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“I DO NOT WRITE MERE WORDS.
I WRITE OF HUMAN FLESH AND BLOOD”
An Intersectional Approach to Identity in Agnes
Smedley’s Autobiographical Novel *Daughter of Earth*

Zdravka Katinic

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Examiner:	Maria Olaussen
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ABSTRACT

Title: “I do not write mere words. I write of human flesh and blood” – An Intersectional Approach to Identity in Agnes Smedley’s Autobiographical Novel *Daughter of Earth*

Author: Zdravka Katinic

Supervisor: Margrét Gunnarsdóttir Champion

Abstract: This essay analyzes Agnes Smedley’s autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth* (1929) from an intersectional perspective. The purpose is to concentrate on the novel itself, Smedley’s alter ego Marie Rogers, and the different aspects that govern the construction of her identity. The aim is to examine and argue how the different power structures such as race, class, and gender apply and are central to Marie’s identity. This will be seen in her ambivalence to resist them or accept them. The approach to the construction of identity is presented through an intersectional framework, a vast field, which this essay attempts to adapt to questions of identity in a literary work. The main points presented in the essay show how both autobiographical fiction and intersectionality are anti-essentialist concepts, fluent and dynamic. Furthermore, the analysis of Smedley’s protagonist attests to the shifting grounds of identity throughout life.

Keywords: Agnes Smedley, autobiographical fiction, Marie Rogers, intersectionality, identity, race, gender, class

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1 INTRODUCTION

Autobiographical fiction is not entirely factual nor fictional, but contains stories grounded in facts that are fictionalized. The autobiographical novel embellishes and dramatizes events, or conveys vulnerabilities that are not easy to express without the protection of fiction. This is what one can assume Agnes Smedley did with her novel *Daughter of Earth* (1929). The historical Smedley is not a woman one would consider afraid of challenges and hurdles – the radical and fearless freedom-fighting journalist who survived a life of poverty and never shied away from her mission in life: “I have had but one loyalty, one faith’ ... ‘and that was to the liberation of the poor and oppressed’” (Lauter 414). However, through the main character in *Daughter of Earth*, one perceives Smedley as a private person: “I led two lives—a private life and a life open to the public” (Smedley 360). Her fictionalized autobiography surely portrays her public fights for the marginalized, but it mostly presents a raw and realistic portrayal of a woman’s private thoughts and struggles for survival.

In literary studies Smedley is not very well known unless one is interested in the proletariat 1930s. Her work was persecuted during the McCarthy era in the United States because she was known to have socialist and communist ties (Lauter 423). Another reason for not highlighting her work is perhaps that it was published during the height of the modernist era, while not itself being considered a traditional modernist piece. Instead it is usually considered to belong to proletarian or feminist literature. With that being said, I believe the novel needs a small summary. *Daughter of Earth* chronicles the life of Marie Rogers, the main character (Smedley’s alter ego), from her childhood until her thirties. It is a story based on Marie’s struggles surviving poverty, a troubled home life, and an ambition to get an education against all odds. She ends up working as a journalist in New York where she focuses on class issues and the Indian liberation movement. Readers become privy to Marie’s clashes with gender expectations, her relationship to sex and love, class, race, and politics. The novel is written as an autobiographical account in a first-person voice. Marie, presented as the fictional author of the novel, is writing her life story. She interjects and explains how her life has taken shape and provides reasons behind certain choices and actions. She wants the reader not to judge any action but to understand that “I do not write mere words. I write of human flesh and blood” (Smedley 256). What Smedley accomplishes in this novel is to portray a full human being constructed with intricacies and

vulnerabilities. The portrayals of complex identities in the novel are open to an intersectional approach, which is my theoretical frame in this essay – an examination of how various factors of race, class, and gender influence Marie’s pursuit of identity.

Yet, Smedley’s accomplishments are not generally recognized, as not much research has been published on this novel. Most commonly, scholars have discussed *Daughter of Earth* in comparison to Smedley’s own life. The emphasis (through the lens of class, i.e. Marxist, or feminist theories) has been on Smedley as an activist and how her life is mirrored in her literature. Paula Rabinowitz brings up Smedley as a prime example of 1930s radical female authors – “constructing an identity using proletarian narrative ... by the ways it links class and gender” (62). Most of Rabinowitz’s book is dedicated to the summation of female working class authors from the 1930-40s and mentions Smedley in different chapters regarding discussions on different themes prevalent in the authorships. Peter Hitchcock, on the other hand, devotes an entire chapter to Smedley in his book *Dialogics of the Oppressed* (1993). His intention is to “symptomatically” (129) explore Smedley’s position in life, by not necessarily emphasizing the reason behind the race, class, and gender difficulties she faced, but highlighting how she dealt with and navigated around them. However, there are some scholars that choose to focus on the character Marie Rogers and the idea of exploring the class and gender obstacles in *Daughter of Earth* (Christie Launius, Melody Graulich, and Bina T. Freiwald). For instance, Graulich explores the extent of real-life domestic violence common in lower-class families based on the fixed patriarchal structure depicted in the novel. Sondra Guttman takes her analysis further, and incorporates the race issue in *Daughter of Earth*, stating that even though “Smedley herself was deeply aware of racism’s powerful hold on the American worker’s ability to conceptualize and then work towards the proletarian state” (489), she fails to accomplish a “possible reconciliation of color and comradeship” (511). Guttman does a thorough analysis of how the rape portrayed in the novel deconstructs the possibility of a reconciliation of race, class, and gender in Smedley’s vision of a post-capitalist society. All in all, most of the critical writing about *Daughter of Earth* connects back to Smedley’s life and her belief in socialism.

Despite Guttman’s approach coinciding partly with my intentions, her focus is on the construct of rape in the novel, while mine will be on the construct of identity. My approach to the construct of identity is aligned with an anti-essentialist approach to identity and oppression. This means that socio-economic identity markers are grounded “in lived experience ... revealing the

way in which the world is produced through the constituting acts of subjective experience” (Butler 522). In other words, from an intersectional perspective, one cannot separate the different factors of race, class, and gender that Marie experiences. All these factors affect each other and are “constituted in time” (519) as “an [sic] historical situation rather than a natural fact” (520). That is why intersectionality is extremely applicable to examining Marie’s identity. My purpose is to concentrate on the novel itself and examine how the different power structures such as race, class, and gender apply to Marie and govern her pursuit of identity. Specifically, I will argue that the socio-economic power structures are central to Marie’s identity, and can be seen in her ambivalence to resist or accept them. The questions I will try to answer are: How do these power structures inform Marie’s mind and outlook on the world? How do they influence her awareness of her body and her relationship with love and sex? How do they shape her voice? How are these power structures responsible for her decisions in life? The intent here is to analyze the power structures through an intersectional approach, not as obstacles, but as factors in the shaping of Marie’s identity.

To accomplish this, I will analyze Smedley’s text through a close reading and the lens of intersectionality. Firstly, I will review the definition and common practice of intersectionality, but also explain how it can and will be used in this paper. After that I will present the main analysis, which is sectioned off in three chapters that focus on how identity and intersectionality affect Marie’s mind – her perceptions of the world; her body – the construction of ownership; and her voice – her presence and fight against oppression. Finally, I will conclude and summarize the content of this essay. Hopefully, at the end, the paper will have given a fresh approach to Smedley’s autobiographical *Daughter of Earth* and likewise an interesting use of intersectionality in literary analysis.

1. THEORY

Intersectionality is probably one of the most relevant socio-cultural concepts today, as it is a tool to understand the multiple facets of oppressive power marginalizing groups in the current rising western xenophobic society. This contemporary society is not vastly different from the one Smedley grew up in. In its core, intersectionality confronts “dichotomies such as gender [race,

class, sexuality, disability] that essentialize differences, power, and privilege ... [and] how variations in one domain of identity ... become more complex when another identity domain ... is introduced into the theoretical and empirical discussion” (Azmitia & Thomas 1). Because intersectionality covers a large area of differences, power, and privilege in society it constitutes an interdisciplinary theory. It is used in academic disciplines from sociology, gender studies, and psychology, to philosophy, linguistics, and law. Despite its large disciplinary reach, it has only been used to a small extent in literature analysis. This makes it necessary to establish a framework that is applicable to literature, which is something that I will also do at the end of this chapter. However, providing an in-depth explanation of intersectionality is necessary before extrapolating how I will use the concept.

The framework of intersectionality is said to have been introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (a legal scholar), as she was trying to outline a way to describe Black women’s experiences in anti-discrimination law (Romero 39). Crenshaw explains that one cannot approach discrimination out of a “single-axis framework” as it “marginalize[s] those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination ... [or] ground[ing it] in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon” (140). This phenomenon also has a significance and application in how humanity has categorized hierarchy. Albeit the shared delineation that intersectionality is an approach to dissect how different aspects of power conventions overlap and are used in positions of privilege or disadvantage in society, there is an overall agreement by scholars that an intersectional framework and methodology is complicated to state. This difficulty stems from not only the complexity of being an interdisciplinary theory, but also the fact that each individual has their own construction of identity domains. This leaves scholars without a specific framework; instead each circumstance is approached as a separate and individual case study. Additionally, intersectionality forces scholars to look into the fluidity of identity markers, as they are constantly changing. Intersectionality is therefore set in an ambiguous sphere, which produces different approaches to the theory.

All of these obstacles have prompted scholars (such as Romero and Hillsburg) to approach intersectionality initially by trying to describe what intersectionality is not or does not do, before explaining what it does or should do. For instance, some scholars refer to intersectionality as something only relatable to marginalized groups, while others suppose that

intersectionality is a tool that can apply to all – as all are compounded by some kind of category (Hillsburg 3). Moreover, there is a disagreement whether intersectionality is only supposed to be used to determine either “‘marginalized subjectivity or a generalized theory of identity’” (4).

Ann Garry (a philosophy scholar) states her case in the discussion this way: that

“intersectionality provides neither any structural analyses of oppressions and privileges nor any particular analysis of anyone’s complex identity or experiences. Instead it points out what kinds of analyses might be useful, namely, ones that consider mutually constructed or intermeshed axes of oppression or facets of identities” (830). There is clearly no specific agreement about intersectionality; rather the subject’s complexity raises questions of validity.

Both Anna Carastathis (a social anthropology scholar) and Vivian M. May (a gender scholar) highlight the criticism directed towards intersectionality and, according to some, the problematic vagueness or fluidness of the framework. Carastathis, on the one hand, argues that the idea of an intersectional model of identity is flawed – that the model’s hypothesis to be able to “articulate the experience of subjects located at the *intersection* – the *crossroads* – of race and gender oppressions” (27) is indeed lifeless. In other words, the intersectional model tends to be used in such a way that one analyzes the specific oppressions such as gender or race separately, then adds them together when dealing with a person subjected to multiple oppressions. The situation is not addressed as a lived experience, but as two separate oppressions that affect a person. For instance, in the case of a black woman – the intersectional model analyzes first how race impacts her and then how gender impacts her, but not how both race and gender impact the subject’s experience of their own community and society at large (27). The model promotes “a unitary conception of oppressions,” considering that the “normative subjects of which are relatively privileged on some axes” (28) should also be identified by their race and gender and not be presented as the norm of a certain identity determinant. Moreover, Carastathis argues “that race, gender, and class are not the identic properties of individuals ... but rather, are political relations which structure the lived experience of the subjects they interpellate” (29). By this, she means that “individuals ‘are’ [not] intersectional subjects prior to a political discourse that assigns them to that location” (29), but are produced within the political discourse.

May, on the other hand, clearly and bluntly states that the misguidedness around intersectionality is based on the fact that “intersectionality is often flattened or its basic precepts ignored,” forcing repetitious clarification that “intersectionality entails thinking about social

reality as multidimensional, lived identities as intertwined, and systems of oppression as meshed and mutually constitutive” (“Speaking into the void” 96). In contrast to Carastathis, May highlights that one cannot be narrow-minded when approaching intersectionality; it has to be approached from multiple points of view with the understanding that it might go against traditional scholarly theories. But they both agree that intersectionality is not a context of only “lived experience or structural constraints and patterns of power, rather both, equally and in relation, as intersectionality calls for” (May, “Speaking into the void” 102). This brings the discussion of intersectionality and its fluctuating nature full circle – leaving it as an open framework to approach independently complex and vast power structures, and the codes that govern society.

I agree with Carastathis that the established view on an intersectional model of identity is flawed, static, and needs to incorporate all identities, as I believe that all individuals have intersectional identities. However, there is an approach to intersectional identities as fluid that varies in degree depending on different situations throughout one’s life. First of all, one also has to look at intersectionality as composed of the different identity domains attached to a person, not only out of a race and gender point of view. I have observed this approach to be common amongst the scholars I have studied, though, the concept of class is often left out. Additionally, intersectionality is not as external as Carastathis presents, in the sense that the political discourse assigns labels and individuals adapt themselves to them. Instead, May is clearer when she explains that “intersectionality posits identity as located within, navigating across, and shaped by social structures” (“Speaking into the void” 103); one can say that the political discourse pushes and molds the choices individuals make, and leaves marks on one’s identity through the experiences encountered. Still, social structures are not only present facts, but ingrained historical ones.

Additionally, for my essay I have found the discussion regarding essentialism and anti-essentialism, as well as Judith Butler’s work on performative acts, very helpful. In principle, the way I see essentialism in this regard is interwoven in how society has induced social constructs and hierarchies. However, these constructions are not “fundamentally fixed and unchanging but, rather, are strategically essentialist” (Collins and Bilge 133) and can be strategically anti-essentialist. Hence, there is offered the option “of performing different multiple identities from one context to the next” (133) in order to either highlight a common agenda or disregard a

general cultural identity. In Marie's pursuit of identity, she determines which markers to reject or accept in different instances. The societal essentialism does not disregard the fluidity around her identity markers, which is why anti-essentialism is important. Race, class, and gender markers shape identities because they are prevalent in society; nevertheless, they also leave room to bend, depending if one is either in a position of privilege or disadvantage. That is why, there is a correspondence between intersectionality, performative acts, essentialism, and anti-essentialism. All four aspects are fluid and changeable throughout time and are reflected differently depending on which social structures and hierarchies interact.

First of all, as mentioned already, intersectionality is a fluid phenomenon which is why one has to approach a discipline or a literary text as an individual case. But, how does one use intersectionality in literary analysis? Hillsburg tries in her text to establish some kind of methodology, but claims that the problem with constructing a methodology for intersectionality is based on the fact that it covers multiple academic disciplines and all of them have their own research paradigms (4). But perhaps one can state some parameters for analyzing intersectionality based on a specific academic discipline. For instance, in literature one can read against the grain: the approach

needs to be flexible and destabilizing, capable of engaging concurrent, simultaneous factors by reading in an athwart or transverse manner ... Identifying and addressing epistemological injustice, testimonial inequality, and asymmetries in intelligibility are also paramount to an intersection approach, which treats opacities and silences as meaningful: engaging the limits of what can be said and understood in conventional/normative terms is therefore also requisite. (May, *Pursuing Intersectionality* 239)

In other words, there might not be a set methodology, but there are aspects and tools to consider when analyzing text. It is easier to look at intersectionality, as Garry says, as a framework. With a framework, one can work out of parameters rather than procedures. For instance, one needs to consider what the studied character is constructed of – is there an emphasis in the text on the character's race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, and so on? How do these aspects, as it is a multidimensional approach, apply to the character's identity and action? Are there any gaps or inconsistencies in the text? This process is specifically prevalent to autobiographical novels, as they are presented as a retelling of a life or event, which means that the narrator is presenting the story in a certain way. Marie Rogers discloses that "I shall gather up these

fragments of my life and make a crazy-quilt of them. Or a mosaic of interesting pattern—unity in diversity” (Smedley 8). In Smedley’s case, the reader is following the fictional version of her, which by default gives her room to highlight her perceptions and opinions while bending and expanding certain events. This gives specific gaps or inconsistencies great power which are significant in deconstructing the intersectional elements at play. By reading against the grain, it is possible to pick up on these hidden power structures and how they interact; moreover, it is possible to emphasize what meaning they have rather than the problem or obstacle they present (May, *Pursuing Intersectionality* 227). It is necessary to keep in mind that the power structures and factors in an intersectional approach are continuously living and changing, because they are intertwined with people and society.

The continuously changing power structures in intersectionality are just as fluid as are the characters in an autobiographical novel. There is not always a set and logical creative arc when retelling someone’s life from childhood to adulthood. The arc is perhaps a fluctuating compilation of shorter and multiple arcs. Moreover, the manner in which the events are remembered can fluctuate as well. Marie explains early on that: “[it] has been one of the greatest struggles in my life to learn to tell the truth” (Smedley 12), because lying was unusual for her, “what was truth and what was fancy I could not know. To me, the wind in the tree tops really carried stories on its back” (11-12). To her childlike mind, there are certain socio-cultural events that were not understood in the moment, but to the older Marie, who is retelling the story, they actually are used to explain her life. Marie comments on aspects of the story to emphasize how she has evolved and how these identity building events and factors influenced her over time. This presents a kind of trial and error type of arc, where it is easy to question reliability. The fault would be to dismiss the socio-cultural aspects and growth intersectional identity markers yield. Therefore, each separate arc is important in the fluctuation of life.

Conclusively, the predominant features most scholars attribute to intersectionality are that one cannot assume a fixed definition of it, but must work with the framework on a trial by trial basis. The “tactics are not offered as guarantees or as some kind of fail-safe formula for practicing intersectionality: they are more akin to brushstrokes in an in-process, many-layered, portrait of intersectional orientations and politics. Intersectional practices, in other words, are recursive and flexible, rather than fixed or set in stone” (May, *Pursuing Intersectionality* 228).

2 THE PURSUIT OF IDENTITY

Marie Rogers' pursuit of identity can be clearly understood in an autobiographical fashion as she gives the reason for her life-writing in the opening paragraphs of *Daughter of Earth*:

What I have written is not a work of beauty, created that someone may spend an hour pleasantly; not a symphony to lift up the spirit, to release it from the dreariness of reality. It is the story of a life, written in desperation, in unhappiness. I write of the earth ... I write of the joys and sorrow of the lowly. Of loneliness. Of pain. And of love ... There is no horizon—as in my life. For thirty years I have lived ... Now I stand at the end of one life and on the threshold of another. Contemplating. Weighing. About me lie the ruins of a life. Instead of blind faith,—directness, unbounded energy; and instead of unclarity, I now have the knowledge that comes from experience; work that is limitless in its scope and significance ... To die would have been beautiful. But I belong to those who do not die for the sake of beauty ... A few of us die, desperate from the pain or disillusionment of love, but for most of us “the earthquake but discloseth new fountains.” For we are of the earth and our struggle is the struggle of earth. (Smedley 7-8)

Straight away, Marie, as the fictional writer, states that her work might not be an unwavering story from beginning to end. A life such as hers was not an easy one, and therefore is not for leisure reading or exempt from faults. It is especially arduous for a lower-class woman that has to fight for a place, even more so for a girl that does not look like the other blond girls in her class. All of these aspects are found in the first two sentences of the quote above. Marie prepares the reader for a number of factors that have influenced and shaped her. The knowledge Marie possesses at this point is the core of her current identity and purpose in life. The ensuing chapters center on the shaping of the person Marie is at the beginning of the novel: how her identity has been shaped by the impact of power structures; how her mind and outlook on life is formed; how this all has affected her opinion of her own body and her relationship with love and sex; and how her voice and radicalism have evolved. The focus of the discussion that follows is on establishing how identity is anti-essential and moves with the impact of power structures; and even more importantly, how despite Marie's essentialist behavior, she continuously rejects and accepts her different identity markers in a fluctuating manner.

2.1 MIND

The power structures in society influence the perception of one's world. Marie's outlook on life began to take shape early on based on the position and suffering of her family. Even though her father is the one she credits a great deal of personal suffering to, it is her mother she insistently tries to avoid becoming. Subsequently, it is the patriarchal power structures that lead to her mother becoming a lesser version of herself. Marie explains that "[i]n pain and tears I have had to unlearn all that my mother beat into my unformed mind ... I see now that she and my father, and the conditions about us, perverted my love and my life. They made me believe I was an evil creature" (Smedley 12). The idea of the unformed mind being influenced is essential for this section as I will try to assert that the acceptance and rejection of identity markers such as race, gender, class, and even cultural heritage continuously alter and evolve Marie's perception of the world.

The underprivileged position of Marie's childhood becomes something she is determined to change through education and class mobilization. Marie's first awareness of gender, race, and class oppressions can be seen in her early years. Firstly, after her brother is born – men “congratulate[d my father] as if he had achieved something remarkable ... A *son* had been born ... he shook me off and told me to go away ... ‘Why?’ I have asked over and over again, but have received no answer” (Smedley 16). Secondly, her father's Native American Indian blood was something people distrusted and described as “unsteady, unreliable—a shiftless crew; that was the Indian blood in their veins ... you never could trust foreigners or Indians” (10, Smedley's ellipsis). Lastly, her lower-class origin left her unacquainted about common daily routines such as brushing teeth and bathing (53). This epistemological awareness and confrontation incite Marie to learn that to overcome her oppressions she has to forge her own path. On the one hand, all of these factors position her at a disadvantage in the power hierarchy. On the other hand, through school, Marie finds a way to escape the hierarchy: “I, for all my faded dresses and stringy ugly hair, who had never seen a toothbrush ... [in school] replied without one falter or one mistake! And the little white girl whose father was a doctor had to listen” (54). One can see that in school Marie both understands her disadvantage, but also glimpses a salvation from feeling unprivileged. Education becomes the means for her to escape being invisible, distrusted, and a poor Native American girl. It gives Marie “an invaluable

lesson—that [the little white girl] was clean and orderly, but that [she, Marie,] could *do* and learn things that [the white girl] couldn't” (55). Marie's chance for upward class mobility through education enables her to separate herself from normative class issues, and consequently the issues of race and gender.

As identity markers are social constructions, Marie's initial understanding of women's agency in society is based on her mother, who is by conventional terms chained to her identity markers. However, one of the people Marie finds independent from the constraints of their identity markers is Aunt Mary (grandmother). She is a woman of Native American descent running a farm – a “strong woman” (Smedley 17), “a woman with the body and mind of a man” (19). In Marie's eyes, Aunt Mary goes against normative stereotypes and embodies everything that someone with her background should not be able to have, compared to her mother who is not independent from her father or her class. Aunt Mary's race, class, and gender do not matter, as she is someone with agency who takes charge of her own life. Another person she admires is her mother's sister Helen, who “feared no one and she openly threatened everyone” (21). Helen does not want to get married; she perceives that women who are married are not free to work or have things for themselves. She would rather work and pay “for her room and board [so that] no man ha[s] the right to ‘boss her around’” (50). She is thus treated as an equal because she brings in money: “[s]he was as valuable and she was as respected as” (49) Marie's father. Even though Marie eventually chooses a different path than Aunt Mary or Helen, her Aunt Helen's resolve to evolve is highly influential in Marie's determination of education and class mobility. Helen establishes a freedom that her mother and father do not reach because of their lack of perseverance to escape the chains of their social roles.

The positions of Aunt Mary and Aunt Helen inspire Marie to resist her identity markers and commences strategic anti-essentialism. In other words, she commences cultural assimilation and starts to adopt qualities that belong to an upper-class mentality. She believes that by taking her mother's advice and becoming “‘edjicated’” (Smedley 127) she will be able to liberate herself from the victim paradigm of her oppression as a path to agency and freedom. As Freiwald explains, “the quest for self-knowledge and empowerment is inextricable from her resolve to account for that bitter harvest that a harsh and distorted society had sown within her” (6). Marie tries, therefore, through education and class mobility to construct an identity that she believes is better than her social and cultural foundation. That is why she initially denounces her origin in

any way possible – “I drew a dark curtain before my conscious memory and began to forget that I had a family at all” (Smedley 143); she “believed only in money, not in love or tenderness. Love and tenderness meant only pain and suffering and defeat. [She] would not let it ruin [her] as it ruined others” (155). She denounces the things that shape her identity – “I would not be a woman” (155) and “I would make money ... only with money would I speak” (156). In this way, Marie rejects leaning on female qualities because such qualities do not help her advance and break away from her class constrictions. Furthermore, she does not only denounce her gender and class, but also her race. This can be seen in the testimonial inequality in how the younger Marie only talks about her father’s heritage in representations, such as being a ‘colorful storyteller.’ Marie “does not conceptualize herself as non-white; she does not embrace ‘color’ as a quality she herself possesses [as something hereditary] ... [Instead] Marie simplistically aligns color and poverty, conceptualizing herself as non-white because she has been ‘blackened’ by poverty” (Guttman 499). One can think of it as “[a] roundabout ... one axis of oppression uses another to oppress ... or that axes can sometimes blend together to produce a distinct mixture” (Garry 831). So, in Marie’s mind, when she denounces her class, she also denounces her part Native American blood. She does this by upward mobilization, an education that can provide a greater life trajectory. By resisting the identity markers, she undertakes “a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including ... [herself] come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (Butler 520).

However, the more Marie pulls away from her identity markers, the more they are there to remind her that they are essential in the social hierarchy and shape her own experiences. Identity markers are imperative to the process of subordination and privilege and they react differently with different power structures or situations. In this respect Marie’s impression of her father’s race and cultural heritage is not something that is evident, but it is significant. When she gets a typing job with “the brown editor” (Smedley 146), she calls him “a jolly man” (146) because she gets the job based on her race. He takes photographs of her standing in front of “an Indian rug hanging in the corner of his office,” asking her to “‘Look serious!’ ... ‘Pretend you’re going to write a story for my magazine’ ... ‘bring those braids of hair around on your shoulders’ ... ‘look at me ... dreamy-like ... dre-e-emmy-like ... as if I were your best beau’” (146, Smedley’s ellipsis). In essence the narrator’s choice to draw out the ellipsis indicates a lingering male gaze. The editor uses his position of power to exploit her gender, Native American heritage,

and need for a job. His choice to dress her as a Native American does not offend Marie, as she has not yet recognized the power her heritage has over her. Another moment that portrays Marie's displacement from the idea of cultural heritage is when she goes to the Yaqui village with her friends to observe the Yaqui Easter dance; she feels "very ignorant" while her friends "seemed to see beyond physical appearances and to be watching what I did not understand" (184). In contrast to herself, her friends (two educated Scandinavians) seem to see beyond the exterior of the exotic and really appreciate the ideals and culture of the Yaqui. The fact that Marie has denounced her origin has left her displaced and devoid of what it means to be a woman of a certain heritage, isolated between her persona and her heritage. The experience at the Yaqui village pushes Marie further away from her identity markers, because she does not fully connect with the importance of culture. Instead she adopts the notion that her friends understand the Yaqui based on their education level. This can be seen to drive her need to broaden her knowledge like her friends – "I returned to school to stare steadily at that hemmed-in road of my life. I would break all obstacles ... work, money, study" (185, Smedley's ellipsis). Marie does not expand on what those obstacles are, but the experience generates her resolution toward class mobilization through work, money, or education. When comparing the situations of the brown editor and the visit to the Yaqui village, one can comprehend that Marie is willing to accept the privilege of her inherited identity when it benefits her. Yet, at moments where she could relate to a cultural background she is at a disadvantage because she has strategically distanced herself away from her origin. This supports that despite her ambivalence, identity markers do impact her social experiences.

Furthermore, this conflict between recognizing or being unaware of her own identity markers, and accepting them or resisting them – the ambivalence – is even clearer in Marie's association with the Socialist movement. Marie goes from having a romanticized idea of the educated people within the Socialist movement to realizing that it is them who have a romanticized idea of her class. There is clear disappointment in her description of the Socialists she meets as "unbeautiful, so dull and dreary looking, so cheaply dressed—just like the things I has always known and hated" (Smedley 198). They look like people from her own class, not the educated and proper romanticized version she imagined. Once again, the repercussions of Marie's displacement, the masking of her own intersective axes, from her own community leave her ambivalent. Marie has been performing and cannot see beyond this romanticized educated

status ideal that has been presented as hegemonically superior to her. The logic for Marie seems to be that there cannot be a correlation between her own class image and the educated Socialists, as education produces class mobilization and dissociates the social mores that marginalize the individual. The reader gets the perception that Marie's initial understanding of her own marginalized class (herself, her family et cetera) is that there is no unanimous appreciation of progress in ideology, but concrete things like money; money buys one food and status. So, when Karin's friend Bob angrily scolds her by saying "'Stop and think—what made them like this?' ... 'The system'" (199), Marie yet again does not understand the subtext referring to her own upbringing at first and rejects her identity marker.

However, the arc of her persistent hunger for knowledge gives her a more circumscribed perception and a virtuous transformation throughout the novel. Marie starts instead to question the Socialists romanticized view of her own class, because "[m]any of them belonged to those interesting and charming intellectuals who idealize the workers, from afar, believing that within the working class lies buried some magic force and knowledge which, at the critical moment, will manifest itself in the form of a social revolution and transform the face of the world" (Smedley 240). The people she meets at the Socialist meetings have "race- and class [and some even gender] privilege," this affects "their analysis of ... oppression and constitutes the parameter of their political practice" (Carastathis 26). It is a privilege that has never been prevalent in Marie's life. One can see her fear that "they might not understand the things that grow in poverty and ignorance" (Smedley 242). Despite that there is a progress in Marie's perception, she is still convinced that education is her escape, and the people around her at the Socialist meetings possess that type of education she presupposes as the prestigious status quo. This ambivalence is a clear example of how Marie tackles her own identity markers. Though Marie remains unaware and resistant to the impacts of her identity markers, she cannot disregard them.

Conclusively, Marie's effort to unlearn or distance herself from all that is associated with her mother and father's burdens has fluctuated from her time as a child until young adulthood. She is trying to shape her world based on the parameters she believes are better than the ones she was given. There are distinct ambivalences in her path, but there is a strong sense of individualism that can be found in Marie's continuous learning arc. However, as it is indicated in the early pages of *Daughter of Earth*, identity markers are socially heavily ingrained and

unavoidably influence Marie's pursuit of identity. As a child, one does not understand how power structures and circumstances impact one's perception of the world, but they are indeed important factors in shaping the mindset and ensuing actions.

2.2 BODY

Throughout the novel, Marie Rogers' relationship with her body and sex is poisoned by the heteronormative and dominant male perspective. This causes her to be afraid of her own body and reject it in all aspects of her intersecting axes. However, the ontological plurality of Marie's life does not factor identity markers such as race as much as gender and class, because she does not outwardly look like her father. Though "most of the time oppressions are inseparable," they are "not necessarily [inseparable] to the same degree or in the same manner in every single instance" (Garry 840). Therefore, this section of the essay is mostly concentrated on the heterogeneous interactions between gender and class, and the importance of self-ownership of identity versus the ownership by social power structures.

It is important to understand that Marie's idea of self-ownership relies considerably on "the shame and secrecy of sex" (Smedley 15). The authorial Marie declares that her first memory "was a strange feeling of love and secrecy" (8). This shame of sex, she explains, left her "tense with a nameless fear ... trembling in terror. An instinct that lies at the root of existence had reared its head in the crudest form in my presence, and on my mind was engraved a picture of terror and revulsion that poisoned the best years of my life" (16). The fact that Marie heard her parents having sex lifted a veil, exposing Marie to something that was silenced by both men and women. The shame of the desire for a sexual relationship, but the horror of the restraints and obligations attached. Essentially, the authorial Marie's choice to present that memory this way is a reflection of her notion of women giving up their sense of ownership when they get married or enter into a sexual relationship – a repercussion of the ruling patriarchy, an entanglement of both gender and class.

Marie's notion of losing ownership of her body is undoubtedly associated with her mother and dominant patriarchal power structures. She observes her mother losing everything individualistic about her – "[a]ll feeling was being washed out of her" (Smedley 90), stating that

her mother's body and spirit died long before she took her last breath. She depicts her as "ashen-colored like the face of a wounded coal miner" and "[h]er blue-black eyes glistened ... where had I seen such horrible eyes before ... I remembered ... why ... long ago ... I must have been no more than four ... I killed a kitten ... clodded it to death in the road because it was strange and I pretended it was dangerous ... its eyes in its death agony looked like those of my mother" (83-84, Smedley's ellipsis). This memory is used to metaphorically connect to her mother being 'clodded' to death by her circumstances – women who stepped out of line were considered strange and dangerous and were supposed to be subdued. As Graulich explains, "women are victims of individual men, but in the larger sense they are victims of social and economic institutions, of gender expectations" (15). The 'system' wants to keep everybody in their specific box; this box is ruled by hierarchy. Since Marie's mother chose to marry another victim "of gender roles and economic exploitations" (15), she gets 'boxed' in with him. Even though her mother is not a woman of color, the fact that she had married an Indian American positions her in that sphere: not "gaining the full privileges of marriage" and not assumed as "weak, fragile or in need of protection," with "occupational segregation" that reduces her "chances of attaining the social class necessary to maintain the ideal form of femininity" (Romero 85). Normatively, most women would not work once they got married, but in Marie's mother's case, she needed to support her family as Marie's father was unreliable and squandered away their money. The deterioration of Marie's mother could be further seen in "her hands, big-veined and almost black from heavy work" (Smedley 87), "her back, [that] she said, 'jist seemed as if it couldn't hold out.' Her teeth tortured her and she had them pulled out one by one. It was cheaper that way and now she had but one tooth on one side of her jaw" (94). These circumstances are significant to Marie, because "her mother's life and character" is "far more circumscribed than her father's, and her mother's physical victimization is one of the most powerful symbols of the power men hold over women" (Graulich 15).

The physical victimization women go through along with the silence around such issues both intimidates and inspires Marie to reject the deterioration her mother suffered, and also the constraints and expectations that are enforced upon women:

I could not understand why some things were and others were not. How did it happen that we had always been poor, for instance. I resented everything, hating myself most of all for having been born a woman, and Helen for her silence that made me feel guilty; hated

my brothers and sister because they existed and loaded me with responsibility I refused to carry; hated my father and mother for bringing me into a world when I didn't ask to come. Why couldn't they have left me alone there in nothingness! (Smedley 143)

This frustration stems from the notion of women like her mother having all of the responsibility but none of the freedom. Despite Marie's understanding that there are social difficulties and disadvantages of being poor and a woman, it is obvious that she has never had anyone to explain to her what it means to be a woman and the 'secrecy' of how her body works.

This type of upbringing unfortunately isolates and positions Marie into victimhood – unaware and unprepared for the construction of her body and the social positions of being a woman. Marie has never had the opportunity to have ownership over her own body. First of all, it took her a long time to get over the fear of what sex means, specifically in marriage; she just knew that it was terrifying – “dooties be damned” (Smedley 111). Secondly, during her marriage to Knut, she gets pregnant, which is her greatest fear. For Marie, having children means the loss of independence: “I saw myself plunged back into the hell ... of nagging, weeping women” (205). She does not understand what is happening to her body physically: “I stopped eating, thinking in my ignorance that the enemy within me would stop growing” (205), but “my mind was terror-stricken. I had not the least idea of the nature or working of my body, of the conception or nature of growing life” (206). Additionally, after her abortion, her “body and mind called for it [the baby] ... [she] felt lonely in space” (206). Rejecting the constriction of being a woman and losing out on the opportunity to learn (the women in her life did not speak of it) leaves Marie essentially inept, having to create her own limited perceptions. This leaves Marie without the agency to pursue an identity on her own terms. Instead out of fear, she initially rejects the disposition of being a woman.

Within the class and dominant male status quo, there are few female cultural representations available to Marie. Either she has the duties of a wife that places her under the ownership of a man and the class and race he belongs to; or the struggle of being a working woman, in whatever capacity necessary. Since the novel revolves around Marie's observation and rejection of her mother's role or identity markers, Helen's position as a prostitute offers an interesting and alternative role in the novel. Marie deems Helen's profession as: “honorable as that of any married women—she made her living in the same way as they made theirs, except that she made a better living and had more rights over her body and soul ... She was pledged to obey

no man ... such a life seemed preferable to marriage. But for me—I wanted neither that life, nor marriage” (Smedley 142). Even though, the two women pose two alternative opposites that Marie has to navigate, the power structure still favors men, giving the husband “traditional ‘property rights’” (Graulich 15) and demanding less accountability of men in concern of children. The inequality in the “distribution of economic power [and personal rights] within the capitalist society and within the patriarchal marriage” (15) is what strips women of freedom and eventually kills their spirit according to Marie. The implied author even foreshadows (whether it happened the way she explains it is unknown) the “fear of children and poverty” (Smedley 200) in the story about her mother's eyes and the dead cat she killed. She metaphorically explains the belief that children eventually kill women – it “sap[s] the strength and vitality of working-class women” (Launius 128). Because once again women become submissive and lose ownership over themselves, as their life starts to only revolve around children. The authorial Marie expresses this as women going “into the silence where all pioneer women have gone before,” “into the darkness,” while she decides that she will remain in the light (Smedley 98). However, there is an ambivalence in her rejection of being a woman, for it is initially a rejection of a gender normative type of relationship. Both her mother’s marriage and Helen’s profession connect the two to gender normative conditions. That is why when Marie accepts Knut’s marriage proposal, it is only under specific conditions – “a sort of romantic friendship, two people working together and remaining friends” (193), no children involved or gendered household chores – only separate economies and interests. Marie’s individualism and strong will prevails by trying to create her own representation where she has agency over her own rights.

Another important example of Marie rejecting her identity marker of being a woman is connected to the notion of the female body being something without autonomy and ownership. For Marie, a woman’s body is seen as only a commodity in marriage and society with virginity as something to be desired because that is all that women have to “trade for a bed and food for the rest of their days” (Smedley 107). Marie, the fictional author, emphasizes her idea of self-ownership with the story about the bartender she meets in Carlsbad. The bartender, who intended to rape her realizes that since Marie rather would have starved than become a prostitute, she is honorable. So, he offers her his weekly wages and marriage for she has effectively “demonstrated [her] fitness to marry a man” (167). This is based on the fact that she is a virgin, an unsullied commodity – “Because I had never ‘been there before’ I was being proposed to!

That seemed unjust and shameful ... to be judged by my body” (167, Smedley’s ellipsis). It is not the horror of almost getting raped that seems to anger Marie, but the crux is the importance her virginal body has for men. Marie’s decision to initially abstain completely from romantic and sexual relationships becomes her first attempt to keep self-ownership. In this way she tries to attain agency over her oppressions by separating herself from the physical ownership of another person through marriage, sex, children, or love.

Marie does not only relate to sex through the deprivation of physical ownership, but also mental ownership. In other words, the ruling patriarchal structures have poisoned not only the acceptance of her female body, but also her mental relationship with sex. I would say that even though she manages to reject the external power her oppressions have regarding the ownership of her body; Marie fails to internally escape her oppressive mental image of her body. Sex has always meant “violence, marriage or prostitution ... [which eventually meant] weeping nagging women and ... unhappiness” (Smedley 188). That is why in romantic or sexual relationships there is a testimonial inequality in Marie distinguishing love or desire from the failure or shame of being weak. This sense of “sex experience to be a thing of shame” (360) and that her “sick spirit ... [would come] in conflict with [her] intellect” (361) is prevalent throughout the autobiographical novel. The narrator describes the feeling of physical desire as if her body grows weak – it is her body’s fault – believing that desire resides only in the body, not the intellect. Hence, she assumes that people, such as her mother and father, who do not rely on their intellect are more inclined to listen to their passions or be subservient to social oppressions. This misperception can be seen as a “deeply ingrained misogyny [Marie has,] which devalues girls and women, views femaleness as a curse and a source of schame [sic], and female sexuality in particular as depraved” (Freiwald 7). So when Juan Diaz rapes her, she does not understand why she feels weak. On the one hand, she blames herself for not fighting harder against supposed sexual urges. Her twisted perception of sexuality makes her believe that it must have been her body ‘going weak’ with desire, not that he overpowers her. One can see that in the way Marie is worried that the fault lies in her boasting about “being a [sexually] free woman” (Smedley 297). On the other hand, she is worried that Diaz reminds her of men like her father, something she feels shameful about, men that she swore to stay away from. The belt buckle Diaz wears, his “face, so strangely familiar, the high forehead, the broad shoulders, bent forward” (292) echo her father’s physique and personality – “a colorful man ... the living, articulate expression of

[others'] desires" (28) with a "buckle of real silver" and "a reputation as a dangerous man with the women" (27) – a man that claims women as property. This trauma brings her back to her parents' problems. That is why, Marie's marriage to Anand (an Indian revolutionary) falls apart. Anand's conviction that Diaz has sullied his property – "[r]ape was a property crime against [the] husband or father" (Romero 83) – and Marie converting into a weeping woman, are two aspects from her parents that she promised she would not emulate. For Marie it is logical to pull away from her identity markers because they only represent constraints and not freedom. However, in the process she loses power over her own sexuality.

By rejecting the socially constructed identity markers, Marie is only able to explore her sexual identity when separating her public and private life. This separation in the way the narrator presents creates a gap in Marie's performative acts, creating a lived complexity. Her public life, which belongs to her work and her friends from the Indian liberation movement, infiltrates the life she tries to hold private. Marie being of a certain racial privilege, her light skin, causes most people around her to assume she is white and that her love for the Indians has to do with "sex love" (Smedley 357). Even though she loves the Indians for all of the work they do together, she is still a woman and they, "like the Americans, had a physical standard for women" (359) and assumptions about female character. So to continue to work with them, one can understand why Marie adapts and divides her public and personal life. In public, Marie keeps her intimate relationships a secret to earn respect; while in private, she defies all of the power standards that segregate women. For instance, she refuses to completely submit to separate standards, or inequality, than "any business man," by "still having clandestine love affairs" (360). This puts her on an equal level with any man. However, Marie opts out of paying her partners and using their bodies as commodities, while basing her relationships with them "upon friendship" (360). In contrast to the men she describes, Marie is trying to reverse the effect men have on sexual relationships into something that is more similar to solidarity and mutual exchange. She is deconstructing part of the patriarchal privilege, but only in private, as such a thing would be detrimental to her public life. Hence, her public life ultimately infiltrates her private life, leaving Marie to neither reject nor accept, but to adapt to the fact that she is trapped by her oppressions and she cannot escape the essentialist control they possess.

In brief, the skewed conception Marie has of body, relationships, and sex is heavily influenced by the core gender roles made visible by class and reinforced in her parent's

relationship. So all of her decisions in life are calculated to the degree in which she will have freedom and equality. Her mother's body is completely damaged because of gender roles and the burdens her husband has belonging to a certain class and race. That is why Marie predominantly goes against her identity markers until her adult years: she abstains from love and sex and focuses on class mobility. Since Marie is hyperconscious of her body, she is chained to the assumption that she needs to make choices based on the power structures encompassing her body. She cannot fully pursue other aspects of her identity because she feels compelled to reject all that is female publicly, but to privately explore her desires yet feel extreme shame over them. Therefore, the power structures in this sense truly govern her pursuit of self. However, Marie continues to resist and fight for women with similar backgrounds to herself, as "fighters in a great cause ... desperate from the pain and disillusionment of love" (Smedley 8). This is something Marie, the fictional author, already mentions to the reader at the beginning of the novel.

2.3 VOICE

In contrast to the shaping of one's mind and body image by identity markers such as race, class, and gender, one's voice is not something that is primarily created. Rather it is something one does or does not evolve into as a secondary action because of such markers. Not all marginalized people utilize their voice or have the possibility to use it. For Marie, being heard is something that she has to accomplish. In the same way her outlook and her sense of body have been shaped, so have her intentions with her voice been a culmination of her foundational factors – her gender, her class, and her race. In *Daughter of Earth*, there are two voices that matter: there is the evolution of the young Marie Rogers; but there is also the authorial Marie Rogers who narrates important insights and "knowledge that comes from experience" (Smedley 8). The focus in this section is how Marie's emergence into radicalism and the fight for the oppressed is the evolution of her accepting her identity markers along with her voice.

The first understanding of voice is found in the way language works and is presented. It is clear in the novel that a certain type of language is more suited for the educated status quo. One can also see how Marie recognizes that if women speak delicately, they will be perceived as

weak, but if women speak firmly, they will be feared. More so, the importance is not only in the tone of the speech, but also in the aptness of the words used. Therefore, when Marie starts school in Trinidad, she is confused by the language spoken as it is not how her mother and father speak, but more refined. Furthermore, even her aunt Helen refines her speech, “[s]he stopped saying ‘ain’t’ and used ‘have’ or ‘have not’” (Smedley 71) instead, because that is how they speak in the city. These differences are noticeable in the way Marie separates rural areas from cities and towns similar to the way she separates the working-class and middle-or upper-classes. One can deduce that she is aware that the working-class, living in the countryside and working in the mines, are not heard because of their poor language skills; while the townsfolk with an education are heard because they had an aptness for language. This gap between the rural areas and towns leaves the reader to assume that this created fear in Marie, a conclusion that “to the American all things he does not understand are dangerous” (102) and dangerous people should be kept silent. Initially, Marie cultivates her speech and rejects her personal history by “try[ing] to correct [her] accent and dialect” (211). She wants to be understood and heard; she does not intend to be the silenced lower-class dark pioneer woman.

To voice injustice does not come naturally, as one is initially subjugated within a hierarchical normative point of view. For instance, Marie’s and others’ light-skin “privilege often leads to ‘blank spots’ and willful ignorance,” a lack of awareness “of any meaningful discordance between” identity markers (May, “Speaking into the void” 96), which is why Marie has associated the hardship of race exclusively with class. So, when one of her classmates of color is faced with a statement by a student claiming “the inferiority of the Negro” (Smedley 215) there is a sense of recollection. The injustice endured by colored people “aroused ferocity within [her] ... That any living man or women could demand less for another than he demanded for himself aroused not only [her] hatred, but [her] fear” (261-262). This recognition is not necessarily her experience, but she feels a part of the injustice they feel. She tells the reader how the claim of inferiority reminds her of men working in the field, “big men perhaps with stooped shoulders, laboring blindly,” men like her father and brothers (262). The narrator Marie comprehends the benefits of light-skinned privilege, as she mentions that she was by “chance ... born white and not black” (262). Her light skin is more like her mother’s and not similar to her father’s Native American features or other far darker people. The ferocity that is awakened in the young Marie, I believe, is her searching for some kind of change, someone to be a voice for her

father. Therefore, even though she surrounds herself with cultivated people that can perhaps highlight the problem, they cannot be the voice of it because they had not lived it – nor has she. Yet, one can see that there is a change in the narrative voice, an acceptance of her distinct identity markers is emerging.

However, Marie's voice is not without conflict, because she has both oppressions and privileges. She can answer people who tell her to "go back to the [country] you came from" (Smedley 282), by claiming her Native American ancestry: "'The one I came from! My people were so American that this was their country before any white man came here'" (282), but she has to tread lightly and not fail to see how her light skin is an identity determinant that "constitute[s] the wages of privilege" (Carastathis 28). This conflict can be seen when her whiteness comes into question. Her whiteness can place her in positions where people can either condemn her or ask her to pick a side. When it suits the privileged her whiteness can be subordinated, and at other times when it suits them her whiteness can be questioned for treason. For instance, when she is questioned in jail about her involvement with the Indian liberation movement, the examiner states: "'Have you no love for your country?' ... 'You are a white woman!' ... 'I had never hoped to live to see an American woman betray her country'" (Smedley 326-327). It is this form of presumed character traits and fluctuations between either side of her mixed-race identity that catalyzes Marie's political voice. Her time in prison gives her a greater political sagacity by determining that her identity will not belong to a country and her "countrymen are the men and women who work against oppression—it does not matter who or where they are" (355). Since identity markers are socially constructed, one can see how Marie can determine to perform the ones that suit her purpose, in either fighting her identity markers oppression or utilizing her identity markers privilege. Her identity does not have to belong to just race, gender or class issues, because they are all part of her; and by accepting and approaching part of her identity markers in this way, she can finally start cultivating her sense of self.

This continuous effort to cultivate her own identity and voice, and at the same time find a collective place to use it, is the author Marie's (Agnes Smeldey's) point in *Daughter of Earth*. She invites the readers to understand the complexity of life, a representation of intersecting identity markers. These factors would have been ignored if she did not make it her sole mission to highlight them – but at the same time figuring out how her own identity has been formed. Just as Smedley herself, one can say that Marie is:

an alienated product of ... contradictions, lived a life doubly outside, both estranged from the “American way,” and never quite within a position in which she could assume a collective presence. For some, this may indicate the unhappy vicissitudes of the individualist, forever torn by allegiances to the self as sacrosanct, objecting to any and all social and state directives that might impinge upon or violate such selfhood ... [but also] advocating a sense of self that has been rarely glimpsed within the socius, and if a subject, can only be said to be so in its counterhegemonic constituency. (Hitchcock 130)

This outlook highlights, on the one hand, that intersectionality is very singular, as one’s identity markers and experiences are distinctive. Marie, for instance, assumes that she and her younger sister, who have the same identity markers, would have the same perception of the world. Yet, their experiences regarding their identity markers are different, because their encounters with race, class, and gender situations have been different. This conundrum proves that intersectionality is highly personal and cannot be assumed as a broad approach, but an individual moment-to-moment framework. On the other hand, it is quite clear in the novel that Marie believes there is a coalition between the fight against oppression and search for identity – “[i]dentity is central to building a collective we” (Collins & Bilge 135). Even though, Marie never fully assumes a collective presence within the Indian liberation movement, she finds a common goal – agency: fighting against oppression. The concept of agency in this case is Marie working within the social structure and using her position of privilege and understanding of oppression to help people. That is why for Marie, by not freeing the “Asiatic peoples [first], the European or American workers could not gain their emancipation; that one of the chief pillars of world capitalism was to be found in the subjection of Asiatic peoples” (Smedley 356). In a sense, her own pursuit for identity is facilitated by freeing people who she believes are more oppressed than she is. Her identity “rests upon a recursive relationship between individual and social structures ... or a collective that must be brought into being because they share similar social locations within power relations” (Collins & Bilge 135). Despite the intersectional experience being individual, there is a collective where one oppressed individual can help another oppressed individual with a similar position within the hierarchy. This can be seen in how the narrator highlights that she is working alongside people fighting against oppression in their own country. The authorial Marie clearly stresses Sardar Ranjit Singh’s (Sardarji’s) philosophy in the novel: “if the thing you work for is great enough and true enough, to work for its achievements is reward enough, even if it does not succeed, even if you are poor and remain poor” (Smedley

273); furthermore, “that is the only basis for work of any kind, and it is the only basis for life” (274). What Sardaji is advocating is to “create a new world” (274). But one can also say that this new world is a work in progress, such as one’s identity is a continuous work in progress. Marie’s work to epistemologically understand her intersecting identity markers will continuously change as she fights the core structures of the oppressions she encounters. Until the weight of oppression and privilege has been dismantled, there is no clear self but a constant anti-essentialist identity.

The identity and voice Marie searches for throughout *Daughter of Earth* is found in the composition – the author the reader finds in the beginning of the novel. It is her arduous search for her identity, for her voice, the thing that is going to carry her, and will explain and provide solace from the events that are her life. Marie has both tried to disregard her identity markers and embrace them, until she realizes that she will use them. She uses her voice to tell her much needed story, a story she has not heard before. Because of the fluctuating nature of autobiographical fiction, it leaves the author with somewhat free reins – no details are irrelevant in the great scope of a life. As one quickly understands, *Daughter of Earth* is very rich in details. For Smedley, one can perhaps assume that her stance in the discussion between the leftists’ argument of “‘art as a class weapon’ over the bohemians’ ‘art for art’s sake’” (Rabinowitz 24), is definitely found in the direction of the leftists’ socio-cultural weapon. However, Marie’s voice in the novel is not just used for class, but for her individually – to reinvent expression in its complex and messy form and not in its immaculate romanticized form. *Daughter of Earth* is not intended to only be read by the working class as a proletarian call for revolution, but also by the bourgeois as an insight into the life of the working class. That is why the novel states early on that it “is not a work of beauty, created that someone may spend an hour pleasantly” (Smedley 7). Through the autobiographical fictional framework of *Daughter of Earth*, Marie as the author, and Smedley, finds redemption in utilizing her voice and artistic space to convey her story, stance, and vulnerabilities with the protection of fiction.

3 CONCLUSION

By writing her novel, Marie Rogers – as the fictional author, finally utilizes what she has learned. She presents how her mind has evolved and changed from childhood to adulthood; she also shows her struggles with being uncomfortable in her own skin, the expectations and confusions of her female body; and by writing this down along with her new purpose for fighting oppression, she is utilizing her voice. More importantly, the aim of this essay is to approach Agnes Smedley's autobiographical fiction *Daughter of Earth* from an intersectional perspective in order to understand how Marie's identity takes shape. I have tried to consider how the power structures of race, class, and gender have impacted her outlook on society, her own life, and her actions. However, the aim was not to look at how these factors are obstacles, but how they are presented in the text and if they have any impact on Marie's ensuing choices. In other words, I have tried to demonstrate how and when Marie rejects and accepts her different identity markers of race, class, and gender.

As this essay has emphasized, Marie's identity markers make a great impact on her, not only as a singular arc, but as a set of arcs that have fluctuated throughout her first thirty years. Intersectionality works in the same way; it is not fixed but flexible. Since life is a mix of multiple arcs of mistakes and lessons learned, of moments that define and change one's direction, so does the intersectional reading signify that one has to incrementally be aware of each moment separately, then figure out how they are connected. This gives socio-cultural aspects great power in how identities are formed. In Marie's case, the fluctuation of her identity markers is clear in her relationship to her mother and father, her pursuit of education, and the different people and movements she comes across. That is why one can see, on one hand, Marie both going against certain factors that identify her and also changing course and embracing them; on the other hand, there is her continuous ambivalence toward certain identity markers, such as gender, and never fully knowing how to disregard or accept it. Marie incessantly searches for answers:

What is most valuable in life, I contemplated? There were many things—freedom of men and women to love and live their lives in a way that brings them happiness; a really great work such as ours, or such as that of the working class—they were parts of the same struggle for freedom of the oppressed ... Understanding? I understood so little. What I longed for was that Anand should understand my life, with all its actions and reactions, its mistakes and achievements, its stupidities, its unreasonableness. (Smedley 380)

There is always a conflict within her, which is normal when trying to understand one's identity. In a way, by writing this novel in an autobiographical voice after leaving Anand who did not understand her, could be her way of reaching out and depicting how her identity markers have made her who she is.

For further research, there is definitely a need to explore the nonconformity in autobiographical fiction, how it is fluid – neither fully true nor fully fictional; therefore, not always obliged to the same standards as either an autobiography or a fictional work. This ambiguity is also something to explore in the diversity of the intersectional approach to identity.

Perhaps we simply need to realize that intersectionality itself is a metaphor that, as it has evolved, encompasses too many facets for any image to capture completely: the interaction of the axes of oppression and privilege across a variety of social structures and situations; the agency of people within these structures; the conflicting interests of members of oppressed group; individuals' social identities—how people see and represent themselves and each other. (Garry 833)

Daughter of Earth is how Marie (Smedley) represents her life. The extensive and different facets of intersectionality are related to how life is structured – “a mosaic of interesting pattern[s]” (Smedley 8). I believe that if one deeply analyzes one's own life one will realize how intricate it is. Therefore, autobiographical fiction is a good stepping stone for intersectional analysis, as it is concretely interconnected to reality. I would suggest that intersectionality is something one can evolve for the process of identity building in other fictional pursuits. Moreover, intersectionality is a framework suitable for both the scholar and the writer when creating characters. It is usually something one does intuitively, but now there is a framework that one can turn to. My hope is that intersectionality expands its way furthermore into fictional literature, even in its complex form as with other disciplines, but nonetheless as a framework. Literature mirrors society, and consequently literature should always evolve with society.

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