

IDENTITY CRISIS IN MARITA GOLDEN'S AND DO REMEMBER ME

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Abstract: African American women writers depicted the sufferings of African American women in American society. The recurrent theme of their writings revolved around women and their searching for identity. Marita Golden is one of the important writers of 20th century. She is a memoirist, essayist and novelist. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the women characters quest for identity in Marita Golden's *And Do Remember Me*. Jessie and Macon in *And Do Remember Me* became life friends in the dangerous confrontations of the civil rights revolution. Jessie continued to rebuild her life, discovered her niche as a professional actress and changed her name to Pearl Moon. She reunited with her mother at the end. Macon found herself as a successful professor.

Keywords: Civil rights movement, Friendship, Quest for identity, Self-realization.

Introduction: The Dictionary.com defines 'Identity Crisis' as "a period or episode of psychological distress, often occurring in adolescence but sometimes in adulthood, when a person seeks a clearer sense of self and an acceptable role in society" (i). The term was coined by Psychologist Erik Erikson. According to him, the emergence of an identity crisis occurs during the teenage years in which people struggle between feelings of identity versus role confusion. The main point of the identity crisis theory is that they emerge not only because of the changes in the individual alone, but even more because of the change of the socio-cultural environment.

The identity crisis theme is used many of the writers in various literatures. The theme of most of the novels written by Black women writers in recent years have been the individual and collective identity among Afro-American Women. Tate discussed that identity quest takes a very important, unique and significant place in African American literature. The black women writers registered their struggle in the midst of "growing isolation, meaninglessness and moral decay" (ix). Furthermore she added that the black women were "... ensconced by her community, dependant on friends and realities for strength during times of hardship" (xx). Black women's quest is more of an internal than an external one.

The theme was employed by many of the African American women writers like Toni Morrison, Maya Angelo and etc. Marita Golden is one of the important writers of 20th century African American literature. She is the author of five novels, three autobiographies and numerous anthologies. In addition she is a memoirist and essayist. In her works, Golden effectively captures the tension and enriching qualities of the mother and daughter identity crises through skillful manipulation of narrative point of view.

Golden's *And Do Remember Me* (1992) traces the lives of two African American women, Jessie and Macon.

St. Petersburg Times reviewed the novel that it is "An engaging saga of unconditional friendship, love, and forgiveness...Golden's style is modern, refreshing and accurately captures a slice of African-American life." In an interview Golden said, "I knew about *And Do Remember Me*, that I wanted to meld a story about the civil rights movement with a story of a woman trying to find a place in the world and in her heart to be safe and free" (Wordpress.com).

Jessie escapes from a dysfunctional family in Mississippi, where she was a victim of father-daughter incest, into civil rights movement. Lincoln Sturgis, a civil rights activist and writer, picked up Jessie as she stood by the blazing highway, and from there she joined the movement people at the height of the marches, sit-ins, jailing, and dangerous confrontations of the Civil Rights revolution. She formed a close friendship with the civil right activist Macon, the only person with whom she could unburden herself about her incestuous past. After Macon graduated from Bennet, she married Courtland Hightower, a professor.

Lincoln talked continuously which satisfied a hunger in Jessie. He liked to have conversation with her and found hard to say good-bye. So that he took her to Greenwood. Whatever she spoke, she always remembered her past. "And in her house Jessie had always been lonely. Then she had learned to be afraid. Afraid of white men. Afraid of her father. Because she knew so well the feeling of fear, she knew when she was safe" (ADRM 15). He was furious to know why Jessie had run away from home. But she was not ready to reveal and gave assurance that one day she would tell him everything.

With the help of Lincoln, Jessie found her skill in acting. Her acting was appreciated by everyone. She surrendered herself to the characters. "...When she stood on the stage, basking in the heartfelt applause of her Freedom School students, the women she had been jailed with, people from the Freedom House and townspeople, Jessie didn't know if she would ever

forgive Lincoln for pushing her this far, or how she could ever thank him" (ADRM 62). She became an actress and moved to New York. She changed her name to Pearl Moon which came to her one night in her dream. "... In the vortex of that luminous, breathless light she felt herself touched by the hand of what she decided to call God...Nobody would name a child Pearl Moon. A made-up name, a theatrical name, a name too beautiful for a real person. And that's why she chose it. Because she wanted her life to be filled with ecstatic moments of grace like the one that had come to her in the dream" (ADRM 85-6). By changing her name, she changed her identity. Soon after they arrived to New York, Pearl revealed everything to Lincoln. He couldn't bear the betrayal because they were together for six years. Increasingly, though, there were Pearl's drinking bout and then another terrible rape, as well as the loss of Lincoln. When the doctor advised her to stop drinking or die, the latter frightened her. So she stopped drinking not to live but to act.

When Lincoln suggested for getting married, pearl said, "I wouldn't make a good wife, Lincoln. You deserve better. Better than me" (ADRM 109). But Lincoln said, "I want to protect you, Pearl. I want to take care of you. I want you to be mine" (ADRM 109). The remembrance was worse than before. He inquired her but the answer he received was everything fine. "He loved her. And she was killing him. Her silence. Her scars. Her refusal to once and for all let him inside where it was cold and windswept, but where, if she relaxed her vigilance, she need not be alone. Alone, encased in a history that imprisoned her and that she clung to, was who she was the day they met. It was who she remained" (ADRM 126). Whenever he mentioned Raj's name, he could sense Pearl withdraw and pull back something. So that he met Raj and hit him severely. When Lincoln was moving to L.A., even after their fight, he asked her to come with him. But Pearl replied that she would wait for him. Lincoln stayed for months in L.A. and sent postcards which she didn't answer. Eventually, it became shorter and stopped coming at all.

Lincoln became famous and was a script director. He waited for a long time for Pearl that she would say she needed him. But he wondered that his absence didn't disintegrate her talent 'rather it had spiraled into a thunderous shout that drowned out whatever personal demons had tried to bring her down' (143). He was married and going to be a father soon but he felt more trepidation than joy. Whenever he arrived to New York, Pearl managed to be out of town. But she decided to meet him when he called her last. When they met, they shared their personal and Lincoln felt sorry for he left her. They departed as though they were never going to meet in future.

When Pearl received the call from her mother about her father's illness, she charged, "Why do you want to steal from me what I have a right to feel? I paid too. Mama, I've got to go now. Call me and tell me when I can come home. Call me and tell me when it'll finally be safe" (ADRM 174). She hated her mother because whenever she tried to tell about her father's abuse to her mother, Olive Foster, she turned her deaf ears to her words. "I don't want to hear nothing about that man, or what he's done" (ADRM 11).

To her father's funeral, Pearl was back to Mississippi. Pearl decided not to cry on her father's death and swore never to forgive her mother. Olive called her as Jessie and asked her to tell everything and held her tightly. Pearl did cry and love and hate had merged, reshaping memory with a finally perfect hand. Olive was not ready to ask forgiveness from her daughter and not ready to ready to put God between them.

There she heard the story of her mother, whom she had thought had betrayed her. Her mother asked, "Jessie, tell me everything" (191). To that question Pearl didn't know where to start and where to stop. "Mothers are daughters, their yearnings transposed, voices seeking perfect pitch.... Mothers are daughters choosing the end of their own story, guiding others to sculpt their own" (191-92). In her home, Pearl was changed as Jessie again.

Macon Fields was an intelligent girl who skipped two grades in elementary school. "...While she had absorbed a bristling sense of the world's enduring injustice from her parents' political activism, she possessed the thoughtful demeanor of a woman who had considered more than once giving up on the world" (ADRM 34). When Courtland addressed American History class, she found herself attracted towards him. She was convinced that he was the man her mother had counseled her to wait for.

Macon and Courtland had spent their married life fighting for various political battles and had lost the marriage in the process. When they found about her problem, she suggested adoption. But Courtland said, "I want my own child, not somebody else's" (ADRM 134). They had dreams for their children, but everything shattered. "While Courtland felt he could only be a father to his specific seed, Macon was eager to love any motherless child. Her husband had left her with no way out, no way to win" (ADRM 135). When Courtland was not ready to adopt a child, divorce was the only thing they were able to agree in the end.

Macon was a tenured, senior faculty member, the author of two respected books yet she felt vulnerable and unsure. She had seen different sets of students every year. She taught sociology at Jefferson College in Fairfax, Virginia, where her students were mostly young and white. She tried to help African American students cope with campus racism. Their questions

turned her into a student. “Reality was what stared back at her from the eyes of her students, what she found in the politics of various departments” (ADRM 155).

Macon encountered breast cancer. During her hospitalization, Pearl helped her. “Macon, so independent, so self-sufficient, had subtly tried to resist Pearl’s competent, nurturing hand. But after a while, her protests that she was fine had exhausted her” (ADRM 159). They used to talk about old miseries, old defeats, redefined that which made them friends. “It was Pearl who was there when

Macon was sick to her stomach from the chemo, holding her hand while she wretched in the bathroom and it was Pearl who cleaned up after her as if she were a baby” (ADRM 161).

Golden vividly portrayed the identity crisis and female bonding in this novel. Jessie and Macon were struggled to recreate themselves and their world – and learn to love the fight. By entering into the civil rights movement they discovered their self. Furthermore, they found their space in the society as an actress (Pearl) and a Professor (Macon).

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