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Politics of Feminist Auto/Ethnography: Personal as Political in Annie Ernaux's *A Woman's Story*

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By

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Politics of Feminist Auto/Ethnography: Personal as Political in Annie Ernaux's *A Woman's Story*

Abstract

This thesis delves into the inseparability of individual and the social in Annie Ernaux's A Woman's Story *that can be approached as auto/ethnographical text/ auto-socio-biographique (Ernaux's own concept). She brings more sociologically grounded style by diverging from French Feminist thought of 1980s though she writes in the same period. She gives emphasis on identity which is shaped not only by gender, but also by a complex interplay of class status, sexual orientation and so on. This study also explores the dynamics of gender and class through the author and her mother's shared history within the broader socio-political and historical context of the twentieth century France. She also raises the political issue of returning to origin through mental homecoming to her working class root. She also addresses cultural memory in the name of individual memory while narrating her own and her mother's story of double exploitation and class based humiliation. Additionally, this thesis examines Ernaux's balance of ethical and moral relations, that is, writing her mother's and her own story within the ethical frame of mother-daughter relationship to, addressing all collective working class women of her mother's generation and community. Furthermore, this study situates itself within the broader framework of feminist auto/ethnographic and philosophical theory of Marilyn Metta, Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson and Luce Irigaray respectively. It concludes that* A Woman's Story *bears the politics of feminist auto/ethnography, that is, personal as political by depicting personal stories are shaped by, and reflect, social conditions.*

Keywords: autoethnography, ethics, politics, identity, voicing the voiceless, cultural memory, return to origin

In *A Woman's Story*, Annie Ernaux intricately weaves the individual and the social through the use of her own defined genre auto-socio-biograpique which closely resembles with autoethnography. Ernaux's work challenges the traditional boundaries of personal writings, using these forms to highlight the complex intersection between individual experiences and broader societal structures. The narrative centers on birth and death of her mother, along with autobiographical reflection of herself to addressing the broader social and collective history of working class women and people of the twentieth century France. Her work is a reflection of her own life and that of her mother, but it also draws attention to the social class, gender dynamics and generational struggles that have shaped their experiences. Ernuax's biographical narrative of her working class mother is entwined with her own memory of growing up with her in the then harsh environment of France marked by the World Wars, economic crisis, migration, gender inequality, cultural norms, class ascension and humiliation associated with working class root. Central to *A Woman's Story* lies the issue of intermix of biographical and autobiographical narrating into a 'relational' story within the ethnographic confines of class, gender, society, culture and history, eventually transforming her work from mere self-narrative into a broader socio-cultural critique.

Ernaux started writing *A Woman's Story* in 1986 shortly after her mother's death. The book was originally published in 1987 in French version as *Une Femme*, later translated into English by Tanya Leslie as *A Woman's Story* and published in 1991. 1980s was a crucial time for women writers to assert their voices, and woman writing about woman through fiction, memoir or autofiction became powerful modes of expression. Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* was heavily influenced by such trend. Writing about her mother was a way to give voice to the working class women in

order to reveal their experiences, struggles and complexities of womanhood in early and mid-twentieth century France.

In the 1980s, French Feminist thought was heavily influenced by figures like Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who focused primarily on issues of gender, language and sexuality. These thinkers often emphasized *ecriture feminine*, a writing that sought to express the unique bodily and linguistic experiences of women. Central to this feminist movement was the idea that gender was the most critical determinant of a woman's identity and experience. Annie Ernaux, writing in the same period, diverged from this perspective by emphasizing that identity is shaped not just by gender but by a complex interplay of class, culture, history and geography which is prominent in *A Woman's Story*. By focusing on these multiple dimensions, Ernaux brings her more sociologically grounded style which merges personal narrative with collective memory and socio-cultural critique, moving towards a broader, more inclusive understanding of identity formation.

Ernaux is one of the pioneer French female writers. She was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 2022 for the "courage and clinical acuity with which she uncovers the roots, estrangements and collective restraints of personal memory" (*The New York Times* para. 3). She is renowned for her minimalist and distanced prose style. Her autobiographical novel *Cleaned Out,* published in 1974, marked the beginning of her writing career. Although the story is based on her own life, she fictionalizes it by having the young character Denise Lesur who thinks back on her life while having an abortion. Ernaux's another work *A Frozen Woman* (1981) is also an autobiographical novel that explores a woman's experience of being stuck and imprisoned in her roles as a mother and wife, considering the demands society places on women.

With the publication of *A Man's Place* (1984) and *A Woman's Story* (1987), she started experimenting with auto/ethnography after publishing fictionalized autobiographical texts. She has created her own innovative style in these two works that represents a new path in life writing: autosociobiographical or autoethnographic text. *A Man's Place* and *A Woman's Story* not only explore her own life and that of her parents (her father in the former and her mother in the latter) but also the social context in which all of their lives developed. Her combination of personal introspection along with sociological examination of societal conventions in those two pieces marks them as being intensely personal and socially relevant. Personal experiences such as bereavement, class-based guilt, working class conflicts, and struggles of her working class family are also demonstrated to reflect the historical, socio-cultural and political environment in which they take place.

The narrative begins with Ernaux's mother passing away in a geriatric unit. One of the nurses calls Ernaux to inform her that her mother has passed away. The author/narrator/ protagonist (Ernaux herself) of the story embarks on a deep journey of sadness and introspection following the death of her mother. She enters a deep state of grief, loss and mourning in the immediate wake of her mother's death. Ernaux's strong desire to chronicle her mother's life drives her while she struggles with her grief. She starts to write about her mother after three weeks of her funeral.

The author then starts to write about her mother's life, a working class woman, from her birth. Her mother was born into a minimal working class family where hardship and survival were the threads sewn into the fabric of daily existence. As a young lady, she accepted the roles that society expected of her-from obedient daughter to hardworking worker who dropped out of school at the age of twelve but also always had a hint of ambition and a burning desire to improve her own dream

in life. She married early to a working class man in 1928.

Ernaux's mother channelled her energies into a small business enterprise as an adult, operating a small grocery store and a cafe with unflinching determination. She rose to prominence in her neighborhood and earned admiration for her continuous determination, generous nature, friendliness and product sales. Her career and her prolonged devotion to her family went hand in hand. She was the pillar of her family, making sure her daughter received the opportunities she had not been given. Ernaux writes of her mother's struggles from running the store and cafe during hard economic times to juggling the demands of motherhood that paved the way for Ernaux to fulfill her own dreams and ambitions, "I was both certain of her love for me and aware of one blatant injustice: she spent all day selling milk and potatoes so that I could sit in a lecture hall and learn about Plato" (51). She portrays not just her mother's story but also larger socioeconomic and cultural forces as well as the unsung heroes who keep families and communities going. She also contextualizes her mother's life story within the larger sociocultural and historical framework of France around twentieth century, including the effects of war and its aftermath on the economy, the status of women in society, migration, industrialization, the emergence of consumer culture, class mobility and so forth. The author painstakingly examines how cultural norms and expectations impacted her mother's life ultimately affecting her own identity. Her mother's and her own behaviors were frequently determined by the need to maintain the family's reputation and appear respectable, which resulted in a life of constant struggle between obligation and desire. Although her mother's economic independence was remarkable for women in her time, the social pressures were firmly entrenched in the conventions of early twentieth century France; a time characterized by inflexible gender roles and few chances for women outside the home.

Bond between Ernaux and her mother is marked by a profound complexity of mother-daughter relationship in which there is a great affection and tension in their connection. Tension frequently permeates this interaction, which is a reflection of the difficulties in comprehending and connecting one another across different point of views and generations. Ernaux in her childhood grew up with her mother who was a pillar of support, a personification of love and power along with her severe nature which was balanced with tender care. Ernaux felt secure and comfortable but also she felt obligated to live up to her mother's high expectations. Things started to change when Ernaux grew older and forged her own way. The mother-daughter bonding traversed during adolescence comprises of rebellion. Her mother's conventional beliefs and expectations for her daughter frequently collided with Ernaux's search of her own identity and freedom. There were moments of contention and discord between them because of her mother's expectations towards her to follow certain sociocultural norms and ideals. In spite of this complication, the intense bond between Ernaux and her mother persisted later, after Ernaux got married, had two kids, and took on the responsibilities of motherhood, household along with her struggle to pursue her profession, education and employment.

When her mother's health deteriorated due to Alzheimer's disease and memory loss, Ernaux showed a great deal of love and responsibility for her. The very chronic illness not only affected her mother's health but also Ernaux's own physical and emotional health. As her mother forgot the essential memories of their lives, Ernaux finds herself losing a part of her own identity that had been intertwined with her mother's. Her mother was once a bright, extrovert and actively independent woman who gradually lost her independence and became more and more dependent on others remaining divorced from reality. Their connection is profoundly altered by

this illness-related time. During that time, Ernaux changed from being a daughter to a nurturing figure like mother. Her narrative also reflects the common experiences of many who have looked after their loved ones with comparable illnesses.

The ending of *A Woman's Story* captures the severe painful death of Ernaux's mother with physical and mental degradation, and the aftermath of her mother's demise. Soon after her mother's death (shortly after three weeks of her funeral), Ernaux begins to write about her mother in an effort to manage and heal her grief, and keep her mother's history and legacy alive. Her writing of the very book acts as a moving reminder of her mother- for her, her family and society at large.

Many academicians, critics and scholars have attempted to make a descriptive and analytical study of Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* from different perspectives. Margaret Peller Feeley in her review analyzes the title of Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* as being ambiguous. According to her, the book's title is unclear as it does not say if the narrative is about a specific woman or whether it intends to depict the universal woman through common experiences of femininity. She posits, "The slim volume is ambiguously titled. It is Annie's story, and it is the story of her mother, whose death opens and closes the book and whose life Annie tries to reconstruct. And of course it is the story of every woman who grows old and every woman who loses a mother" (46). Her text shifts the focus from her individual experiences to that of her mother and finally to all collective woman who belongs from working class along with their struggles, also reflecting to every woman who grows old and every girl who becomes woman and loses a mother. The title initially appears problematic due to its ambiguity but is integral to Ernaux's evolving project, as it mirrors her transition from her own and her family's personal experiences to collective experiences.

In her review, Susan Ireland observes *A Woman's Story* as a text of hybrid genre. Ireland considers Ernaux's work as "a good example of her predilection for hybrid literary forms" (115). She further states:

> As in a traditional biography, Ernaux recounts her mother's life from her childhood in rural Normandy to her struggle with Alzheimer's disease in a hospital in the suburbs of Paris; at the same time, her innovative approach, which incorporates into the narrative elements of autobiography, fiction, and sociological and historical analysis, gives rise to a multifaceted exploration of her family story over the course of several generations. (115)

Jennifer Willging too opines Ernaux's attempt to "link her personal history to collective history" (99). She suggests a form of ethnobiography in *A Woman's Story* to link personal history with collective history in which the narrator draws on "not just the personal memory of the mother" but also "the social, economic, and historical forces that shape her life in order to create her mother's story" (99).

Chloe Taylor Merleau examines Annie Ernaux's various works with respect to confessional writing and her reasons behind confession. She finds out the reasons behind Ernaux's confessions "ranging from the psychological to the political, and for the strange combination of resistance and compulsion which they involve" (66). With reference to *A Woman's Story*, she further remarks:

> Ernaux writes in order to retain her deceased parents and her memories of them. In this instance, writing is once more seen as a means to get and to keep the elusive other, whether a distant lover or a deceased loved one, and yet now we see that she also writes to achieve a form of therapeutic catharsis, to get rid of rather than to get, to sever herself from the object of her unhappy love. (68)

In *A Woman's Story*, the tension between two motives of confession, 'preservation and catharsis' seem contradictory but is not flawed rather the duality is significant. From political perspective, her writing works to reassert voice for her mother, a working class woman and many other silenced women like her mother whose struggles are not seen or heard. From psychological perspective, her writing enables her to therapeutically cope up with sadness after losing her mother, express her pain and heal herself. On the other hand, there is also another reason for Ernaux to confess as she discloses specific mistakes of her past and her realization in the present.

Lyn Thomas and Emma Webb examine how French women authors who draw from their own experiences develop a feminist paradigm that is employed both as a means of self-reflection and political instrument. In the context of Ernaux and her *A Woman's Story*, they investigate that the text's portrayal of femininity can be wholly comprehended when it is seen in conjunction with the pain and aspirations of working-class:

> For Ernaux, it was the need to express and explore her own experience of class-based oppression and the losses involved in the process of changing class through education which moved her to write. If class is in many ways Ernaux's dominant theme, it is never separated from issues of gender and sexuality . . . Later, in *A Woman's Story*, Ernaux makes the combination of political and personal motivation in her writing abundantly clear; she is concerned to bring her working-class culture of origin into literature, through the account of her mother's life. (29)

Intersecting line of class and gender is at the heart of Ernaux's work. She does not privilege issues of gender over class or class over gender as the two are inextricably linked within her work. Ernaux through her text portrays the interconnection of class

and gender as central to both her own experiences and her mother's life, to expose the emotional and social complexities of class mobility and the gendered sacrifices of her mother's generation. Her mother's working class status is compounded by the gender roles of sacrifice and labor she was expected to perform, while Ernaux's own class mobility made possible by these sacrifices, brings with it a complex mix of guilt, humiliation and losses that make her express those feelings in the very book.

E. Nicole Meyer in her review analyzes *A Woman's Story* on the basis of mother-daughter relationship. She suggests that Ernaux's sense of self is in relation to her mother's identity in such a way that in writing the very book, "she juxtaposes the mention of her own birth with giving birth, conversely to her mother: I was to be born in September./ I believe I am writing about my mother because it is my turn to bring her into the world" (30). Similarly, Meyer explores another twinning identity of Ernaux and her mother which is "generous nature" (35). Her mother prefers giving to everybody and "hope[s] to be loved for what she would give" instead of taking from them and the same trait she develops in relation to her mother even after her death which she writes in the text, "Isn't writing also a way of giving"? (36). Furthermore, she also views the text with equal emphasis on "the social nature of Ernaux's project" focusing on the metanarrative comment of the text (12). Ernaux's identity is not only linked to her mother as other symbiotically but the other as per Siobhan McIlvanney, "also takes the form of the narrator's parents, her lover or the everyday men and women she observes in public places" (6). In the similar line, McIlvanney interprets *A Woman's Story* in the light of representativeness in which the narrator "re-establishes contact with working class background through the portrayal of others, whether parents, or ordinary men and women" (108). Through her mother, the narrator attempts to provide a representative image of twentieth century France's

socio-political reality. Deep inside, the other not only indicates her mother as she situates her mother within a broader social framework and presents her as representative of working class figures. As per McIlvanney, Ernaux's mother is situated within a "general category rather than in her familial relation to the narrator" (89).

The aforementioned reviews on *A Woman's Story*, for the most part, discuss the ideas of class-gender intersection, hybrid genre, confessional writing and mother-daughter relationship, whereas this research proposes a shift towards understanding the text through the lens of auto/ethnography (particularly feminist auto/ethnography) highlighting on its main politics; personal as inherently political. This study also necessitates a more integrated analysis that explores the interaction of relational self/identity, ethical and political relationality, cultural memory and various artistic techniques used in auto/ethnographic text like that of Ernaux which provides specific foundation for enacting personal as political. The present study also revolves around comprehending how the text interlinks the personal and the political/social through advanced genre of life writing like auto-socio-biographique (Ernaux's own defined genre) which is almost similar to auto/ethnography. There is a lack of comprehensive research that brings insight of personal as political in chronology but the study brings forth this idea by making a shift from personal or relational to political ethnographic reflection on class and gender identity.

Ernaux's utilization of auto/ethnography in her text raises significant questions regarding her decision in selecting this narrative approach which serves as a vehicle for recounting her personal and familial histories within the context of broader socio-political, historical and cultural frameworks. So, the following research questions arose to investigate in deeper way:

1. How do elements of auto/ethnography in the text contribute to depicting the intersections of personal, familial and socio-political histories reflecting wider issues of gender and class?
2. Why does she choose auto/ethnography as a crucial approach in her text?
3. How does Ernaux's use of auto/ethnography in *A Woman's Story* offer new perspectives on the relational interplay between self and other, auto and ethno, or the personal and the political?

The present study undertakes a comprehensive examination of *A Woman's Story* aiming to uncover Ernaux's ability to operate within auto/ethnography. By examining the text through the concepts of relational self, ethical and political relationality, cultural memory and artistic techniques, this research demonstrates how Ernaux's writing is not only a personal narrative but also a politically charged auto-socio-biographical or auto/ethnographic narrative that bridges the personal and the political/social. The conceptual use of auto/ethnography in the text serves as a powerful vehicle for portraying personal and familial histories within broader socio-political, cultural and historical frameworks, also reflecting the wider issues of class and gender. This study specifically seeks to explore why Ernaux selects auto/ethnography as her narrative approach, how it allows her to map the relational interplay between self and other at different levels moving from between herself and her mother (ethical) to collective working class women of her mother's community (political) and how this method brings new insight into the ways personal histories can reflect and critique collective socio-political realities.

This research employs qualitative and interpretative methods to analyze the primary text *A Woman's Story* to understand its nuanced interplay of class and gender identity, making the personal as inherently social/political. Information is sourced

from secondary sources including books, research journal articles, critical reviews of various scholars and analyses available through online databases in order to justify the thesis statement. The theoretical framework for this study are drawn from feminist auto/ethnographic theory of Marilyn Metta, Nancy Chodorow, Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis, Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson and feminist philosophical theory of Luce Irigaray.

Auto/ethnography is quite new method. Karl Heider, an anthropologist, coined the term autoethnography in 1975. Although Heider is credited with coining the phrase, David Hayano is recognized as being the first to use it in a form that is comparable to how we currently use it, the researcher is a member of the group being researched. Although this new technique was somewhat quiet in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of social sciences researchers increased in the 1990s by adopting this method. As per Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, "one of the historical trends that contributed to the formation of autoethnography is the increased importance of social identities and identity politics" (25-26). This method has been extended in numerous disciplines in the twenty-first century. The foundation of autoethnography consists of highly individualized narratives that utilize the author's or researcher's experience to push for further sociological knowledge.

Auto/ethnography is a form of "self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text." (Reed-Danahay, qtd. in Jones, Adams, and Ellis 72). Its agenda is socio-political. It is a hybrid form of ethnography (a study of the other but also includes self-awareness) and autobiography. For as auto/ethnographers, we are, first and foremost, ethnographers who recognize and honor our deep connections with, rather than separation from, the communities of which we are a part (Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin, qtd. in Jones,

Adams, and Ellis 59).

Its focus is on issues of identity and selfhood, voice and authenticity, cultural displacement and exile, boundary-crossing and a double-consciousness that foreground the multiple nature of selfhood while opening up new ways of writing about social life (Reed-Danahay, qtd. in Jones, Adams, and Ellis 72). Through personal delving, it offers broader chance to study about the political, social and cultural issues. It holds the major politics that personal and social/political are not distinct but intertwined or relational.

Ellis and Metta's approaches are rooted in feminist autoethnography. Feminist autoethnography embodies the poststructuralist and feminist thinking that "the self can only exist in fluid, shifting and contextual reciprocity with other selves" which denotes that self is relational, reciprocal, fluid and ever changing (Metta 503). With respect to the notion of 'relational self', in the same line, Chodorow emphasizes on women's identities that are shaped through relationships, can be applied to *A Woman's Story* by analyzing how Ernaux's selfhood is intricately tied to her mother across different stages. Chodorow clearly makes distinction between men's self and women's self: "Masculine identification processes stress differentiation from others, the denial of affective relation. . . Feminine identification processes are relational, whereas masculine identification processes tend to deny relationship" (176). So, men's self is individualistic and women's self is relational as well as social which Chodorow further remarks, ". . . [W]omen's lives, and beliefs about women, define them as embedded in social interaction and personal relationships in a way that men are not" (178). Metta further says that "women's autoethnographic writings provide critical spaces for women's silenced experiences" (491). Metta's concept of "feminist autoethnography" and "women's autoethnographic writing" can be used to analyze

Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* in the light of the nexus of gender and genre foregrounding women's experiences and critiquing societal structures that shape and constrain them.

Irigaray, a French philosopher's notion of the 'combination of love of self and love of other that provides a wholeness to female ethics' will be utilized to analyze Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* with regard to her focus/care towards both self and other. Irigaray also has discussed about "dimensions of female ethics" that shift from "within themselves to among themselves" (108). Her insights on feminist ethics and politics will be useful to analyze the issue of personal as political by delving minutely into Ernaux's ethical and political motif.

Grace A. Giorgio's idea that 'autoethnographic text facilitates cultural memory' will be utilized to study how Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* addresses cultural memory in the name of individual memory making her text both personal and political at the same time. Similarily, feminist autoethnographers Jones's view on importance of context in autoethnography and Collinson's view on autoethnography working as a bridge joining personal and social/political will be helpful to analyze how Ernaux's work accompanies both personal and political.

Being herself a feminist autoethnographer, Ellis conceptualizes autoethnography as "about the feminine, the caring, the mothering. It is a feminist methodology" (225). Her concept of artful autoethnography can be applied to analyze *A Woman's Story* in terms of how Ernaux's use of various artistic techniques helps to make her text personal as well as inherently political.

Feminist autoethnographer Metta describes that "women's autoethnographic writings place women at the centre of scholarly texts, critical analysis, and knowledge-making" (491). In Ernaux's *A Woman's Story*, the title which is

ambiguous that can denote her mother's story, her own story or every working class woman's story reflects her meaningful struggle in keeping women at the centre. In this regard, Meyer states:

> The title itself complicates our task. Is *A Woman's Story* [Une Femme] about a specific woman-that is, the narrator's mother? Or, could this woman be the narrator, Annie, herself? Or, does the story of remembering and forgetting, of loving and losing, and of speaking and silencing become the universal story of every woman? (34)

The ambiguous title chosen by Ernaux supports the concept of women's autoethnographic writing which situates women at the centre. Ernaux, while describing about her working class grandmother, her working class mother and finally about herself within French society of the twentieth century has to do with the exploration of women's history across different generations.

A Woman's Story delicately knits self-narrative or autobiographical voice within social context of the then twentieth century France. She situates her mother's and her own lives within the broader context of economic and political upheavals. For instance, she locates personal events of her family within wider social and political framework: "They were married in 1928" (24); and "In 1931, they took out a loan on a grocery shop and a small adjoining café situated in Lillebonne" (27) marking emphasis on economic depression. She recalls on how her parents had to "economize on everything" (26) during the 1930s and how her mother, running a shop in an industrial town navigated "industrial poverty" (28) while providing credit to struggling families. Also, she situates her birth year 1940 within the backdrop of WWII, her mother's courage in taking her "for a walk" (32) amidst the chaos of WWII and even her cough relation with migration- "In 1945, they left the valley,

where the foggy climate made me cough and stunted my growth, and moved back to Yvetot" (34). Talking about the correlation between personal and sociopolitical context, Jones writes:

> Context and point of view play an ever important role in the knowledges shared in the autoethnographic story. As an autoethnographer, he/she works in context, focusing in how place, products, and people create and cultivate knowledges in relational experiences. The personal here is in conversation with and is situated within social, political, and cultural contexts. (431)

Ernaux is successful to sketch her work as an autoethnography with her major focus on intricating her mother's and her own personal stories within broader socio-cultural and political context. She frames her mother's life and her own within the historical continuum of 1930-1986, starting from economic depression, WWII, migration and post-war, generation gap, workers' and students' uprising, and 1960s feminism and its afterwards.

Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* exemplifies metareferential narratives that frame the work as hybrid and blurred genre which is the characteristic of autoethnography. Ernaux clearly rejects literary categorizations of her work by noting, "Naturally, this isn't a biography, neither is it a novel, may be a cross between literature, sociology, and history" (87) and "The more objective aspect of my writing will probably involve a cross between family history and sociology, reality and fiction" (12). This refusal to conform aligns with Holman Jones characterization of autoethnography as "a blurred genre. . . refusing categorization" (124). Ernaux's combination of personal memory, familial history and broader societal observations reflects the autoethnographic act of linking individual experiences to collective histories making it hybrid and blurred genre.

Metta's approach is rooted in feminist autoethnography. She describes "feminist autoethnography implicates the poststructuralist and feminist thinking that the self can only exist in fluid, shifting and contextual reciprocity with other selves" (503) which implies that self is relational, permeable and fluid. American psychoanalyst and sociologist Chodorow shares the same view and emphasizes 'relational self' reflecting how women identities/selfhood are shaped through relationship with mother especially, across various stages of their life.

In *A Woman's Story*, the issue of 'relational self' is profoundly depicted through the evolving dynamics of Ernaux's relationship with her mother across different stages of her life. During childhood, Ernaux's bond with her mother was deeply intimate as she expresses: "I knew every detail of her body. I thought that I would grow up to become her" (33). This aligns with Chodorow's assertion that "early infantile development occurs in relation to another person or persons-to a mother" (77). Ernaux's sense of self during childhood is in close proximity to her mother. When physical distance emerged between them while pursuing her higher education, Ernaux acknowledges, "Until I married, I still belonged to her, even when we were living apart" (54). This resonates with Chodorow's concept "A girl identifies with and is expected to identify with her mother in order to attain her adult feminine identification" (177). In adulthood, Ernaux's urge to care for her mother who was battling with Alzheimer "I need to feed her, to touch her and to hear her" (83) corresponds to Chodorow's assertion "Externally, as internally, women grow up and remain more connected to others" (177) which shows that Ernaux's selfhood is intricately tied to her mother at adulthood also. The 'relational self' as emphasized by feminist autoethnography and specifically 'relational self that is rooted with maternal at various stages of life' by Chodorow remain central to Ernaux's *A Woman's Story*

showcasing her selfhood being intimately relational with her mother during childhood, girlhood and adulthood.

Ernaux engages with distinct feminist ethics in the line of gender and gendered experiences. She is dedicated towards writing her mother's and her own story at first within the frame of mother-daughter relationship and later, has shifted her focus to; among all collective working class women of her mother's community in order to prove the prevalence of female ethics in her work. Ernaux's sense of female ethics is so much closer to Luce Irigaray's concept of "female ethics":

> This world of female ethics would continue to have two vertical and horizontal dimensions: - daughter-to-mother, mother-to-daughter; - among women, or among sisters. Without a vertical dimension, a loving ethical order cannot take place among women. Within themselves, among themselves, women need both of these dimensions (even squared) if they are to act ethically. (108)

Ernaux powerfully illustrates female relationality as ethical through the intimate vertical bond within mother and daughter, echoing Irigaray's assertion that such a vertical dimension is foundation for a loving ethical order to take place among women. Ernaux explicitly articulates this vertical dimension when she writes, "I believe I am writing about my mother because it's my turn to bring her into the world" (30) which indicates a reversal of roles where the daughter becomes the caretaker of her mother's legacy, a relational ethical dynamic grounded in love, care and responsibility towards her mother. Her endeavor to write and "find out the truth about her mother" (12) is merely both personal and ethical act, rooted in "thick relations" that Avishai Margalit defines as "our relations to the near and dear" (7). Margalit's emphasis on "ethics guides our thick relations" (37) is complementary to Irigaray's vision of an ethical vertical dimension, and Ernaux in the same line

underscores on the ethical weight of writing about her mother "the only woman who really meant something to me" (11). By accompanying Irigaray's philosophy to that of Margalit's, Ernaux's work emerges as an important reflection of female relationality as firstly ethical, grounded in her intimate connection to her mother. She reaffirms that female relationality, particularly between mother and daughter holds vital ethical significance.

Ernaux again reflects on broader female relationality moving from the ethical bond between mother and daughter to addressing 'thin or moral relation' with working class women of her mother's community. This transition reverberates with Irigaray's shift from vertical dimension to horizontal dimension of female ethics, the latter one emphasizes on the collective experiences "among women, or among sisters" (108). This horizontal dimension of female ethics is political in nature. Ernaux mentions the political act when she writes, "It was only when my mother-born in an oppressed world from which she wanted to escape-became history that I started to feel less alone and out of place in a world ruled by words and ideas" (87). Here, oppressed world signifies not only the plight of her working class mother who suffered from double marginalization due to gender, class related factors, and also class humiliation but also, the shared experiences and struggles of women, of her mother's generation among her mother's community. This perspective of addressing to collective working class oppressed women of her mother's generation resonates with Margalit's concept of "morality [that] tells us how we should regulate our thin relations" (8) and "thin relations" as "backed by the attribute of being human" (7). Ernaux expresses a sense of morality to those struggling working class women of her mother's community even if her personal bonds are absent with them. Her effort in addressing larger community of working class women essentially makes her writing and text political. Thus,

integration of Irigaray's vision of horizontal dimension and Margalit's morality centred on thin relations makes her text an important reflection of female relationality as political.

Though Ernaux has created majority of her narrative based on her mother, it is also self-focused narrative as much as it is other-focused. While the text ostensibly centers on her mother's life, Ernaux simultaneously uncovers how her own identity is shaped by her mother's sacrifice, class mobility, and their shared history. Ernaux writes, "Her overriding concern was to give me everything she hadn't had" (38), emphasizing her mother's sacrifice to provide Ernaux opportunities she herself never enjoyed. Ernaux is also creating her own story about her own position she holds today due to her mother's hardwork, sacrifice and selflessness while writing about her mother's story of struggle being a working class mother. Similarily, she states, "Through me, she continued to satisfy her thirst for knowledge" (43) and "She expected me to correct her when she had used the wrong word" (44) showcasing their shared history of class mobility when her mother used to worry about social conventions that will pass a negative judgement upon their lower working class culture. Ernaux, on the basis of witnessing many events about her mother's life, is writing about her mother in depth but on the other side, she is also constructing narrative about herself on the basis of their shared history which resembles with Kathy Hernandez and Faith Ngunjiri's concept of autoethnography as "both self-focused and other-focused" (279). By documenting her mother's life, Ernaux not only preserves her mother's history but also documents her own life story based on their shared history, and asserts her own identity linked within socio-cultural framework, exemplifying Irigaray's concept of feminist ethics of care that asserts: "The act of love is neither an explosion nor an implosion but an indwelling. Dwelling with the

self, and with the other" (212). Though Ernaux crafts her mother's story in particular, she also makes her own place in it.

As auto/ethnography is both self-focused and other-focused form of text or method, it also has the unique capacity to facilitate cultural memory by preserving and sharing collective lived experiences. In the same line of argument, theorist of feminist autoethnography Grace Giorgio articulates this function of autoethnographic writing, noting:

> As autoethnographers working with our own memories, we can conjure up the collective memory, the cultural memory of an event or time past, to enact memorial collective . . . Autoethnographic writing can enact memorial by creating texts that imprint our collective experience and memories for the present and future. Such texts allow us to see how sharing a lived experience shapes who we are, as individuals and as a culture, creating sites for cultural memory to be witnessed and remembered. (420)

Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* exemplifies this dual focus on both personal and collective memory by embedding individual and collective experiences within her narrative. She reflects on her parents' struggles as members of the working class, particularly her mother's experience of societal norms and class-based oppression. Her mother's early life was deprived of education and was destined to work as a factory worker. It highlights the harsh conditions endured by working class women since childhood, "She was neither happy nor unhappy to leave school at the age of twelve-and a half, the common practice in those days. She got herself a job in a margarine factory where she suffered from the cold and the damp" (18). This reflects both the limited opportunities available to women and the physical hardships of such labourers.

Ernaux also presents the hardship of working class men since their childhood "The story of my father's life was no different from my mother's" (24). Women had to be on the line of social expectation placed upon them by maintaining respectability despite poverty. Ernaux recalls how her mother tried to remain a "factory girl[s] but nonetheless respectable" (21). Additionally, Ernaux documents her mother's efforts to maintain status of class mobility noting how she "tried to avoid making grammatical mistakes and chose her words correctly" (42). These details reveal not only the experience of her mother and father but also of the whole working class people of her mother and father's generation who shared the same history of struggle and class mobility emphasizing on Ernaux's use of cultural memory to address the collective identity. In this regard, Hywel Dix remarks:

> At its most basic, cultural memory is the term used to refer to the process by which individual memories are transposed onto the social plane. It provides not only access to the past but also an orientation and perspective on the present. Cultural memory has the capacity to generate a shared sense of history, a collective identity based on knowledge, understanding and meanings that are widely held, and perhaps even a common purpose. (9)

By anchoring her narrative based on the lives of her working class parents and their struggles within shared history of the early and mid-twentieth century France, her work transcends the boundaries of personal memory. Her use of cultural memory contributes to a broader understanding of collective experiences and identity. Through cultural memory, she documents not only her own experiences of class humiliation and anxiety, along with her memories of her working class father and mother but also collective experiences of other working class children and family at large. With the usage of cultural memory in her writing, she inserts collective histories into her

narrative which helps to transform her personal story into a political act, demonstrating the inseparability of the personal and the political.

In *A Woman's Story*, Ernaux creates a narrative space for silenced voices, particularly of working-class women like her mother who were oppressed by the societal norms in early and mid-twentieth century France. Women from working class during that time lacked access to education, platforms for expression and the means to write powerfully about their struggles. Ernaux's work emerges as a tribute to her working- class mother and women like her mother, seeking to document their hard work, challenges and resilience. Her mother's life story exemplifies these struggles. Born into a working-class family, her mother left school at twelve-and-a-half years old due to the demands of rural poverty, "She went to the local primary school, missing class when she was needed in the fields or when one of her brother or sisters fell ill" (17). With little choice, her mother took a job in a margarine factory where she endured harsh conditions at a young age as a result of intense physical labor: "she suffered from the cold and the damp, her wet hands developing chilblains that stayed with her all winter" (18). Ernaux's narrative captures the struggles of her mother's generation, a time when women's labor was undervalued, and their voices were ignored.

Even after marriage, her mother's struggles were intensified as she sought to uplift her class status to middle class. She got married at twenty-two to a working class man. Her desire to rise above factory girl led her to "running a grocery business" (26), a business typically associated with the middle class at that time. Ernaux praises her mother's determination, noting that "She was the driving force behind their relationship and so he followed her" (27). Her mother not only ran the shop independently but also supported others during times of economic depression by

offering credit to struggling families. Her responsibilities spanned domestic and professional domains from handling families, kitchen to running café and grocery store, "she had to go everywhere-the tax office, the town hall and deal with suppliers and representatives" (29). Even after her husband's death, she continued to manage the business alone, demonstrating her unrelenting resilience, "she continued to run the business as before" (58).

Ernuax highlights these untold stories of working class women of her mother's generation through representation of her mother's story in detail who all bore the burden of both societal expectations (mainly due to patriarchy) and economic hardships imposed upon them, and she creates a platform to give voices to their silenced experiences through her writing which aligns with Metta's view on women's autoethnographic writings:

> Women's autoethnographic writings provide critical spaces for women's silenced experiences, voices, and stories to be told, mapped, and shared, and hence, contribute to the ways in which we make knowledge about the world and our senses of place in it. By creating new knowledges of women's lives and experiences that have been marginalized based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality, feminist autoethnographers can reclaim their authority and sovereignty over their own narratives and knowledge-making. (491)

Ernaux's text proves above idea by documenting her mother's life and through it, the lives of countless other working-class women of her mother's generation and community. Her autoethnographic approach ensures that these marginalized stories are no longer invisible. She writes this autoethnographic text by breaking silence and eventually reclaiming the voices of the subjugated people's experiences.

Ernaux also portrays the intersection of gender and class issues across three generations of women; her grandmother, mother, and herself, within the sociocultural, historical and political context of the early and mid-twentieth century France. By chronicling their struggles and resilience, Ernaux highlights the double exploitation imposed by patriarchy and bourgeois oppression which shape their lives in distinct yet interconnected ways. Combined issue of class and gender which is attributed in the text also reveals the broader implications of personal experiences as political, grounding the text in a feminist and socio-historical discourse. With similar kind of note on class and gender intersection, along with personal as political, Lyn Thomas and Emma Web in their review state:

> If class is in many ways Ernaux's dominant theme, it is never separated from issues of gender and sexuality. . . Later, in *A Woman's Story*, Ernaux makes the combination of political and personal motivation in her writing abundantly clear; she is concerned to bring her working-class culture of origin into literature, through the account of her mother's life. (29)

Their observation underscores Ernaux's commitment to mix class and gender issues along with framing her mother's life and other working class women of her mother's community within a broader social and political discourse bridging the personal and the political.

In the early twentieth century, Ernaux's grandmother exemplifies the double burden of gender and class oppression. She "earned a living from cottage weaving" (12) and "laid down the law, made sure her children were taught their place" (13) reflect the dual burden of bearing the role of housewife and also a worker. Her role as "an energetic worker" (14) highlights her physical and emotional labor to sustain her family. Despite limited resources and poverty, she excelled as a good housekeeper

"she managed to feed and clothe her family on practically no money at all" (14). The decline of cottage weaving pushed her into other menial jobs "she took in people's laundry and cleaned offices" (15). These experiences reflect the systemic exploitation of working-class women since that time when they were expected to shoulder domestic and economic responsibilities with little support, wages and recognition.

Moving to her mother's generation around the mid-twentieth century France also reveals a similar pattern of dual exploitation, intensified by her mother's role as a working-class mother though her mother's life is marked by progress in terms of occupation. After marriage, her mother and father ran a small grocery shop and cafe. Ernaux notes her mother's exhausting juggling act between professional and domestic spheres: "Not a moment to herself, I'm sure, what with rushing in and out of the shop, the café, and the kitchen" (28). Her mother's hard work is evident: "She was always in a rush" (40). The double life of serving customers with risk of loss and managing the household depicts her mother's perpetual state of exhaustion: "She had two expressions, one for the customers and one for us. . . Back in the kitchen, she flopped into a chair and the smile faded. . . exhausted by the role she had taken on. . . she worked so hard for people who, she was sure, would stop coming to her as soon as they 'found somewhere cheaper'" (40). Arguments with Ernaux's father further revealed the gendered division of labor, as her mother repeatedly asserted "I'm the one who does everything around here" (41). These experiences showcase how her mother and her mother's generation's working-class women's struggle were deeply rooted in the double burden of patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies.

While Eranux's education and professional opportunities differentiate her from her grandmother's and mother's time, the continuation of gender and class based oppression persists at her time too. Ernaux recounts her mother's gut feelings

towards her husband's family and her mother's advice on the eve of her wedding day:

> My mother had mixed feelings about my husband's family. Although she admired their style, their manners, and their education, and was naturally proud to see her daughter fit in, she feared that beneath their icy politeness they held her in contempt…the advice she gave me on the eve of my wedding day: "Make sure you're a good housewife, otherwise he might send you back." Of my mother-in-law, she once said a few years ago: Anyone can see she wasn't brought up the way we were. (56)

Complex intersection of class and gender shapes the anxieties and expectations on the side of her mother surrounding Ernaux's marriage. While she admires the social mobility her daughter's marriage represents, she remains deeply wary of the class-based humiliation and anxiety her daughter might develop due to marrying to a little well to do and educated family's son. Her advice to Ernaux on the eve of wedding underscores the deep-rooted patriarchal norms that bind women's worth to their domestic roles, warning Ernaux to conform to patriarchal expectations in order to avoid rejection from her husband. Her mother's comment about her mother-in-law further illustrates the internalized class insecurity of whether her daughter will fit to that house of new customs and upbringing than their own.

Ernaux's own life mirrors her mother's struggles in some respects. Despite her education and professional achievements, she too remains tethered to traditional gender roles, as evident in her account of marriage and motherhood, "What with cooking the meals, bringing up a young child, and teaching at a *lycee* in the mountains forty kilometers from home, I too became a woman with no time to spare" (57). Though she achieves upward mobility through education and a teaching career, she faces the same double exploitation her grandmother and mother endured, exposing

how gender and class based oppression persisted across generations.

Ernaux's narrative combines personal and political dimensions as stated by Thomas and Webb. Through the lives of her grandmother, mother and herself, she represents the double exploitation faced by women based on class and gender across different generations. By transforming her family's struggles into literature, she not only preserves their stories but also provides voices to all working-class women's silenced experiences. She also reflects how individual lives are shaped by, and can challenge, societal norms. She amplifies the voices of countless women whose lives remain at the margins of history and literature.

Ernaux's socio-political consciousness is clearly reflected in her work as she aims to connect her own and her family's experiences of class humiliation to working-class individuals of French society collectively who struggle to attain class mobility but at the same time, face internalized class humiliation and insecurity due to working class root. Her work becomes not only a personal testament but also a socio-political commentary on the oppressive dynamics of class.

Reflecting on her mother's efforts to assimilate the dominant middle-class culture after her family's socio-economic ascent, Ernaux writes: "She longed to learn the rules of good behavior and was always worrying about the social conventions, fearful of doing the wrong thing" (43). The anxiety is also seen in her mother's determination to equip Ernaux with the tools of upward mobility such as "good shoes, warm clothes, all the right stationery needed for class" and her enrollment in "private establishment run by nuns, not at the local primary school" (38). Her mother also encourages her to adopt the manners and language of bourgeoisie and in turn, becomes curious to learn herself using her daughter's education as a means to elevate herself culturally "In the evening, over dinner, she would make me talk about school,

the teachers, and the subjects I was taught. She liked using the same expressions as me, such as ‘break’, ‘PE’, and ‘prep’. She expected me to correct her when she had used the wrong word” (43-44). This need for approval, shaped by her working-class roots, marks the internalized inferiority experienced by those gaining upward mobility.

Ernaux also highlights the tastes and cultural preferences of ordinary people like Ernaux’s family members whose tastes and preferences are distinct from those of elite people. Dominant elites prioritize intellectual pursuits like reading books than local newspapers, visiting museums than circus and fairs, and carrying out intellectual jobs than common gardening. Elite people are soft-spoken and well-mannered but her “mother’s violent temper, outbursts of affection, and reproachful attitude” (38) shows different social background than theirs. Elites speak correctly with fluency. Ernaux states her father’s inclination towards his own working-class root’s culture and choices, whereas her mother’s eagerness to adopt dominant middle-class culture and choices: “He didn’t care about speaking properly and continued to use expressions in the local dialect. She, on the other hand, tried to avoid making grammatical mistakes and chose her words carefully” (41-42). She asserts that “my father would read only the local newspaper” (41) but about her mother “she read the same books I read, the ones recommended by the local bookshop” (44). Similarly, she further shows the differences “He took me to the funfair, to the circus, and to see Fernandel’s films. He taught me how to ride a bicycle and recognize the garden vegetables. With him I had fun, with her I had conversations” (45). Her mother’s effort in teaching her daughter about elite people’s culture is evident “when she took me to the museum, it wasn’t so much for the pleasure of admiring Egyptian vases, but for the satisfaction of helping me acquire the knowledge and the tastes that she attributed to cultivated people” (44).

These difference between her own father and mother in the same family shows the psychological fractures that children of such families' experience as a result of class mobility.

Despite her efforts to rise above her class origin, Ernaux's mother encounters humiliation even after Ernaux marries a man from socially more proper family than theirs. Ernaux recalls how her mother feels alienated during her visit to her daughter's married house "Living with us was like living in a world that welcomed her and rejected her at the same time" (61). This humiliation is expressed when her mother angrily declares: "I don't think I belong here" (61). Ernaux herself recognizes this shared experience of unease, comparing her mother's discomfort to her own feelings as a teenager when she is introduced to people "a cut above" her family (62). Her mother's unease, shyness, subservience and frustration such as her reluctance to "answer the phone when it rang next to her", her habit of "entering the living room" only after knocking when "her son-in-law was watching football on television" (61) and her irritation after losing her role as a caretaker and worker when a dishwasher was purchased "I can't spend all day reading! What am I going to do now?" (65) underscores her continued internalization of inferiority complex even though her daughter and son-in-law had not treated her in wrong way. Such types of overall humiliating experiences are not only personal as these can be experience of many with similar family background having working class root. This connection between personal experiences and other's experiences in Ernaux's writing resonates with Collinson's perspective who is the theorist of feminist autoethnography:

> Autoethnography seeks to connect the personal to the social, the cultural, and the political, and locates self/selves, however shifting, transient and fragmentary, and others within a social context. It asks us continually to shift

> the research lens back and forth from the "auto" to the "ethno" and to recognize that we need fundamentally and analytically to acknowledge the interplay between the two; the link is indissoluble. Autoethnographers thus boldly traverse, blur, and threaten the putative distinctions of the personal and the social, and of self and other. (297)

The above perspective of Collinson aligns with Ernaux's approach in *A Woman's Story* in which her narrative shifts from her own, her mother's and her family's experience of class humiliation to collective implication within a larger social and political context. The humiliation tied to class is not an individual failing but a reflection of systemic inequalities.

Ernaux's narrative has not isolated her own and her family's personal experiences from similar kind of political experiences but has situated them within the collective struggles of working-class individuals navigating class mobility. Through her autoethnographic mode of writing, Ernaux blurs the boundaries between personal and social, self and other by illustrating the indissoluble link between individual lives and the structures that shape them.

Ellis defines "artful autoethnography" as "autoethnographic works that employ artistic methods, modes of inquiry and forms of representation (qtd. in Jones, Adams, and Ellis 460). Ernaux employs artistic techniques such as ambiguous title, cultural metaphors along with description of photographic images that provide contextual information and represent wider society. The selection of the title 'A Woman's Story' by Ernaux which is ambiguous highlights the inseparability of the personal and the political. On the one level, it refers to the personal stories of Ernaux and her mother, closely tied to their emotional, and relational dynamics. On another level, through the representation of her working-class mother's struggles, she gestures

towards the collective struggles of working-class women in the early and mid-twentieth century France, whose efforts to transcend class boundaries were marked by silent sacrifices and class humiliation. This duality, singular or plural in the title reflects how individual experiences are embedded within broader socio-political context. By refusing to delimit the title to only one perspective, she suggests that the personal is inherently political, as the individual narratives of struggle, aspiration and identity are deeply interwoven with the collective history of class and gender oppression.

Anderson and Coffin assert, "Often photographic images are presented in autoethnographic texts in tandem with the researchers' narratives of their interpretations and contextual understandings of the photos" (qtd. in Jones, Adams, and Ellis 69). Similarily, in her autoethnographic writing project *A Woman's Story*, Ernaux makes use of description of family photograph that provides contextual information especially with regard to working class culture and identity. In the description of wedding photograph of her father and mother, Ernaux brings cultural metaphors like non-smiling faces of her parents and apple trees. Parents never smile in family photos who belong to the working class origin: "She isn't smiling but her face wears a serene expression. . . His brows are knitted and he looks worried. May be he is afraid the photograph will come out wrong" (25).

Ernaux also brings images of two apple trees in the very description, "[T]he leaves of two apple trees interlace to form a dome above their heads" (25). Apple trees also serve as a cultural metaphor for her parents' working class root. Her mother was grown up in working class background where their livelihood was based on horticulture and farming. In description of her mother's childhood, she writes that her mother enjoyed "outdoor life of a little country girl" which involved "shaking the fruit

off apple trees" (17). She also states, "[T]he apple cider that ruined one's teeth" in the section of her mother's childhood (16). In the geographic and demographic context of Ernaux's parents, apple cider was the beverage of choice, and apple trees represent the working class people's horticulturally reliant way of life. She also describes the post-war scenario of her family life; "As before, they had taken over a general store and a small café. . . there was a large courtyard, a cider press, and several barns for storing firewood, straw and hay. . . Although my father ran the café, he managed to find time to look after the garden, keep a few rabbits and hens, and make apple cider, which we sold to the customers" (34-35). This shows that her parents working-class backgrounds had less to do with bourgeoisie notion of culture and more to be inclined in gardening. Apple trees, cider press and apple cider denote not only the identity of Ernaux parents who belong to working-class root but also of collective working-class people of France.

Ernaux also brings references of two different flowers, forsythia and white lilies while attending and arranging her mother's funeral. The flowers have different languages and codes as per the class distinction. Lily symbolizes the code of bourgeoisie values in which they need to be bought from florist. Ernaux depicts clash of codes between two different social classes when she went to buy white lilies for her mother's funeral: "I asked for white lilies but the florist advised against them: they were suitable only for children, possibly for young girls" (5). She feels embarrassed because she seems to be illiterate in the aristocrat's flower codes as she does not possess knowledge on the norms of etiquette when it comes to selecting the proper flower in such a mournful social setting.

On the other hand, forsythia symbolizes the code of proletariat as they are naturally available and need not be purchased from florist shop like lilies. Forsythia is

the flower Ernaux offers to her mother the day before her passing. She tries to convey through forsythia that the flower is suitable for her mother who has proletariat root and her mother accepts that flower too: "[T]he Sunday after Easter, I went to see her with some forsythia . . . I arranged the forsythia branches in a vase. . . At one period, she grabbed at the flowers in the vase. . . She died the next day" (83-84). Giving her mother forsythia implies that Ernaux made the proper gesture by providing the correct flower that avoids conflict of norms between two social classes. Ernaux mentions this same bouquet of forsythia that she took with her to see her mother at Sunday in the beginning of text: "On the trolley stood the bunch of forsythia I had bought the day before" (2).

The metaphor of 'giving birth to her mother' is also evident in her text through mentioning the period of starting and ending of writing the very book, "Sunday 20 April 1986 - 26 February 1987" (87). This period of about ten months which she spent to write about her mother is same as the period of normal pregnancy. After writing this book, she brings her mother into the literary realm and she views this writing process as a means of giving birth to her mother, not a physical birth but a symbolic rebirth. Writing about her mother and bringing her to the literary world also denotes Ernaux's returning to her origin of working class root. It is through her mother's struggle and selflessness that Ernaux becomes successful in life, "she was ready to make any sacrifice if it meant a better life for me" (51). She also recalls her past which helped to shape her present giving due emphasis to her mother: "It was her voice, together with her words, her hands, and her way of moving and laughing, which linked the woman I am to the child I once was" (87). Ernaux with the usage of these metaphors and peripheral details not only uncovers the personal details but also collective details about French society at large.

After attaining success and upgrading her status equivalent to elite, she achieved her mother's eager dream for her through writing this book. She conveys that she has not forgotten her working class root. She states, "I would like to remain a cut below literature" (12) which expresses her simplicity in attaching to the side of working class root. She does not want to write in a style that differs from that of the folks who raised her and the community where she grew up. Yulia Kosova, Elena Ponomarenko, and Gerard Siary introduce Ernaux's concept of flat writing. By keeping those people in mind, she adopts her own way of writing, "flat writing" which is characterized by "a simple statement of facts and archiving of objective traces of the existence of workers and peasants . . . closer to the language of sociological or ethnographic research" (122). Ernaux's flat prose style (as a matter of fact style) reveals sentence structures and language of working class people which she has kept inside double inverted commas in her text. Though she has adopted her own flat-writing style (*ecriture plate/writing like a knife*), the insertion of artistic techniques proves that her writing is afterall not so flat.

Ernaux's *A Woman's Story* is an example of her own defined and coined genre auto-socio-biographique. By including narrative voices from both the individual and the communal, her creative genre concentrates on political sphere. That is why, Ernaux's creation of this genre in French context is close to autoethnography in the US and the European context because of having the same motif, objective and politics. Marcus Twellmann and Philipp Lammers state that "Ernaux used the label 'auto-socio-biographique' for the texts in which she seeks to make her own life transparent with regard to social structures" (50). Her academic success distances her from her parents' world and her working class root, "the last bond between me and the world I come from has been severed" (87). She after writing this book, addressing

to her mother and every working class women's community, is a proof that she is returning to her origin which resembles with Twellmann and Lammers's view on goal of autosociobiography "to address the long hushed-up fact that class difference persists and to convey to readers a consciousness of their own class affiliation" (53). This book sets a powerful example of converting her own despair into a luxury.

Ernaux feels that writing about her working class root, origin and culture is therapeutic for her which is also essential to her identity albeit she gained better status: "It was only when my mother-born in an oppressed world from which she wanted to escape-became history that I started to feel less alone and out of place in a world ruled by words and ideas, the world where she had wanted me to live" (87). Twellmann and Lammers state two elements of autosociobiography, "the return narrative and class. The interconnection of the two yields a distinct and peculiarly static image of society" (53). In the same manner, Ernaux presents wider discussion of political topics like class and her return to origin narrative, inside which she is able to connect herself and her family's story/ history with society.

The present study finds out that Ernaux has adopted her own defined genre of life writing auto-socio-biographique in *A Woman's Story* which resembles to autoethnography that both of them help to connect personal with the political/social. Her main aim is to situate her own and her mother's story within larger socio-political, cultural and historical context of the twentieth century France. She raises the political issues of class and gender and under it, she exposes the personal experiences of her grandmother, mother and many working class women who struggle to attain class mobility despite facing double marginalization and humiliation due to belonging in working class root. Her work follows many features of autoethnography like hybrid genre, positioning her own and mother's story within stories of others; the others

denote the community of working class women, focus on wider socio-cultural, political and historical context, use of cultural memory to reflect collective experiences, emphasis on relational self, ethical and political relationality, giving voice to the voiceless, as well as both self-focused and other-focused.

Furthermore, the narrative also highlights the return to origin. Ernaux's experiences of class mobility as a result of her academic excellence but her mental 'homecoming' comes in terms with her working-class root after writing this particular book on her mother. This illustrates not only experience of Ernaux but also other people who are forced to adopt the culture of bourgeoisie as a result of their academic excellence and forget their own working class root. As she is the witness to many incidents and struggles of her working class family and their background, she wants to exactly portray the same thing as it is. For this, she adopts the method called autoethnography which provides justice to her writing.

Additionally, Ernaux's personal does not directly become political as there is specific chronological order. Her main concern is to bring her mother to literary world, so she focuses her writing to find out truth about her mother. As her mother and she herself have shared history of class humiliation and many other French sociopolitical context, she, while writing about her mother, brings her own story side by side which depicts ethical relationality. Then only, she is concerned towards other working class women of her mother's generation and community, and addresses them which shows political relationality. Her mother becomes a representative figure for all working class women of early and the mid-twentieth century France who struggled and suffered silently and who are not included in history and literature. So, Ernaux's concern is not only to document her own and her mother's life story (ethical) but also to address and tribute to every working class woman's struggles and resilience

(political).

Ernaux's use of flat writing, description of photographic images, ambiguous title, and cultural metaphors all seem to be peripheral details but they help to support indirectly the politics of feminist autoethnography; personal as political. As majority of the study concentrates to analyze *A Woman's Story* through the lens of autoethnography highlighting on personal and collective dimensions, the new researchers are encouraged to consider Marxist-Feminist framework highlighting on class and gender, capitalism and patriarchy as well as double exploitation or marginalization faced by working class women since ages.

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