnant women by force without taking into account the woman's refusal of their barbaric act. Many of the traumatized women eventually commit suicide. On the other hand, unlike her mother, Scarlett refuses all this kind of bloody practices. She has been encouraged to run to the USA for this reason too. In fact, she admits that her mother will abort her fetus as she used to do for other women. In addition, when she talks about her mother it could be felt that Scarlett is taking revenge by letting her mother alone and by refusing to get married as she advised her: "Ma's lack of grandchildren must have felt like a curse from all the women whose pregnancies she had ended" (Hua 114).

The patriarchy and the oppression of females in China start when the girl is young. Greenhalgh describes the Asian families, "China and its cultural offshoots, Japan and Korea, evolved some of the most patriarchal family systems that ever existed" (265). Hence, when a child is born, the father fasts to show respect for the child and his creation. That is to say, children are considered to be precious gifts from God and they are a blessing for the parents. However, the oppression of the female begins when children are able to speak as Ging Su claims "parents taught the boy to respond boldly and clearly; a girl, submissively and low" (Ging Su 45)

Then, when the girls are ten, the parents start to teach them functions and duties associated with womanhood to prepare these little girls for marriage at the age of twenty. Furthermore, teaching the duties for women is also a significant element that has characterized Perfume Bay. Women in this maternity centre learn how to take care of their children and how to be the *ideal* mothers despite the fact that Mama Fang believes that motherhood is not given to all mothers; she says “some women aren't meant to hold babies.”(Hua 31) After the girl gets married, another kind of oppression and patriarchy appears and this oppression is welcomed by her because it is a traditional custom and no one is able to disobey. Moreover, the married woman becomes an object a man owns which means all her properties become under the control of her husband. Ging Si admits that “Being under the guardianship of her husband, she had in the eyes of the law, no right to possess separate property during the lifetime of her husband. At marriage everything she possessed, even properties inherited from her parents...became the property of her husband” (38). In this novel, Hua shows the way this patriarchal system allows the husband to take his wife’s properties. This practice leads to empower the situation of men and permits them to take from the women all what they desire. For instance, Scarlett describes Yeung's mentality and his way of thinking by claiming that “Boss Yeung would never accept her refusal of his bribe. Men like him used to taking what they wanted, and she knew he'd come after her” (Hua 37).

II-Identity and Immigration

Asian Americans are considered the racial group that counts the greatest proportion of foreign born residents in the United States. According to a statistical research under title “Immigration Part of the State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Series,” it has been indicated that there are more immigrant coming from Asia than from any region in the world,

this is due to the United States new policies that facilitate the process of immigration for the Asians and the fast naturalization of the Asian immigrants. In the same article, the researchers have also acknowledged that “those from north American countries have waited a decade or more, while those from Asian countries have waited five to eight years” (5). They argue that Asians immigrate to the USA for a myriad of reasons including the reunification with their family, education, employment, and escaping oppressive home countries (5).

Furthermore, escaping the oppressive homeland is another reason which has convinced Scarlett to not return back home. In her childhood years, Scarlett Chen denies her natal identity and she refuses to be treated as a Chinese girl. She expresses her denial by choosing for she an English name over her real Chinese name. She also wants to leave everything related to her culture, history, and country behind so that she can live in the USA with a new adopted identity. When Scarlett has given birth to her first child, she names her Liberty because, according to her, only in America could individuals be free, “liberty belonged to her and that liberty belonged in America” (Hua 127).

Society builds the individuals' identities. However, these identities are able to be changed and thrown away as Scarlett revealed in the novel that “the land of your birth shaped you, even if later, like Scarlett, you led your life in opposition to it” (Hua 284). In addition, the process of adopting a new self and a new identity takes a long way to achieve. The single immigrant mother struggles not only with the difficulty of establishing a life in a foreign country but she also faces difficulties with defining herself according to the characteristics she selects.

Moreover, in an article entitled “The Experience of Becoming a Mother for Single, Unpatented, Medicaid-Eligible, First-Time Mothers” the authors argued that single mothers struggle with defining who they are and who they would become. Coming back to the story's

main character, Scarlett is facing a difficult process of redefining and giving meaning to her life. Scarlett before meeting Boss Yeung was a young and pretty woman, she has to work in factories in order to gain money and improve her living conditions, and she refuses to get married even if her mother Ma insists on her to find a husband.

Now, after giving birth to her daughter she loses her physical and emotional well-being and her economic situation has been decreased. For instance, she comments on her body shape change and she claims that she has lost her beauty “she resembled a lank-haired, hollow-eyed ghost from the old tales those who lured travellers to their death. If Boss Yeung could see her now, he'd recoil. She felt like an old sow before the slaughter” (Hua 168). In addition to that, Scarlett did not give in to reality, but she decided to start to radically reformulate her life by believing in future possibilities. She also dived in the role of mother as a new identity and another way for self-definition. Scarlett risked new life roles; she tried to find a job and get enough money to fix her papers before her visa expires.

Scarlett's new identity begins to take shape after escaping from Perfume Bay. After she runs away, she took a decision to live her life independently with only her daughter. She is seeking to regularize her legal status to remain in America to increase her daughter's possibilities to live a better life. As the story unfolds, Scarlett, even if she is wishing to stay in America, cannot ignore the constant feeling of fear in which she lives. Scarlett fears of being discovered by Boss Yeung and takes her “Liberty” away from her. She also worries that the American authorities would deport her at any time. On the other hand, Scarlett keeps trying and taking risks in order to be in America in a legal way even if the mission seems hard to be accomplished.

Scarlett is stripped of her original Chinese identity and kept her English name in an attempt to create a new identity that fits her desire, as she did not accept living with an identity that society

attributed to her against her will. Scarlett did not succeed in creating an identity independent of Boss Yeung and her country. In the end, she returned back to her lover, Boss Yeung, or rather her saviour, because he was the one who finally helped her overcome problems and settle her situation, as opened a shop for her to sell food to improve her economical situation.

After liberating herself from Perfume Bay, Scarlett took the first steps in changing her life. The first thing Scarlett does is eating the foods that have been forbidden in the maternity centre. She has gone to MacDonald and bought a bag of fries; every bite is considered as a curse for Mama Fang and Boss Yeung. Scarlett felt freer; she happily disobeys the Chinese medicine tenants that forbid caffeine, tea, soda, and fried foods for the safety of the baby. Additionally, she has changed her haircut, declaring the beginning of a fresh new life with a new look. Daisy has applied some makeup to cover the marks of tiredness on Scarlett's face and make her regain confidence in her physical appearance. This practice and behaviour is called by feminists the manners of slave girl: "External appearance and movement are adjusted by women themselves in their attempts to conform to and reinforce the status quo. There is a name for this female participation in the reinforcement of women's subordinate status: we have called it slave girl behaviour" (Haug 79). However, other feminists refused to set themselves in a slave girl image because of their appearance. They suggest that the "enjoyment and pleasure are implicitly assumed to be extras historical quantities standing in eternal opposition to oppression" (Haug 81).

III-The Natural Mothers: A Social Myth that Troubles the Woman

Socio-ecofeminism thought emerged as an oppositional force against patriarchal assumption that says both women and nature are equally oppressed by male ways of thinking and action. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their materialistic conception of nature and

society believe, just like the enlightenment thinkers, that human progress was based upon a careful exploitation of nature and the non-human (Pramod K 50). Likewise, Chinese society, according to Scarlett's point of view, considers nature and the non-human are created solely for the service of man; she admits that animals were meant for work and consumption.

Judith Flanders asserts that women, according to a social myth, are naturally given a role of mothers. She admitted, as well, that “Evangelical ideas had linked the idea of womanliness to women carrying out their biological destiny--- to being wives and mothers. That was their job, and to expect to have any other job was reaction of their God-given place” (Flanders 13). Besides, in an article entitled “The Natural Mother”, Silvia Marchesi argued that mothers are completely linked to the life of their children: "there is still a widespread belief that on becoming a mother, their centre of interests, assumptions and desires will exclusively be for, and about, their child "(28).

That is to say, women after giving birth find their freedom restrained and they become attached to their children. In this novel, *A River of Stars*, Scarlett puts her whole energy in protecting her daughter Liberty like she has been taught in Perfume Bay. Furthermore, it has been believed that motherhood is an easy task to fulfil and that the mother is created with the knowledge of childrearing matters. Chinese society convictions insisted that mothers innately know best how to care for their children and breastfeed them, regardless their childrearing experiences "Mothers were supposed to know simply by virtue of being mothers" (Flanders 84). However, in reality plenty of females do not know how deal with this new life role, motherhood, for instance, Daisy struggles to feed her son Didi. Her breasts hurt and she could not find the right position to breastfeed. Meanwhile, Chinese beliefs and traditions insist that mothers know instinctively how to care for their children regardless of their childrearing experience.

In fact, this idea is widespread all over the world. For instance, in the Victorian era, men proclaim that females should stay at home, expand their families and fulfil the duty of childrearing. As a matter of fact, Harrison in her article entitled “Surrogate Power: The Agency of The Replacement Mother in Mid-Victorian Literature.” asserted that “early-Victorian advice texts considered maternity not only as natural and instinctual to women, but also as a religious obligation... a woman was expected to fulfil her procreation capacity as a duty to God” (Harrison 33). The society expects women to intuitively fulfil the role of the mother and spontaneously know how to take care of their children because they are genetically programmed to perform these tasks.

As it was mentioned earlier, in *Perfume Bay* the pregnant women learn how to be mothers. It is described as a crash course in motherhood, where future mothers learn the tasks of mothering and childrearing. Additionally, Mama Fang is an *amah* in Lo’s family house. Her mother has died in childbirth. She then had taken care of herself and her father. Lo falls in love with her during her work period in his house. After that they have a son. However, Mama Fang refuses to touch or breastfeed her little baby. Thus, Lo and his wife have raised the son as their own and in return they had given Mama Fang a year's salary. After a period of time she learns that she starts to miss her child “new mothers felt nothing at first that fierce adoration developed over days and weeks. She might have come to love her son” (Hua 258).

V-Marxist Feminist Analysis of the Female Exploitation in *A River of Stars*

Over the last few years, China's economy has shifted from communism to capitalism. This economic transformation has led millions of teenagers and young women to leave their villages and migrate from rural areas to cities in order to escape poverty and obtain employment in the various expanding factories despite the low wages and the subordinate positions they fatally occupy.

Hua unveils in her novel, the experiences and the harsh conditions that women, mostly underage girls, have to undergo due to poverty and financial instability. She develops the lives of her characters, each with their own background story. However, the main focus of the narrative is Scarlett. The omniscient narrator's standpoint offers the readers a glimpse of Scarlett's journey, going back and forth from her past life in China to her present life as an immigrant unwed mother in America.

Scarlett has always dreamt of being independent. Her fear of ending up repeating her mother's miserable life has led her to leave her village and her home, when she has been barely sixteen, in hopes of finding employment in the city, like expressed throughout this passage, "The factories promised independence and a future different from the one handed to her" (Hua 120). Upon arriving in the city, Scarlett starts working at a shoe factory, while enduring, alongside other underage girls, the extremely poor and harsh conditions of the workplace. Hua describes the deteriorating state that Scarlett has to live in as follow: "She started on the assembly line of shoe factory, living in a dormitory, twelve girls to a room, in a village made vertical, suffocating in summer and freezing in winter" (Hua120).

In addition to the run-down atmosphere they are put in, these female workers, including Scarlett, are not granted any type of freedom or independence, and they enjoy no democratic rights. Their whole lives are controlled and policed by their superiors at the factory and even the simplest daily tasks are scheduled for them. Thus, these girls are obliged to work harder, stay obedient and avoid falling behind their assigned schedules; otherwise, the company owners will cut a big portion of their salary as a punishment. They are treated no better than slaves. The cruel treatment that these young ladies have to endure is portrayed through these lines, “Her pay was docked if she talked back to the supervisor, if she fell behind production goals, and her schedule—to shit, to shower, to work, and to eat—was timed to the minute” (Hua 120). This indicates that these young women are victims of overexploitation in their workplace. On this basis, George Albee and Melissa Perry in their article “Economic and Social Causes of Sexism and of the Exploitation of Women” state that “Working conditions in the factories were abysmal, hours were long, pay was poor—jobs were not unlike slavery” (153).

The discrimination against female workers goes beyond working hours and underpaid salaries. The extremely cruel and terrible work conditions, the pressure, and the exhausting long-hour shifts these young women undergo at their workplace, have, with no doubt, affected their mental health and sometimes it can even lead to serious consequences like suicide, as Hua recounts in this passage, “A worker on the assembly line killed herself by jumping off the roof of the dormitory. A teenager, a girl far from home, someone’s daughter, someone’s sister, crushed by the seven-day workweeks and fifteen-hour days” (Hua 72). Hua demonstrates and brings out throughout this passage, the complete and total disregard from capitalist organizations, towards their employees’ mental health, rights and safety. In relation to women’s awful situation at work, Cinzia Arruza discusses and reveals in *Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism*, the different types of mistreatment that

working class women have to endure. She says: “Working class women were humiliated, ill-treated, despised, physically abused, paid half the male salary, and constrained to a brutal life of unending misery” (23).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that these female workers are more likely to fall prey to false and fake job recruitment through advertisements, promising them a high salary and taking advantage of their poor economic state and young age. Hua explores this issue through Scarlett’s experience:

She quit that factory and joined another girl whose friend promised a job with good wages. When they arrived at the squat concrete building, however, an oily man locked them into a room on the second floor. Scarlett had climbed out of the window and dropped into a trash bin to escape, while that girl remained behind, afraid to jump and unwilling to believe she had been tricked (Hua 120)

Scarlett manages to secure herself a good position as a deputy manager at Boss Yeung’s factory, despite not having a high school degree and not being a college graduate. She relied on her experiences rather than a degree “At Boss Yeung’s factory, she’d worked with college graduates who were younger and softer. She had never questioned her place alongside them because of her work experience, her knowledge applied and theirs theoretical” (Hua 121). Yet, even her slightly higher position, is clearly not enough to ensure her an equal status and the same privileges as her male co-workers. Hua attests the marginalization of women in the workplace through this passage, “At Boss Yeung’s factory, the men had expected even the most senior women on staff to serve tea and defer to them at meetings” (Hua 57). In her book *The Second Sex* (2010), Simon de Beauvoir points out that only a realization of a socialist society all over the world, would achieve true gender equality. She adds that, “There will no longer be men or women, but only workers, equal among themselves”.

In capitalist societies, men use women as a major source of cheap labor. They take advantage and benefit from women's workforce, and in return women obtain minimum wages or low salaries, as well as unpaid overtime work. Hua interprets this issue throughout Scarlett's exchange with Manager Kwok, who allows her to take an interview at his restaurant. Scarlett voices out her concern about the restaurant having few employees who end up working unpaid overtime hours. As a consequence, Manager Kwok abruptly rejects her apprehension and thinks that "She shouldn't have asked so many questions. Rejected: not because of her red-rimmed eyes or her hunched posture, but because she wasn't as naïve as he wanted" (Hua 118).

Another similar experience occurs to Scarlett, when she enthusiastically shares her idea to open a Hanbaobao food cart with Old Wu hoping he would teach her the recipe. However, her dreams are crushed when he tries desperately to convince her that it is a terrible idea, and suggests that she works at an electronic factory instead. Wu tells her that "Trying to run your own business, it is too risky" and that he has "seen a lot of people who wanted what you want and failed" (Hua 143). Yet his attempt to make her change her mind has failed, because Scarlett is determined to do anything and everything to support her new family.

Hua succeeds in bringing out through her novel the various types of exploitation that women undergo and face under capitalism. Women's oppression and mistreatment does not end despite them moving to the public sphere and despite their workforce, they are still marginalized and not treated as men's equals at their workplace. In her article "Women work" Selma James

affirms that “‘women are naturally’ seen low-waged or unwaged servants by men, by society and by their own children. The work we do is the essence of our slavery, and neglecting women’s work has wide implications for every aspect of our struggle” (68).

VI. Female Exploitation through Patriarchy and Gender Bias in *A River of Stars*

Hua’s novel, *A River of Stars*, succeeds to depict through the experiences of her female characters the patriarchal practices that subjugate women at different levels, especially on an economic level. Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as “A system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (214). She emphasizes that the use of the expression “Social structure” in her definition is essential, because it does not generalize all men as the dominants and every woman as the subordinate.

Women in China hold a subordinate position in society. They are deemed to be of less value than men, who are believed to be the superiors in society. Hua portrays male supremacy and dominance through Boss Yeung and Scarlett’s dynamics. Although Scarlett may seem like a strong independent woman, her dependency and subordination towards Boss Yeung is highly apparent. She is in a constant fear of losing the perfect future and family she has imagined: “She’d pictured herself someday with a settled life with a husband-someone solid as Boss Yeung- if not him exactly-a home and family” (Hua 10). Scarlett faithfully tries to appease and obey all his wishes and commands in order to prove that she is capable of being a mother “If she couldn’t please him while pregnant, she never would as a mother. She’d use any chance of a future together” (Hua 09). In this respect, bell hooks, in her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre* argues that the main cause of discrimination, exploitation, and oppression against women is sexism that is exerted through male domination (47). Similarly, Zillah R. Eisenstein in her book *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*

asserts that “Male supremacy and capitalism are defined as the core relations determining the oppression of women today” (1).

Scarlett reminisces about her past relationship with Boss Yeung throughout the whole novel. In her vulnerable and weak moments, she only remembers his kind acts, and dismisses the bad memories. Hua shows Scarlett’s sensitive side through this passage: “How would Boss Yeung react if he saw her now, dressed like a bride? Would he remember the salt on her skin, the sticky warmth of their bodies under clean cotton sheets, feel regret—or disgust? She’d take anything, anything but his indifference” (Hua 241). This indeed confirms Margaret Atwood’s presumption in her book *The Robber Bride*, about whether male gaze exists or not. She writes:

Male fantasies, male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on pedestal or down on your knees, it’s all a male fantasy: that you’re strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren’t catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you’re unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. (471)

Hua reflects upon verbal violence in her novel. The psychological abuse that is perpetuated against Scarlett is shown through Boss Yeung’s language and tone whenever he communicates with her, especially during her pregnancy. Boss Yeung asserts his dominance by giving her orders, humiliating her, and by accusing her of being irresponsible and selfish. Hua expresses his unjust and oppressive behavior through this passage:

He thumped the desk, and the chopsticks clattered off the bowl. The screen locked up, freezing his expression into a snarl. Scarlett steeled herself. During her pregnancy, he had grown accustomed to giving her orders,

and he wouldn't stop after she delivered, not unless she stood up to him now....

'Selfish,' he said. She understood. If she'd been more careful, if she'd been thinking about their son, she wouldn't have fallen. "I won't let you ruin him."

With a hiss of disgust, he logged off. (Hua 9- 10)

Engels discusses in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State* that women are degraded by men who only use them as an instrument to produce children. Indeed, additionally to his oppressive treatment, Boss Yeung considers Scarlett as a mistress and nothing more than a mere tool of reproduction, especially since she, as they thought at first, is giving birth to a boy, as Hua reveals in this following passage, "Sequestered at Perfume Bay, she'd become a modern-day concubine, her existence reduced to a single purpose: to produce the heir" (Hua 9).

Son preference and gender bias is also portrayed in the novel. Boss Yeung has always dreamt and longed for a son who would help carrying the family line as well as his business and wealth and "That was when Scarlett had realized just how much his son meant to Boss Yeung, reviving the dream that had died with the birth of his daughters: an heir to carry his legacy" (Hua 6).

Viann is also a victim of exploitation and patriarchal injustice. She is trained and raised her whole life, by her father, to take over his wealth; yet when a son comes into the picture, Boss Yeung plans radically changes, "Viann, was the only daughter he mentioned by name, polished, clever, and ambitious, a leader in the making, the kind of daughter a modern man wanted to raise but not marry. His favourite until he learned that Scarlett was having a son" (Hua 122). In addition to being exploited, Viann also endures sexist and misogynistic remarks and insults from Uncle Lo. This following passage shows Uncle Lo's extreme sexism and misogyny: "Uncle Lo cajoled Viann, 'Eat! You look like a little girl.' 'I'm full.' 'So thin!' said Uncle Lo,

flush, vital and impeccably dressed in a tailored buttoned-up shirt, his tie knotted tight as a fist. She waved off the tray. ‘No man wants a scrawny chicken’” (Hua 251).

Through the above analysis of the female exploitation through patriarchy, it is indisputable that patriarchy as a system is responsible for the subordinate status of women. It is one of the main obstacles that restrict women from finally gaining their emancipation and liberation. While men on the other hand, are highly benefited by this oppressive system.

IV. Female Empowerment through Sisterhood in *A River of Stars*

Sisterhood is an essential concept that helps women empower themselves. It is a movement that urges women to cooperate, unite, and support each other in their fight against the oppressive capitalist, patriarchal, and sexist society. On this regard, Hooks in her book *Feminism is for Everybody* affirms that without solidarity between women, none of the great transformation that women have achieved would have happened (14).

Hua’s two protagonists, Scarlett and Daisy, lean and stand by each other in their journey to defy the ruthless life events they undergo on a daily basis. Together they learn how to challenge the struggles and how to cope with the harsh and unjust capitalist and patriarchal society, despite their huge age gap and their different backgrounds.

Scarlett and Daisy’s sisterhood and unity emerges from their shared experiences. Both are single mothers in a foreign country, far from their families and homes and “Neither she nor

Scarlett were moneyed married wives, not like the other guests” (Hua 11). Their desperate need for a community where they would feel accepted, understood and belonged to, has made their relationship and bond stronger. Hua describes their relationship as follows “Sisters not by blood, but by choice” (Hua 230). This description suggests that sisterhood is not limited to the biological relationship between siblings, but it is related to the bond that women have created in order to break free from all systems of oppression.

After Scarlett and Daisy escape the maternity home, they make, together, their way to Chinatown, where they start their new life. They are able to rely on each other while giving birth. Hua narrates in this passage how, “Scarlett was grateful for Daisy’s company, hard as it was to admit she needed help from anyone, hard as it was to groan in front of her” (Hua 87). They both work together in harmony; while Daisy helps Scarlett interact and communicate with people, thanks to her perfect and fluent English, Scarlett is useful by providing and supporting Daisy and her son financially.

Although Scarlett and Daisy argue practically every day, and despite having to take a break from each other every now and then; yet, they have managed to create a strong and solid bond “And—Daisy. After the intensity of their early days, they had to be apart more often than together. It surprises Scarlett how much she missed Daisy each day—her sharp tongue, her sharp wit, and her capable hands” (Hua 215). Through this passage, Hua exposes the emotional and character development of Scarlett; both she and Daisy have come to like each other, despite their differences. In this context, Helena Michie, argues in her book *Sororophobia: Differences among Women in Literature*, that feminism offers women a new family that embraces all women no matter how different they might appear to be (3).

Sisterhood between Daisy and Scarlett also arises from the lack of a mother figure in their lives. In fact, both Scarlett and Daisy's mothers are not in the picture throughout their pregnancy and even after they have delivered their babies. The absence of their mothers made them resort to sisterhood. Moreover, Scarlett has learned to understand her mother's own suffering and struggles through her sisterly relationship with Daisy "Scarlett had become a scold like Ma and for the first time, she understood why she'd enraged her mother, who yelled because she felt old and because her flailing arms and shouts might cover up her fear. Because Daisy, willful and impulsive, reminded Scarlett of all her own failures since" (Hua 134). This passage suggests as well that Scarlett sees her young self through Daisy.

Another solid friendship has occurred between Scarlett, Daisy, and the lesbian couple, also referred to as the "lala" couple, Casey and her wife Ying. It starts when Casey, the redhead, as Hua describes her, has interacted with Scarlett on different occasions. Casey becomes Scarlett's regular customer at the Hanbaobao food cart. She always makes sure to give Scarlett extra tips. Her generosity, kindness, and slight knowledge of Chinese culture and language have helped ease and prolong their interactions. Casey, later on, invites Scarlett to her wedding, where Scarlett meets for the first time Ying. The two women's wedding inspires Scarlett to marry Daisy in order to regulate her papers and obtain the U.S green card "'You can help,' Scarlett told Daisy. 'If we—if we get married'" (Hua 234). Although marrying Daisy is controversial, since Daisy is a minor and since they are both heterosexual, they still opted for it. "No, Scarlett said. She wasn't lala, and she knew Daisy wasn't, either. If they married for show, then Scarlett could get her papers fixed" (Hua 234).

This new friendship solidifies even more when the lesbian couple offer to be Scarlett and Daisy's witnesses on their wedding day, since they both do not know anyone that they could

trust to be there on their wedding ceremony “Ying might remember being alone in a new country, ignorant of local laws and customs, hoping for the kindness of strangers—including the stranger who became her wife. And Casey might feel a kinship with newcomers to America.’ ‘We’ll be your witnesses. If you’ll have us’” (Hua 237-238).

Indeed, as it is shown through the female characters in *A River of Stars*, sisterhood serves as a key element towards women’s liberation from all forms of oppression. Scarlett, Daisy, and the rest of the female characters, empower themselves by staying unified, and by overcoming together the brutal society. As hooks points out “Working together to expose, examine, and eliminate sexist socializations within ourselves, women would strengthen and affirm one another and build a solid foundation for developing political solidarity” (47).

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore and analyze some of the major themes that are included in the novel *A River of Stars*, by using the Eco-feminist and Marxist Feminist theories. Regarding the Eco-feminist theory, the first part of this chapter analyzes themes in relation to motherhood, immigration, and identity. Moreover, in the light of the Marxist feminist theory, it discusses the exploitation of women under the different oppressive systems. And lastly, it explores the theme of empowerment as it is represented through sisterhood.

General Conclusion

This present research has examined Vanessa Hua's novel, *A River of Stars*, by applying the Eco-feminist and the Marxist Feminist theories. It has explored the lives and experiences of unwed immigrant mothers as well as the various ways that capitalism, patriarchy, and all the different oppressive systems, adopted in order to exploit women.

The first chapter is divided into two parts. The first section offers a general overview of Hua's biography, along with a glimpse of her professional career as a journalist and writer, as well as her literary influences, which have had a profound impact on her. They have, in fact, inspired her to become a writer and a novelist. Additionally, it has also supplied the synopsis of the whole novel. This chapter has also introduced the historical and social background of the novel by giving the context of the Chinese immigration to the United States, the one child policy as well as, the gender bias issue in China. Furthermore, it provides a broad overview of the impact of postpartum traditions on women's health. The second part is devoted to present the literary theories that have been used in order to examine the novel, starting by introducing the origins, development and principles of the Eco-feminist theory, and then moving to presenting a brief overview of the Marxist Feminist theory.

The second chapter has focused on the analytical reading of *A River of Stars*, in the light of the Eco-feminist and Marxist feminist theories. The first part of this chapter has demonstrated the experience of motherhood among immigrant single mothers as it is depicted in the novel. It has demonstrated the stigma surrounding Chinese unwed mother as well as, the struggles that single immigrant mothers go through daily. Indeed, Scarlett, the protagonist has experienced various harsh conditions, firstly as a woman and as a single mother too. This chapter has also discussed the constructed relationship of women to nature by reducing women's function and role to only reproduction and nurturing. Additionally it

has examined the factors that have led the main character, Scarlett, to migrate from China to a foreign country and her subsequent identity crisis.

On the other hand, the second part of the second chapter has been devoted to analyze the theme of exploitation of women, by using the Marxist Feminist theory. It has highlighted the various ways that capitalism and other oppressive systems use in order to subjugate women and deprive them from their basic and fundamental rights. For instance, in the case of the character Scarlett, who was the victim of capitalist exploitation, and had experienced harsh and poor conditions and treatment at the workplace, such as, physical and mental health care negligence, which led some workers to commit suicide, lack of safety measurements, extremely low wages, and long working hours. Scarlett, along with the other female characters of this novel are also victims of patriarchy. This chapter revealed that women are dominated by men, either their partners, fathers or by their coworkers at the workplace. And lastly, it has demonstrated women's empowerment through their solidarity and unity.

In short, this research has attempted to expose the different struggles and issues those women in general, and immigrant mothers in specific, have to undergo and fight daily while facing the ruthless and oppressive capitalist and patriarchal organizations. This study has showcased as well, that the only way women could break free from being victims of subjugation and sexism is through the complete dismantling of these oppressive systems because where there is capitalism and patriarchy, there is bound to be subjugation and gender inequality. Moreover, building upon this humble work, and in a new framework and context, *A River of Stars*, would be a good source for future researchers, to explore and study new factors of immigration in different perspectives that have not been that commonly talked about.

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ملخص

تهدف مذكرة التخرج هذه إلى دراسة تجربة النساء الحوامل اللاتي هاجرن إلى الولايات المتحدة من خلال تبيان استغلال النظام الرأسمالي و الأنظمة الاضطهادية للعنصر النسوي في رواية فانيسا هوا "نهر النجوم". تعتمد هذه الدراسة بشكل أساسي على النظريات النسوية البيئية والماركسية لتحليل أهم مواضيع الرواية التي تتجلى في مشكلة الهيمنة والاستغلال والنظام الاضطهادي والهجرة والأمومة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم استخدام بعض المفاهيم التي تخص نظرية التحليل النفسي في تحليل هذه الرواية عند الضرورة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن المهارات التكيفية للأمهات وقدرتهن على مواجهة المواقف الصعبة. كما أن هذه الدراسة ستوضح دور تضامن النساء فيما بينهن للنجاح أخيرا في التأقلم و التغلب على الصعوبات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الادب الاسيوي الامريكي، الأمومة، الهجرة.