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Winsom, "Yemaya," (detail, tryptich), oils on canvas, 122 x 459 cm., 1999.

"Yemaya is the first mother and with her the human race multiplies. She is mother of the world. She is the blood of the earth, the giver of life to all who live on this planet. Yemaya rules the house, nurtures the child in the waters of the womb, and has jurisdiction over the affairs of women. Nothing in this world can exist without Yemaya. Power is the name of Yemaya."

Cassie Premo Steele

Drawing Strength from Our Mothers

Tapping the Roots of Black Women's History

In an essay from 1984, Audre Lorde, the African American poet and writer asked Afro-German women to ask themselves, "How can I draw strength from my roots when these roots are entwined in such a terrible history?"(Lorde, 1992: viii). Lorde's own writings can be read as an answer to this very question.[1]

In her biomythography, *Zami*, Lorde (1982) turns to the mother as both a literal and a figural image that will provide her with mother roots from which she can draw strength and survival. By turning to the figural image of the mother, she fits her narrative into the traditions of American women's writing, black women's autobiography, and lesbian narratives. Lorde's *Zami* ends with a final scene of reunion with the mythological, sexual/spiritual mother, Afrekete, through whom Lorde regains her connections to her sexual and spiritual motherland, Africa, and in whom Lorde finds the sexual and spiritual ritual that will enable her to heal from the historical traumas of slavery and colonization.

Before turning to the mythological mother, Afrekete, I will first discuss the personal and historical mothers Lorde embraces. For while other critics have emphasized the significance of this figural black goddess in Lorde's work, I will show how Lorde not only is left to *imagine the figure* of the mother in her writing, but also is able to take from *her own real mother* both the literal and figural roots that she needs.[2] Her mother provides her with a way of turning to history and also writing her story into history. Lorde's specific history places her in a line of descent that can be traced through her mother, an immigrant in Harlem, to her mother's birthplace, the West Indian island of Carriacou, and back to Africa, from where her mother's ancestors were sold as slaves. Further, her mother also provides the seeds for the "metaphor"

of the sexual and spiritual mother-figure, Afrekete, through whom Audre creates a ritual of healing.

Grounding her narrative in matrilineal history and myth allows Lorde to find and take root: to form her identity. In this section, I will examine the ways in which Lorde digs this root through, first, her portrayal of her mother and the particular knowledges about spirituality and sexuality that her mother gives to the young Audre. In the next section, I will look at how Lorde incorporates her reasearch into the culture and myths of Carriacou, her mother's place of birth, and into her narrative in ways that give Lorde's own life meaning and context. Ultimately, Lorde's matrilineage will take her back to Africa to the myth of Afrekete, the great mother.[3] As we will see in the final section, these scenes of healing union between sexuality and spirituality, and between Lorde and the mother, are all the more powerful given Lorde's own history of sexual abuse, numbness, and silence. As Lorde comes to union, feeling, and writing, she connects her own healing journey with the historical journeys of women of the global diaspora, women whose histories are laden with personal and collective sexual trauma.[4]

Lorde's narrative in *Zami* begins by focusing on her mother, Linda, and the wisdom that she passes on to Audre from her birth place of Carriacou.[5] Linda Lorde had emigrated to America with Audre's father, a Barbadian, in 1924, when she was 27 and he was 26 (1982: 9). Their new home in America never really feels like home to them. To counteract her feelings of loss, Lorde's mother tells her daughters "stories about Carriacou, where she had been born" (1982: 13) amid "the hills of Carriacou between L'Esterre and Harvey Vale" (1982: 14).

By these stories, Lorde's mother teaches her a form of spirituality that was different from the Catholicism she was learning in school:

> She knew about mixing oils for bruises and rashes, and about dispos-
> ing of all toenail clippings and hair from the comb. About burning
> candles before All Souls Day to keep the soucoyants away, lest they
> suck the blood of her babies. She knew about blessing the food and
> yourself before eating, and about saying prayers before going to sleep.
> (1982: 10)

Although Audre did not know it at the time, her mother was passing on the particular mix of Catholic and African spirituality of the people of Carriacou, which includes beliefs in witches who suck the blood of babies and the celebration of All Souls Day on November 2 (Hill, 1977: 330). Similarly, Lorde writes that her mother "taught us one [prayer] to the mother that I never learned in school" (1982: 10), a prayer to the Virgin, *"my sweet mother"* (1982: 10). In these ways Lorde's earliest spiritual teachings included mixes of Catholicism and African spirituality, held together by the female imagery of a mother who would care for and protect her.

At the same time that she was learning about spirituality from her mother, Lorde also learned an appreciation for the female physical body. This is demonstrated early in the narrative in a scene where her mother combs her hair as she sits between her mother's legs: "I remember the warm mother smell caught between her legs, and the intimacy of physical touching nestled inside of the anxiety/pain like a nutmeg nestled inside its covering of mace" (Lorde, 1982: 33). Claudine Raynaud writes that this scene:

> expresses her rapport with her mother, her sense of belonging to the island of Carriacou, and discloses the source of her lesbianism.... The rich red color of the mace netting before the nutmeg is dried.... is the secret sign of home, the island of Carriacou, of Grenada, one of the main producers of nutmeg. (1988: 227)

And directly following this scene in the narrative is a tender scene of Saturday morning in bed with mother where "Warm milky smells of morning surround us" (Lorde, 1982: 34), a scene that likewise shows the importance of the physical, maternal presence in Lorde's development.

Closely connected to the spiritual and the physical are the sensuous descriptions of her mother's West Indian mortar: "I loved to finger the hard roundness of the carved fruit, and the always surprising termination of the shapes as the carvings stopped at the rim and the bowl sloped abruptly downward, smoothly oval but abruptly businesslike" (1982: 71). In her mother's kitchen, Lorde feels the stirrings of sexual desire:

> with one hand firmly pressed around the carved side of the mortar caressing the wooden fruit with my aromatic fingers. I thrust sharply downward, feeling the shifting salt and the hard little pellets of garlic right up through the shaft of the wooden pestle. Up again, down, around, and up.... All of these transported me into a world of scent and rhythm and movement and sound that grew more and more exciting as the ingredients liquefied. (1982: 74)

Raynaud (1988) connects this with African culture and myth since the "stone for oil crushing is a symbol for female genitalia" in a village of Sudan (Griaule qtd. in Raynaud, 1988: 95). And on the day of her first menstruation, Audre's mother shows again an appreciation for the female body by agreeing to cook Audre's favorite dish for supper. While her mother is gone to get tea, Audre prepares the spices: "I smelled the delicate breadfruit smell rising up from the front of my print blouse that was my own womansmell, warm, shameful, but secretly utterly delicious" (Lorde, 1982: 77). Then the narrator, as a grown woman, relates her fantasy of her mother and herself, "slowly, thoroughly, our touching and caressing each other's most secret places" (1982: 78). As she grinds the spices, "There was a heavy fullness at the root of me that

was exciting and dangerous" (1982: 78). In the narrative to follow, Lorde will trace this root through her matrilineage to arrive at an understanding of the connection between the spiritual and the sexual. At this point, however, this root is "shameful" and "dangerous" because of the pain associated with it, coupled with the prohibitions against speaking of the pain. In breaking these prohibitions, Lorde rewrites history, both personal and collective.

While as a child Audre was learning these sexual and spiritual lessons from her mother, it was not until she was an adult that she was able to connect the teachings of her mother with a larger, historical narrative. Lorde writes that as an immigrant from an island that could not be found on any map, "my mother was different from the other women I knew" (1982: 15). Her parents speak in patois (1982: 15), using words the meanings of which Lorde can only guess, words that she calls "my mother's secret poetry" (1982: 32).[6] Growing up, her mother would tell her of "the Sunday-long boat trips that took her to Aunt Anni's in Carriacou" (1982: 11). Carriacou first enters Lorde's consciousness as a legend that provides her with a vision of women together:

> Here Aunt Anni lived among the other women who saw their men off on the sailing vessels, then tended goats and groundnuts, planted grain and poured rum on the earth to strengthen the corn's growing, built their women's houses and the rainwater catchments, harvested the limes, wove their lives and the lives of their children together. Women who survived the absence of their sea-faring men easily, because they came to love each other, past the men's returning.
>   *Madivine. Friending. Zami. How Carriacou women love each other is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and their beauty.* (1982: 13-14)

As she grows older, Lorde begins to think that her mother is crazy or mistaken, that there really is no place called Carriacou, but she still harbors hopes for its existence: "But underneath it all as I was growing up, *home* was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper" (1982: 14).

When she is 26 years old, Lorde finally locates Carriacou on a map in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which underlines the island's history as a colony. Anna Wilson (1992) writes that "The reality of Carriacou as a mapped space indicates the inexorable colonization of the world; but it also reinforces the need for Lorde to redescribe it, to give it a voice and a significance that is not the strangled one of the former colony" (Lorde, 1982: 83). As an adult, Lorde visits Grenada, the island where her mother lived after her family left Carriacou. There, she writes, "I saw the root of my mother's powers walking through the streets" (1982: 9). Although Lorde's visit to Grenada is not ostensibly part of the narrative, she incorporates this visit and her newfound knowledge of Carriacou into the narrative.

What Lorde discovers is that the love between women in Carriacou is not

only legend; it is also history. Since in Carriacou men go away for long periods of time on fishing and trade expeditions, the women have a practice of *zami*, or lesbianism, while the men are away.[7] In Carriacou the men say "women are hotter than men" and only women can satisfy other women (Smith, 1962: 199). Donald Hill (1977) writes, "One informant claimed that virtually every wife whose husband had gone away several years or more is a zami" (280). Further, the women very rarely stop lesbianism once they start (Smith, 1962: 200). When a man returns, it is often difficult for him to regain sexual favors from his wife, so he permits her to remain zami, "hoping she will become bisexual" (Hill, 1977: 281). Thus, through the history of Carriacou, Lorde finds the context that gives her own life meaning, the context of lesbian desire and practice.

However, this sexual matrilineage is not entirely separate from the spiritual roots that Lorde finds in Carriacou. From Hill and Smith, Lorde would have learned that Carriacou had been a French colony in the West Indies that imported slaves from Africa. The island became a British colony briefly during the American war of Independence in 1763 and then again in 1784. By then, French cultural forms (including Catholicism) had been established. After 1808, when Britain prohibited the importation of slaves to West Indian colonies, the elite left the island, leaving it an island of people of African descent whose inhabitants speak French patois and English dialect and in whom Catholicism is deeply rooted. Thus, the Catholic/African mix of religion that Lorde learned from her mother has its roots in the history of colonization and slavery in Carriacou. Further, the prayer to the "mother" that Lorde learned would be explained by the link between the Virgin and great goddess religions in Africa. Three basic elements of African spirituality that often survive colonization and are integrated into new forms of syncretic religion—mothering, the connection to the earth, and the connection of spirituality and sexuality—are dramatized in the narrative (see Mbiti, 1969; Karenga, 1882; Richards, 1990).

In describing her first sexual encounter in high school with her friend, Marie, Lorde writes, "We lay awake far into the night, snuggling under the covers by the light of the votive candle on Our Lady's altar in the corner, kissing and hugging and giggling in low tones so her mother wouldn't hear us" (1982: 120). Thus, Audre's first positive sexual experience happens in the presence of mothers—both the physical mother of Marie and the spiritual mother, Mary. This scene also sets up the connection between sexuality and spirituality that Lorde will draw in her subsequent sexual encounters.

In the description of Audre making love with a woman for the first time, Lorde writes, "I surfaced dizzy and blessed with her rich myrrh-taste in my mouth, in my throat, smeared over my face" (1982: 139). In this encounter, however, Audre goes down into blessing rather than up into danger, emphasizing the source of blessing from below, from the earth, rather than from heaven above. Also, the use of myrrh connotes a holy gift in Christianity, which shows Lorde's connection to elements of Christianity. We should note, as well,

that Audre's lovemaking with this woman, Ginger, happens with Ginger's mother's knowledge and in the mother's house.

Lorde again connects the syncretic nature of religion with the mother when in Mexico, her lover, Eudora, whom Lorde describes as having the mark of an Amazon from her mastectomy (1982: 169), teaches her how "the women in San Christobál de las Casas give the names of catholic saints to their goddesses" (1982: 170). Eudora also teaches her about the connections "between Mexico and Africa and Asia" and about the destruction of Aztec culture by the Europeans, a "genocide [that] rivals the Holocaust" (1982: 170). In addition to these lessons about history and mythology, Audre learns another lesson from Eudora, who "knew many things about loving women that I had not learned" (1982: 170): it is with Eudora that Audre allows herself to be made love to for the first time.

Finally, the Amazon from Africa and the myrrh from Jerusalem mix with the corn of America when Lorde writes of all her friends and lovers, fellow zamis, "Their names, selves, faces feed me like corn before labor" (1982: 256). This corn image again underscores Lorde's connection to goddess mythologies; the corn mother is a common image in many indigenous cultures of the Americas, and holds within it the power of fertility, the nourishment between generations, and the promise of democracy (see Awiakta). In all these ways, Lorde receives spiritual sustenance from her historical and cultural mothers in Africa, the Caribbean, and America.

The ultimate connection between sexuality and spirituality can be found in the final scenes of the narrative, which show Lorde's connection to her deepest mother root in Africa through the character of Afrekete. Significantly, just before the narrative turns toward Afrekete, there is a scene in which Audre boards a bus at a "corner," or crossroads:

> The bus door opened and I placed my foot upon the step. Quite suddenly, there was music swelling up in my head, as if a choir of angels had boarded the Second Avenue bus directly in front of me. They were singing the last chorus of an old spiritual of hope:
> Gonna die this death
> on Cal—va—ryyyyy
> BUT AIN'T GONNA
> DIE
> NO MORE…!
> … I suddenly stood upon a hill in the center of an unknown country, hearing the sky fill with a new spelling of my own name. (1982: 238-39)

This scene prefigures Lorde's transformation of her own African, Caribbean, African American, Christian backgound into the new self in "an unknown country" through syncretic combination. As we will see, the figure of

Afrekete functions as the conduit for the healing of all the different aspects of Lorde's history.

Further, the setting of the meeting between Audre and Afrekete shows that this union is not only one between Audre and Africa, but between Audre and all her cultural mothers. At the party where they meet, Afrekete and Audre dance to Frankie Lymon's "Goody, Goody," a Belafonte calypso, and a slow Sinatra (1982: 245), a particular mix of singers that parallels the mix of cultures that have combined to form Audre herself. After the party, Audre goes home with Afrekete to "Gennie's old neighborhood" (1982: 247), which connects Audre to her younger self and to the memory of her dead friend.

Background to the role of Afrekete in African myth will provide us with greater understanding of her significance for Lorde's "biomythography." According to Lorde herself in a conversation with Judy Grahn, Afrekete comes from the time of the "old thunder god religion," which preceded the Yoruban culture, in present-day Nigeria. According to Lorde, Afrekete is the female precursor to the Yoruban god, Eshu, the trickster, god of the crossroads. Henry Louis Gates characterizes Eshu as masculine:

> the divine linguist ... guardian of the crossroads, master of style and the stylus, phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of the mystical barrier that separates the divine from the profane world. (Lorde, 1982: 286-87)

Similarly, in *Women Reading/Women Writing*, Ana Louise Keating remarks that, through Afrekete, Lorde "appropriates for herself the linguistic authority generally associated with masculinity" (1996: 166). However, in defining Afrekete as *the precursor* to Eshu, Lorde stresses the figure's mixture of both masculine and feminine characteristics. As precursor, Afrekete is, we might say, the mother of Eshu.

In Yoruban mythology, the mother of Eshu is the god/dess of the crossroads, MawuLisa. Some critics do identify Afrekete as MawuLisa. Claudine Raynaud writes that Afrekete is a bisexual personification of Mawu (the moon, female) and Lisa (the sun, male): "Whenever there is an eclipse of the sun or the moon it is said that Mawu and Lisa are making love" (Parrinder, qtd. Raynaud, 1996: 237). Mary K. DeShazer (1986) also identifies Afrekete as MawuLisa, "a mother of both sorrow and magic ... [who] created the world" (185-186). Likewise, Ana Louise Keating connects Afrekete to MawuLisa by recalling that Lorde calls Eshu a son of MawuLisa in *The Black Unicorn*. (1996: 164- 65).

Rather than identifying Afrekete as either Eshu or MawuLisa, however, I want to stress the figure's syncretic function, as s/he brings together all the mothers—personal, historical, and mythological—in Lorde's narrative. Afrekete, thus, is part recuperation of cultural myth and part invention. Both cross-gendered and bisexual, Afrekete is both mother and master, nurturing and

philosophical; s/he shows that the values of "female" mothering and "male" competence with language and meaning are equally necessary in order to survive on these borders between cultures.[8]

The final scenes in *Zami* show the ultimate connection between sexuality and spirituality as they depict lovemaking as a rite, which includes references to mass, ritual, prayer, transubstantiation, and union. Lorde writes that her lovemaking with Afrekete is an act of "making moon honor love ... sacred as the ocean at high tide" (Lorde, 1982: 252). The site of the lovemaking occurs amid a "mass of green plants that Afrekete tended religiously" (1982: 250), and their motions imitate those of religious ritual: "squeezed the pale yellow-green fruit juice in thin ritual lines back and forth over and around your coconut-brown belly ... massaged it over your thighs and between your breasts until your brownness shone like a light through a veil" (1982: 251). Their coming together is a prayer: "Afrekete Afrekete ride me to the crossroads where we shall sleep, coated in the woman's power. The sound of our bodies meeting is the prayer of all strangers and sisters, that the discarded evils, abandoned at all crossroads, will not follow us upon our journeys" (1982: 252). It is a prayer to leave behind her own sufferings, like many prayers, but this prayer goes out not to an external deity but to a meeting of bodies, a connection that is both sexual and spiritual.

Most importantly, the lovemaking as religious rite concludes in transubstantiation. Transubstantiation implies change and becoming, mystery and magic, which, as in Christianity, is performed through the body; in this case it occurs through the body of Afrekete. Here Afrekete is identified as the youngest daughter of MawuLisa, who Lorde herself becomes as she incorporates the inheritance of her mothers: "Mawu-lisa, thunder, sky, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become" (1982: 255). As biological daughter of her own mother and spiritual daughter of her cultural mothers, Lorde, through her spiritual-sexual union with Afrekete, loves her mother and becomes her. In loving and becoming Afrekete, Lorde bodily inherits the mothers' histories and myths that give her the sustenance, nurturance, and stability to grow strong and tall.

Lorde writes, "Afrekete taught me roots" (1982: 250). Indeed, all her mothers—personal, historical, and mythological—provide her with the roots she needs to work through traumatic history. Digging up these roots, entwined with violence, pain and silence, enables Lorde not only to envision healing but to make it possible. This healing comes through a sexual-spiritual reclamation of her personal, historical, and mythological mother roots. In weaving these mothers into her narrative, Lorde links history and myth by showing how myths can change history. The histories of slavery, rape, and sexual abuse, and their consequences of silence, numbness, and pain, may be transformed, Lorde teaches, not when we leave these histories behind but when we return to them, as together we are witness to and are touched by the pain of the past. Only after such a process may traumatic history be accompanied by a history of matrilin-

eage, which leads us toward speaking, and loving, and healing. Lorde's biomythography is, finally, the complex history of all these mother roots.

In digging these mother roots, Lorde not only envisions healing but makes it possible. To claim one's being as both sexual and spiritual is to refuse the limited choice of either whore or virgin, either Jezebel or Mammy, either body or spirit. To claim one's being as both sexual and spiritual also means refusing to tie oneself to a traumatic past. In showing how the erotic is both sexual and spiritual power that has been kept from women, Lorde encourages women to heal this split, to reclaim this power, and to move beyond mere surviving to living, and thriving, as whole and healthy, spiritual and sexual, creative and powerful women.

[1] For more on Lorde, see also my *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa and The Poetry of Witness*, forthcoming from St. Martin's Press.
[2]Such a focus on the positive aspects of the figural mother can be found in DiBernard and Lauter. In focusing on the positive lessons Audre's own mother teaches, I do not mean to downplay the many painful aspects of their relationship discussed by Ana Louise Keating (1996) in her excellent analysis of *Zami* in *Women Reading / Women Writing*: Audre's mother "would not openly acknowlege her own 'blackness'"; would not discuss "the differences in skin tone between herself, her husband, and her three daughters"; hit and chastised Audre when she lost for class president; and "ignored or condemned her anger" when she confronted racism (148-49). However, by focusing on the positive aspects of Audre's mother, I am going beyond other critics by showing that Lorde not only takes the model for Afrekete from her research into West African mythology, but also from her own reclamation of the positive lessons about sexuality and spirituality that she learned from her mother.
[3]Similarly to Keating (see note above), Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez (1998) contrasts the "disappointment and even anger with their biological mothers" that both Lorde and Anzaldúa express with the "idealized images they present of the mother-goddesses who serve as role models for their independent, emergent sense of self." As my readings make clear, I want to trace the sources of these "mother-goddesses" in the writers' personal as well as cultural biographies. See Browdy de Hernandez, 1998: 246.
[4]Chinosole similarly traces Lorde's text through the "matrilineal diaspora" back to slave narratives but does not treat the issue of sexual abuse in her essay.
[5]In this section I rely upon the work of anthropologists Smith (1962) and Hill (1977) to whom Lorde could have referred for her research; she explicitly mentions Donald Hill in her Acknowledgments, while Hill cites M. G. Smith as the expert on Carriacou. Further evidence that Lorde relied upon these sources can be found in the similarity between Hill's observation that "One man believed that women get the drive to become zami from their mother's blood" (Hill, 1977: 281) and Lorde's last line of her narrative: "There it is said that the

desire to lie with other women comes from the mother's blood" (1982: 256).
[6]It is interesting to note the connection between Lorde's mention of the songs "for everything" in Carriacou (1982: 11) and Hill's (1977) description of calypso, a form of music/poetry that expresses feelings about slavery, government, history, and community relations (Hill, 1977: 209). Hill also notes that the songs at festivals are in call and response pattern and are African in style (1977: 330).
[7]Chinosole (1990) writes that "'zami' is patois for 'lesbian,' based on the French expression, les amies" (385, 393).
[8]Suzette A. Henke (1998) writes of the encounter with Afrekete: "Virtually eating the Mother / Nature-Goddess, Audre/Zami breaks down the barriers that separate mother and daughter, humankind and nature, Demeter and Persephone, child and MawuLisa, male and female, East and West, body and spirit" (111).

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Gail McCabe

A Mother's Embrace

Today I went through the sewing things
A lifetime of threads, and pins
Knitting needles and crochet hooks
Coloured yarns, embroidery silks
My mother's making things.

I don't know what function
each spike performed
The bone handled hook or the latchet.
Stitch counters in plastic profusion
Lost in the time when these were tools
Of a craft I only observed
at her knee.

Did I do that? I can barely remember
Barely recall an attachment
Blocked in the pain of passionate heat
Of anger and disappointment, regret
At what might have been
Could we but forget our stance, our position, our game.

Today I went through the sewing things
She doesn't use any more
The circular hoop that made hats
or shawls
Anonymous articles

Lost in a lifetime of woven cloth
A coat of many colours, she
wrapped round
her self hidden within
worn out by time and trial

Worn out with the life of pain
of disappointment in us all
of regret that repeats the pattern
she wove up in a life of deceit
self-deception

Yet, I remember the life of the wool
As it pulled through her fingers
Threaded there
Nimbly clacking and clicking
a life of its own woven up

Today I went through the sewing things
Trophies of talents she denied
and disowned
Memorials and warnings of what can become
In time's being what can't be undone

What to do now but encase them
Like artist's creations enshrined
Creations unborn but the tools
linger on
Testify, witness, spy and frame up
The creator gone too, a shadow, a shell
And today I browse through, I clean up
I wrap up, I fold and I fidget
with these

Things which are memories of people
Things which are people
Things to be put away in their places
People too put aside
Placed away
Rejected
Despised

But inside, heart's inside
Soul's inside

Hidden inside ... a revelation of me

Sometimes, when I'm weary, I lie wrapped
around in a cover, she
made for me
A patchwork of myriad colours,
designs and
possibilities
A mother's embrace
Well, once I remembered none

Erica Lawson

Black Women's Mothering in a Historical and Contemporary Perspective
Understanding the Past, Forging the Future

This essay explores some of the historical and contemporary practices that punish Black women for daring to become mothers. It offers a critical reading of how the construction of the bad Black mother contributes to the realization of 'normal' family life and the 'ideal' nation-state. To this end, I will briefly examine the struggle of the central character in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to save her children from the horrors of slavery, and I will consider Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* which focuses on Black women's experiences within states that are determined to control their reproduction. I argue that there are striking similarities between Morrison's historical work and Roberts' current research that illustrate the dangers of mothering then and now. This essay also explores community-based mothering as it contributes to self-actualization and community support among Black women.

My academic and political interests in writing this paper are anchored in disrupting conventional praxis that pathologize Black women in the context of motherhood. I do not write as a Black woman who is a mother. For me, economic constraints, the challenges of student and work life, and the prominence of nuclear family patterns in Canadian society, raise critical questions about the feasibility of motherhood. These questions remain unresolved. Rather, I write as the daughter of a Caribbean woman who, like many other mothers, was forced to leave her children behind to work in Canada. I write as someone who has witnessed this woman's determination to fight for her children's education and general well-being, and I write as the grand-daughter of a man and a woman who raised many of their grand-children because many of *their* own children were pushed to emigrate to find work in the "developed" world. My evolving perspective on motherhood therefore, is informed by the

acts of resistance that Black women engage in to claim their understanding and expression of mothering, the exploitation of Black women's labour by the state through the immigration system and its impact on parent/child relationships, and by the reliance on extended families and other mothers to help raise children. Furthermore, I read these realities in the context of broad historical and economic forces that shape African mothering in the Diaspora through the production of unique yet similarly oppressive experiences.

Motherhood and the state: Policing Black women

It is not a surprise that the struggle for sexual freedom within the western feminist movement in the 1960s did not appeal to African women. The reluctance to join the sexual liberation movement in large numbers cannot be understood without historicizing African womens' political agenda: their fight against racism, their desire to strengthen their communities, and the importance of challenging the view that Black people were inherently promiscuous. In addition to founding societies to uplift the Black community, a number of Black women engaged in policing the behaviours of other Black people to ensure that they adhered to proper family values and codes of sexual conduct. The underlying principles governing the creation of the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society for Social Relief is a case in point. Founded in Chatham, Ontario in 1853, the Society was open to all women between sixteen and forty-eight years old, and its services were tied to a vigilant show of proper conduct and morality by the recipients. The Society assisted women who were not addicted to alcohol and who did not engage in multiple relationships (Bristow, 1994: 121). Moreover, article 2 of the bylaws stated that "no member of this society shall be entitled to any relief on account of any disease that she has imprudently brought upon herself" (Bristow, 1994: 121). Women who broke the rules were expelled from the Society.

Similarly, Black women in the United States aspired to dispel the myth of promiscuity and inherent indecency. During the era of Reconstruction, Black women struggled against the barrage of negative images that defined Black womanhood and sexuality (Hooks, 1981), but their attempts to attain some measure of dignity were usually thwarted by white society. Hooks tells us that "everywhere Black women went on public streets, in shops, or at their places at work, they were accosted and subjected to obscene comments and even physical abuse at the hands of white men and women. Those black women suffered most whose behavior exemplified that of a lady" (1981: 55). Black women's articulation of a sexually moral self destabilized white society's views regarding the Black female body as a unit of re/production. That is, the outrage expressed by whites was tied to a fundamental destabilization of the (white) ontological perception of self and personhood as constructed through the subordination of Black womanhood. I submit that these two factors: the subordination of Black female sexuality and reproduction to economic interests, and the construction of these bodies as inherently indecent, continue to

have currency in Euro-American society. This paper is concerned with examining motherhood as a site where the economic and psychosocial interests of the dominant group are articulated through and protected by the state, and where these interests are contested by Black women who undertake motherhood/mothering as an expression of self that is connected to community values and sustainability.

Female sexuality and reproductivity are not free from social and political constraints. Rather, the idealized expression of sexuality, reproduction and motherhood are anchored within the institution of marriage and the nuclear family structure. In order to understand these constraints, it is necessary to consider the meanings ascribed to "woman/women" in processes of nationalism, colonialism and imperialism, for particular meanings have ensured that female bodies are the sites upon which aspirations are mapped and desires are projected. Beyond its articulation of femininity as it is socially constructed and understood, motherhood is tied to the longings of the nation-state. Here I use nation-state to mean the exercise of power that allows a dominant group to control its destiny and realize its goals (Collins, 2000: 229). The creation of family life then, as defined by one's ability to produce children who are connected to a family circle, is a reflection and extension of nationalist aspirations and is therefore subject to state intervention.

The use of the category "woman" shifts in different situations and the term itself is produced in classist, racist, patriarchal and sexualized processes of inequalities (Pierson, 1998; Mohanty, 1991). Pierson (1998) tells us that one may become a woman in opposition to other women in cultures where asymmetric race and class relations are organizing principles. From this perspective, motherhood must be seen as intricately connected to these subordinating processes whereby not all women within a nation are equally encouraged to reproduce. Rather, women who are thought to embody the physical, cultural and mythical ideals of the nation's past, present and future are likely to be rewarded for producing the right type of children, while others are punished for perceived over-reproductivity.

One of the most powerful scenes in Toni Morrison's widely acclaimed novel, *Beloved,* is the central character's determination to kill her four children to save them from slavery. Sethe, the mother, succeeds in killing one child, and is in the process of destroying another when she is stopped. The scene unfolds in a barn wherein:

> ...two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time.... Little nigger-boy eyes open in sawdust; little nigger-girl eyes staring between the wet fingers that held her face so that her head wouldn't fall off.... (1998: 175)

Set in post-civil war Ohio, the story centres around the dead baby's spirit, Beloved, who personifies the evils of slavery and haunts her mother's present as Sethe struggles to throw-off the legacy of slavery. Seeing that the wounded or dead children are of no monetary value to them or the slave economy, the four horsemen sent to re-capture the runaway family, "trotted off leaving the sheriff behind with the damnedest bunch of coons they'd ever seen. All testimony to the result of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the animal life they preferred" (Morrison, 1998: 177). Sethe and her children were valuable to the extent that they were useful re/producers in the society.

Black women's reproductive capability continues to be regulated and policed in American society to protect state interests. Over the past decade, an increasing number of poor Black women have been prosecuted for exposing their babies to drugs in the womb. Jennifer Clarise Johnson, a 23-year-old crack addict became the first woman in the United States to be criminally convicted for exposing her baby to crack while pregnant (Roberts, 1997b: 127). The laws are framed under the guise of protecting the fetus from abuse that reduces life chances, but effectively, they are meant to punish Black women who become pregnant, especially if these women are dependent on state welfare.

When a pregnant woman is arrested for harming the fetus by smoking crack, her crime is determined by her decision to have the baby since the woman can avoid prosecution if she has an abortion (Roberts, 1997a: 152). In other words, the "choices" that she faces in front of the judge are: get an abortion, inject Norplant[1] or remain fertile and go to jail. In addition, if a Black woman violates probation by becoming pregnant she will be sent to jail. Roberts asserts that Black women are targeted for such harsh punishment because of the widespread belief that they are not suitable mothers or capable human beings. I would also argue that the legacy of medical experimentation on African bodies lessens concerns about the devastating side-effects of Norplant on many women. Furthermore, the entrenched belief in the idea of the "strong Black women" (Collins, 2000; Beckles, 1995) render state representatives incapable of considering the emotional and spiritual implications of having an abortion for many Black women. What are we to make of the ways in which Black women's reproductive capability is used as described by Morrison and Roberts? And how do their respective works make connections between Black women's reproduction in the slave economy and in the contemporary Diasporic context?

Understanding the past to make sense of the present

If we consider the evolution of imperialist cultures through a continuum of emerging historical patterns of unequal social relations, we can begin to make connections between Black women's reproductive/mothering experiences in slavery and the challenges they face in today. A close look will tell us that not much has changed. Let us consider these arguments in light of the scene from Morrison's *Beloved* (1998) described earlier. Four white men were sent to re-

capture Sethe, a runaway slave and her four children. They found her in a barn in the process of killing her children to save them from the slavery. If we shift our gaze to the men, this powerful scene provides insight into how Euro-American male subjects performed their identity and participated in the economy through the exploitation of Black female sexuality and motherhood.

First, to the four white men, Sethe personified the bad Black mother and exhibited all the characteristics of the animal-like Black woman. That is, Sethe represented everything that the men's white mothers, wives, daughters and sisters were not. Essentially, her body, and the way in which she tried to save her children from slavery allowed the men to imagine home. Sethe's unstable and violent world, created by the slave system which the men helped to sustain, marked the boundary between the slaves' world and the orderly, safe white world suitable for bearing and rearing children in a normal family setting. Second, re-capturing slaves allowed working class white males to participate in the economy by being paid for their services. Indeed, exercising male power through racism and patriarchy offered working class white men some measure of compensation for their exploitation in the ruling nation (Callincos qtd. in McLaren, 1997: 39). Third, the element of an emotional and spiritual sense of privilege that the working class derived from policing others cannot be overlooked. After witnessing Sethe's actions, the men ride off re-affirmed in their belief that it is dangerous to grant slaves freedom because it will inevitably be squandered. This scene reveals that in the slave economy, Black female bodies had symbolic and material uses and meanings that allowed American society to make sense of itself. Moreover, it illustrates how white male subjects articulate their identity by participating violence against Black women. But how does this continue to happen today?

Current state laws that allow judges to sentence pregnant Black women to jail for smoking crack are similar to the laws that allowed Sethe to be tracked down and re-captured. [2] These laws are connected over different historical periods by the common goal of regulating Black female reproduction for the collective good of the white patriarchal capitalist state (see also Augustine, 1997; Williams, 1997). Today, the continued criminalization of Black women results in economic benefits for the law and order industry. This ranges from politicians who build careers by promising tougher laws and larger budgets for the police, judges who build reputations by enforcing these laws, to a burgeoning prison system that is increasingly farmed out to entrepreneurs. Additionally, there is metaphysical value in Black women's bodies in that the meanings attributed to these bodies help to organize the physical and moral borders of white social existence.

The ways in which childbearing Black women are perceived and treated today is illustrative of the connections between the slave economy and the current demands of the capitalist state. In slavery, Black women were coerced into producing children to replenish the slave population, and each child produced added cash value to the owner's human stock. Presently though, in societies that

reduces the person to a unit of consumerism, Black women and their children, especially poor ones, are disposable in the 'new' world economy. This is a reality that contributes to the devaluation of mothering in the African Diaspora.

Community-based mothering

Yet mothering plays a crucial role in communal sustainability and self-empowerment for Black women. To understand the complexities of how this occurs, it is necessary to consider the importance of community in the lives of African people who are severely constrained in imperialist societies. Dei contends that the hostility of the Diaspora "influences the particular options and strategies that are open to those who are minoritized. Understanding the nature of the hostility they encounter is crucial in order not to deny the intellectual agency and power of local subjects and the pragmatic political choices that they make" (2000: 208-209). I read Dei as a challenge to appreciate 'community' as a site of resistance and affirmation with its own tensions and contradictions rather than as a homogenous collective. This understanding of community connotes the need for Africans in the Diaspora to have a foundation for political consciousness/activism, economic support, and a space wherein the self is articulated and affirmed. With this in mind, community-based mothering in the African Diaspora must be looked at through critical lens for a broader understanding of how it is experienced both as a political act and as an expression of a holistic self.

Historically and presently, community mothering practices was and is a central experience in the lives of many Black women and participation in mothering is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in societies that marginalize Black women. Collins (2000: 11) correctly points out that insightful self-definitions nurtured in suppressed communities, enabled African Black women to use African derived conceptions of self and community to resist negative evaluations of Black women. Community mothering is one of the ways in which this was done and is a practice that is evident in the Caribbean experience with which I am familiar.

Between 1973 and 1975, extensive research was conducted with forty-five African Jamaican women to determine the dynamics of conjugal relations in the society's belief system at specific historical periods (Brodber 1986: 23). The women were born from about eighteen sixty-one to nineteen hundred. The study used the testimonies and life histories of the women to develop "a multi-dimensional and dynamic figure of the free woman as she perceived herself to be" as a way of understanding conjugal relations, extended kinship practices, and female independence. The research found that:

> ... "taking" and "growing" other people's children was normal behaviour for Afro-Jamaican women of the early twentieth century. The children who entered the units in this way were treated as blood relatives and the surrogate parents, despite what emotional attach-

ments might have developed between themselves and their "taken children, were easily able to pass them on to other adults or back to the parents themselves. This act was looked upon as one carried out "through love." (Brodber, 1986: 26).

All of the women in the sample had reared children at some point whether or not they had given birth to them. The researchers argue that the shifting and changing nature of the relationship between children and caregiver resulted in constant accommodation to subtraction and addition of persons. This experience, they argue, produced individuals with the ability to relate emotionally to a wide range of people in the face of their imminent departure, a characteristic referred to as "emotionally expansive" (Brodber, 1986: 25).

My own childhood unfolded under the guidance of extended family and many other mothers who took responsibility for raising children in the community. Men and women in the community saw themselves as empowered to feed, bathe, and generally care for each other's children without concern for blood-related ties. Both my mother and my aunt who live in Canada have shared many stories about what it meant to grow up in an extended community of other mothers and caregivers. Speaking about the childhood/adolescent years as she and her siblings experienced them, my mother told me that:

> *When we were out playing, our parents didn't worry about where we were or if we were being fed. The only thing is that we all had to come home at night ... there was always someone to take care of you, to discipline you ... my brothers got more beatings from people in the community than us girls because we were girls. The teachers in the community were also involved in our lives outside of school, sometimes too much. It was like a small village raising kids, that's how I would describe it.*

In addition to the emotionality of extended mothering and its connection to the development of women-centred community bonds, motherhood/mothering is also a site for community economic survival and political expression among Black women.

Inaccessibility to mainstream institutions of power means that Black women exercise influence and exert power in their everyday lived realities through a series of mothering activities described as motherwork (Collins, 2000: 208-209). Motherwork facilitates the articulation of political consciousness by blood mothers and other mothers in women-centred family networks. For example, Black women use their power in the home, in the church, and in other community-based institutions to foster self-reliance and self-confidence in children.

Motherwork as the impetus for child and community development is evident in the everyday lives of Caribbean women. Caribbean women define themselves primarily through their mothering roles, the development of their

identities on the ability to be good mothers, and putting the spiritual well-being of their children above all else (Barriteau, 196:145). Thus, when children suffer, women experience the worst state of material and psychological stress. Women employ a number of survival strategies to sustain family and community in the face of harsh economic measures in Caribbean societies (Barriteau, 1996; Barrow, 1986; Bolles, 1983; McAfee, 1991). Barriteau (1996, 146-147) refers to the Red Thread Collective of Guyana whereby community members produced textbooks for children during a period of socioeconomic hardship in that country. Moreover, the author describes how middle-class families, although also affected by economic upheaval, continue to support less well off family members in exchange for child-care services. Women-centred strategies stem from the reality that women and children are hardest hit by economic crisis as women are the primary providers and caregivers in most Caribbean households.

The resilient strategies that women use to sustain their children and communities has prompted Barriteau to call for a critical examination of the household as a site of important economic activity with national implications. This approach, Barriteau argues, would "not only move economic modeling closer to socioeconomic reality - that is, to the lived experiences of Caribbean people—but disrupt the hierarchical relation between households and the market behaviour" (1996: 150). Indeed, there are lessons to be learned from the ways in which Black women through motherwork, blood-related or not, continue to support extended family networks and community sustainability.

Conclusion

Despite historical and contemporary depictions of the bad Black mother to sustain the illusion of normalcy in Euro-American family life, mothering in the African Diaspora is a complex and meaningful experience for many Black women. As such, mothering has to be examined and understood on its own terms and under the circumstances that give rise to how it occurs. Such an approach is a valuable opportunity to look at how mothering results in empowerment and transformation for Black women and their communities.

[1]Surgically injected into the arm, Norplant consists of six silicone capsules each about the size of a matchstick. It prevents pregnancy for up to five years, but the drug causes serious side effects and complications for many women. Once implanted into poor Black women, the laws prevent the removal of Norplant. [2]The *Fugitive Slave Law,* passed by the United States Congress in 1850 permitted the recapture and return of runaway slaves to their owners.

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Marybeth White

Oppressive Nascence,
The Nascence of Oppression

Giving birth
an heir to a culture

Birth
rhythm, flow,
    unfolding of past, presently of the future

Woman to woman
womb to womb
passing tradition,
        giving, receiving
        containing, releasing
breath of life

Intervention
rhythm, flow....interrupted
past presently infused with uncertainty
future...synergy of unknown

Tradition passing,
Disruption
Domination, Subjugation
Upheaval

Giving birth
receiving distortion,
culture of heir
        CON FUSED

Priscilla Gibson

Developmental Mothering in an African American Community

From Grandmothers to New Mothers Again

This article will report the research findings on the "lived experience" of African American grandmothers who assume the role of primary caregiver for their grandchildren whose parents are absent. This caregiving situation is described as kinship care which is the caring of children by a non-parent relative when parents are unable or unwilling to provide that care (Karp, 1991). Increasingly, grandmothers, especially African American grandmothers (Dubowitz, 1994), are becoming kinship providers for grandchildren with absent parents (American Association of Retired Persons, 1994; 1999). This absent middle generation (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994) occurs because of social problems such as drug abuse, incarceration, domestic violence, and divorce, just to name a few. In their new role, grandmothers experience multiple stressors (Scannapieco and Jackson, 1996), increased responsibilities (Gibson, 1996), and anger and resentment (Minkler and Roe, 1993).

As older Black women, these grandmothers experience the cumulative disadvantages of their race, gender, and often social class (Scott, 1991). This results in a marginalized position in society (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994). Yet, they are valued in their families and communities as communicators of values and ideals (Hill-Lubin, 1991), superwomen and guardians of the generation (Frazier, 1939). As primary caregivers, they abandon their future plans of child-free responsibilities to protect their grandchildren from the perils of the foster care system, navigate the treacherous social service delivery system, and address the needs of their grandchildren (Burnette, 1997).

African American grandmother caregivers are a silent group that has received little attention from research. Most studies on this subject are about those in the foster care system or using the data from it. Unfortunately, these grandmothers are compared to foster care parents (LeProhn, 1994), a practice

in research that dismisses the cultural context of their experiences and undermines a growth in knowledge about this unique mothering situation.

The research study

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological perspective approach. Its purpose was to capture the "world of the lived experience" (Cohen and Omery, 1994: 139) while providing a mechanism for grandmothers to share their experiences (hooks, 1993). Criteria for participation were the following: African American; grandmother, great-grandmother, or great-aunt; primarily caregiver of a relative under the age of six; and parents of grandchildren being out of the household. An interview guide composed of a grand tour question (Creswell, 1994): "What is your experience as the primary caregiver to your grandchild?" and eleven subquestions regarding the caregiving experience were developed.

Interviews were conducted between March 1995 and February 1996 with informants from the Denver, Colorado, metropolitan area. They were recruited from a local Head Start center, the John F. Kennedy Center for Developmental Disabilities, and via the snowball method (Yegidis and Weinbach, 1991). Twelve informants, eight grandmothers, and four great-grandmothers, volunteered to be in the study.

Interviews were 45 to 90 minutes in length. They were audiotaped and transcribed. The completed transcriptions were the basis for data analysis. Grounded theory and Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUDIST) were used to analyze data. Thus codes and connections between them were developed into categories and propositions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Findings

African American grandmothers shifted their role from grandmother to new mother again. The phrase, "new mother again" (Gibson, 1999) acknowledges that although these grandmothers mothered their birth children, mothering their grandchildren was unexpected (Karp, 1993) and unplanned (Minkler and Roe, 1993). This shift involved a developmental decision-making process about mothering. These decisions involved interrelated areas in the life of the grandmother such as herself, her relationships with the parents of her grandchildren, her mothering relationship with the grandchild, and her relationship with the child welfare system.

The process is developmental with unique phases. These phases are developmental in that they are built upon the previous phase of the mothering process. Each phase consists of activities, decisions, and considerations as well as the grandmothers' affective/emotional reactions, which sequentially depict the level of involvement in the lives of their grandchildren. The grandmothers' activities in the five foci of attention were organized into a four-phase developmental mothering process.

The foci of attention

The foci of attention are areas where the grandmother places her energies when making decisions. They include (a) the self, (b) the relationship with the parents of the grandchildren, (c) the relationship with the grandchildren, (d) the relationship with the child welfare system and (e) her own affective/emotional reactions. The first area is the self, which contains all the activities and tasks in which grandmothers are engaged. This is a broad category encompassing work, retirement, future plans, voluntary activities in the community and with church groups, and relationships with significant others.

The second area is relationships with the parents of the grandchildren. All grandmothers were involved with the parents of their grandchildren, their own adult children, or the adult children's partners. The grandchildren occupy the third area of focus in the lives of their grandmothers. In fact, they were a constant in the lives of grandmothers even before the role shift. The grandmothers had always been invested in the nurturing of their grandchildren. The child welfare system is the fourth area of focus in the lives of the grandmothers. This system is involved in all but one case. But this system, unlike the other foci, is used by grandmothers only as necessary.

The fifth and final area is the affective/emotional component which characterized the feelings that grandmothers experienced. This component was not verbalized as freely as were the other foci. Feelings, regardless of their intensity, were not dwelled upon because grandmothers did not put them as a priority. It seems that grandmothers in their new role have so many other aspects to consider that their feelings are just those—feelings—to have or mention, but not to be emphasized.

Developmental mothering process

The four phases are in order of occurrence: (a) pre-decision, (b) decision process, (c) post-immediate decision, and (d) permanent decision. The first phase, the pre-decision phase, pre-dates a grandmother becoming a new mother again. The second phase, the decision process, is that period in which the grandmother discovers that her grandchild needs an effective caregiver and realizes that she must assume that role. The third phase is the post-immediate decision. This is the period in which the grandmother has assumed the role by actively providing care for her grandchild while continually assessing the grandchild's needs. In the fourth phase, the permanent decision phase, the grandmother has been mothering for a period of time. The grandchild is established in her household.

First Phase: Pre-decision.

This phase occurs when the grandchildren are in the care of their parents and the grandmother's role is that of the traditional grandmother. All grandmothers began in this phase. They considered how to juggle activities including work, retirement, and/or volunteer efforts in their communities or their church

groups and, at the same time, how to continue their involvement with grandchildren and the parents of their grandchildren. Their decisions concerning the parents of their grandchildren involved the amount and intensity of advice and informal social support to provide. This grandmother described her role with her son. "I've been helping my son raise his children ever since him and his wife separated. I just kind of had babies but it was always, when I wanted them to go home at night, they could go home."

Another grandmother provided her grandchildren and great-grandchildren with financial support.

> *She [parent of great-grandchild] gets, I think, $290 for both of them [great-grandchildren]. That's no money at all. She couldn't manage with two children anyway but we [family] help her as much as we can because I feel as though I wouldn't be a good grandmother if I didn't try to fulfill and help my grandchildren with their children. I helped my children with their children, now, I'm helping my grandchildren with theirs and I don't mind.*

Although there were variations in the experiences of the grandmothers, the first phase had the least amount of variations. Variations in the grandmothers' assistive role ranged from minimal—general advice giving—to maximal help in providing basic necessities. In two cases, grandmothers were also mothering their adolescent and college-age children in their homes. Generally, the grandmothers had non-residential adult children over 21. An example is the following advice that one grandmother gave to her daughter.

> *I told her one day, I said, "let me tell you [parent of grandchildren] something to your heart. You better check yourself because your daughters are getting much closer to me than they are to you because you're too busy for them." And, they said, "Mama's always so tired. She's fussing and hollering."*

No shift in roles occurred in this phase. In terms of the foci of attention, the experiences of grandmothers were identical. The majority of the grandmothers had little or no contact with social services.

This phase seemed joyful and pleasant for the grandmothers. Despite their having to continue to work at an older age, they were positive about their lives. They were coping with their concerns about their family members. The position of grandmothers in this phase is best expressed as: "I can best assist with auxiliary mothering." This grandmother generally described her emotional state during her helping role prior to the role shift from grandmother to primary caregiver. "Yes, because we were like, J [male companion] and I were together maybe six months before the kids [grandchildren] came in and it was very relaxing just the two of us."

The grandmothers remained in this phase until they were required by

circumstances to make a decision about becoming the new mother again to their grandchildren.

Second phase: the decision process

In this phase, the grandmothers realized that their grandchildren needed another caregiver and that their efforts as supportive grandmother were insufficient to meet the parenting needs of their grandchildren. A grandmother expressed the situation of her grandchildren.

> *So, I knew then that I had to take them [grandchildren]. I love them too much to let them go to some foster home because my son was in prison [and] their mother was in prison. Either I was going to take them or they were going to have to go to some facility. I didn't want this for my grandchildren. They've gone through enough as it is with their parents.*

This phase is characterized by many decisions in relation to the five foci of attention. Grandmothers' decisions were framed with reference to the optimum care of their grandchildren and all of their efforts were aimed at attaining that level. Similar to the first, the second phase also had few variations. In this phase, the grandmothers' realization about the conditions of their grandchildren occurred differently. These variations ranged from a conversation with the parents of the grandchildren about a problem or a condition, which was hindering effective mothering, to a threat of removal or the actual removal of the grandchild by child protection.

The decision to assume the role of new mother again catapults the grandmothers into a number of additional decisions in the foci of attention. One decision concerned the relationship between the grandmother and the parents of the grandchildren. Another was how to incorporate the grandchildren into their daily schedules and busy lives.

Interactions with the child welfare system shifted in this phase, particularly with child protection. The grandmothers had already made the decision that their grandchildren would not go into the foster care system. In some cases, grandmothers decided to work through the court system to secure custody of their grandchildren. In the following quote, a grandmother explained her rationale for contacting child protection, she refers to as social services.

> *But it was even worse because she did not leave me any birth certificate, and you can go to jail if you have a child without a birth certificate. My son was in jail, so he couldn't get me a birth certificate. And, I wasn't sure if the child was even his. So, I had to call social services, I had to bring them in.*

Grandmothers also decided to contact other agencies in the child welfare system to obtain financial assistance. In the following quote, a grandmother described her situation that lead to requesting financial assistance.

I had to give up my job and then I had to take care of A's [grandchild] medical expenses, because like I said, he used to go to the hospital every other week. I didn't have the money to cover them and I just get bogged down with bills. So, I went out to social services and applied and it took them about a month and a half and they give me help with them [medical bills].

The quote below from another grandmother described a request for service that was not granted.

After I'd had the children for a while and my daughter and their father seemed rather settled, for about a year I was able to work. Then the trouble started again and I took the grandkids. All I wanted, all I asked for help from social services was for babysitting. I couldn't get any help there for daycare so I had to give up my job again.

Grandmothers experienced a range of feelings. These included feelings of aloneness and resentment. Despite these feelings, grandmothers would not give up their role as new mother again. This phase was a pensive time for grandmothers.

It's different this time around than it was with my children, with my two. In some ways ,this time, with my grandchildren, I've felt alone. I do not have a lot of help or support and I am just really worried that social service would cause problems.

They were quite worried about the condition of their grandchildren and the various situations of the parents of their grandchildren. Some turned to their religion for strength and asked a higher power for assistance. The position of the grandmother was generally: "I need to provide the primary mothering. I'm the only person who can and will do it."

I had to give up my job. That was a decision that I had to make. I was pushed into a corner. I didn't have proper daycare. I couldn't find sufficient daycare. The baby was small. My daughter was out of the home. She'd left and I didn't know where to contact her. At the time, my father was on dialysis and my mother was really busy there and all my brothers and sisters were busy with their families. I could have afforded a babysitter, but I couldn't find one that I could trust with my grandson being so small.

Third phase: post-immediate decision

In this phase, grandmothers were settling into their new role. The role shift was completed. And, yet there were more decisions for the grandmothers to make. Again, grandmothers primarily had the care of the grandchildren in mind. Grandmothers were deciding how to conduct their lives in order to

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provide for the many needs of their grandchildren. As they planned each activity, they had to consider their grandchildren. This consideration often required either securing childcare or taking the grandchildren with them. Grandmothers became aware of the need for informal social support and made decisions about getting it. In the quote below, a grandmother reported her need for social support with the responsibilities of her new role.

> *Then I had to worry about his health. My daughter-in-laws, most of the time, would take him to the clinic because I had to work. It was a supervisory position, and, most of the time, I had to be there. I close at night. I couldn't call in and say, I can't come in because I have to take the baby to the doctor. In fact, they would say, "what baby?" I couldn't explain to them how I got the baby. Just all at once, I got a baby.*

The most variations in the foci of attention occurred in this phase. It was the phase that some grandmothers skipped. Some grandmothers moved from the second phase to the fourth phase without experience of the third phase. These grandmothers shared a high level of social support, were not in need of governmental assistance, and maintained a stable relationship with the parents of their grandchildren. Additionally, the grandchildren's parents usually did not have a problem with drug abuse and the grandchildren were healthy. For these grandmothers, child protection was not involved with their families. The grandmother who is quoted below shared her pleasure at being a new mother again.

> *Should have had the grandchildren first. He's a joy, but he has all this energy. I can't keep up. And its totally different raising him, having him in the household, than it was when my children were younger because times have changed and situations have changed. There's a difference. It's nice to have him here and it's a chance to do the things you didn't do with yours the first time, to correct things. It's nice.*

But for the other grandmothers, the third phase was the most difficult. With the young grandchildren in their homes, they became increasingly and acutely aware of the young grandchildren's needs and their own needs as new mothers. They were forced to make decisions about how to meet these needs. Some grandmothers actually decided to demand services from the child welfare system because of the needs of their grandchildren. This grandmother voiced a strong conviction about her financial needs.

> *I could use some financial help. And, I think that a mother, a grandmother should get more. I think I deserve more than they are giving me for three kids [grandchildren]. Because what they are giving me is not a lot to feed and to clothe them. It takes more than what AFDC is giving me.*

It was the time when they were most likely to be angry with the parents of their grandchildren, especially if these parents had been irresponsible. Note the sentiments expressed in the following quote by a grandmother.

I couldn't understand how she [daughter and parent of grandchildren] could not want to be a part of her baby's life. I couldn't understand it because I know she wasn't raised that way. In our family, everybody is really close and being from the South, we take care of each other and the kids. We are kind of like close-knit and whenever someone needs something, we try to help as much as we can under the circumstances. But I just couldn't understand how she could just abandon her children.

The position of the grandmother is best summarized as: "I need to decide how best to care for my grandchild." This grandmother's story depicts her attitude regarding this position.

He [grandson] was born premature and when we got him back from the hospital—he spent a month in the hospital—they had a visiting nurse come out, a very young lady, much younger than my daughters. And, I had raised my two children and I'd help raise two of my younger brothers and sisters. I figured I knew a little bit more about babies than she did. So, I would get a little friction from her about raising the children and the things she didn't think were appropriate and I knew would work.

Fourth phase: permanent decision

In this final phase, all of the grandmothers shifted their attention to creating the optimal mothering environment for their grandchildren. This phase occurred as grandmothers felt more comfortable with their new mothering responsibilities. The awareness of being an effective caregiver, however, did not prevent some grandmothers from deciding to return their grandchildren to the care of their parents if the parent would be responsible caregivers. The decision to keep or to return the grandchildren was the one variation in this phase. Only two grandmothers were ambivalent about this decision; the others were definite. One grandmother advised against assuming the role because of age. "If there is someone else in the family that would take the kids [grandchildren] and you [grandmother] think they would treat them right, I would advise them to let them have them."

This phase had many commonalties among the grandmothers. They decided that their experiences in their role shift had been positive, despite experiencing financial hardship or problems with the child welfare system. They were at peace with their decisions. Some of them decided that they were blessed. Despite their lists of do's and don'ts in giving advice to grandmothers entering their same situation, they were unanimously pleased with their decision to enter the role shift and to care for their grandchildren. The

following is one grandmother's description of her contentment.

> *When the kids [grandchildren] come in and tell me—hey'll come in the room especially when I'm hurting and lay down in the bed with me and rub my knees and things—You know Granny, we love you to death." That's makes it all worth it .*

The general position of the grandmother was, "It's been difficult but it's been worth it. I am an effective caregiver to my grandchild. I would do it again." One grandmother expressed her caregiving in the following manner.

> *It's not easy but I don't have any problems dealing with it. I took it on and I'll deal with it. So, I'm dealing with it and God has blessed us. We don't have problems. They have more than they need. They have food and clothes. I guess that's one of the reasons I've been working in school programs and volunteer programs for years so whatever I can send somebody else, I can send myself, If I need it.*

Discussion

These findings add to our knowledge on mothering in the African Diaspora. African American grandmothers entered into a unique mothering situation when they shifted their role from grandmother to new mother again. This complex mothering situation, which is a dynamic developmental process with phases, involves many decisions and considerations of significant others. In this process, the grandmother selected their grandchildren as their main priority but also continued to support the parents of their grandchildren. At a stage in their lives when they anticipated that their primary mothering responsibilities would be lessened, they engaged in an intense, dualistic mothering role: Mother to their grandchildren and mother to their adult children (parents of the grandchildren).

This information about the new mother again role can guide us in social services, policy and research regarding African American grandmothers in kinship care. Social services need to take into account this complex mothering situation provided by older women to vulnerable grandchildren whose parents are experiencing personal troubles. When developing programs and services, policies need to be inclusive of three significant parties: grandmothers, grandchildren, and parents of grandchildren. Research is needed to increase our knowledge of this mothering in kinship, with African Americans and other groups. Mothering needs to be explored in the context of the lived experience to capture the true cultural aspects and complexities.

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Allison Mackey

Return to the [M]Other to Heal the Self

Identity, Selfhood and Community in *Toni Morrison's* Beloved

Something of the spirit of our slave forebears must be pursued today.
From the inner depths of our being we must sing with them: "Before
I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and
be free." This spirit, this drive, this rugged sense of somebodyness is
the first and vital step that the Negro must take in dealing with this
dilemma.... it will be necessary for the Negro to find a new self-image.
—Martin Luther King Jr. (1967)

The imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first
bodily encounter with the mother...where are we to find them? In
what darkness, what madness, have they been abandoned?
—Luce Irigaray (1991a)

In this article I will borrow from psychoanalytic theory in order to examine
issues of identity formation, selfhood and community in Toni Morrison's
(1998) novel *Beloved*. While the problematic cultural and sexual biases inherent
in traditional psychoanalysis have been pointed out by many critics, there are
aspects of psychoanalytic theory that I feel still remain valuable for literary
analysis.[1] Because of the apparently universal, "biological" fact of being born of
a woman, the primacy of the mother-infant connection is particularly impor-
tant; for each and every one of us, our early experiences create templates for later
relationships. As in much of Morrison's work—where "Mother-love" in the
context of racism and slavery can be seen as an act of "resistance"—the children
in *Beloved* are able to "move from mother-love to self-love to selfhood"
(O'Reilly, 1999: 189).
    While I will begin by briefly outlining the main tenets of psychoanalytic

theory as they relate to my reading of the novel, the bulk of this paper will illustrate how the relationship between Sethe and her two daughters, Beloved and Denver, suggest that re-experiencing the primal mother-infant relationship represents more than just an individual healing journey towards selfhood; a symbolic "return" to the "mother" can also facilitate eventual healing for the collective self of the African Diaspora, a community whose history has been fragmented by the horrifying legacy of slavery and racism.

While various aspects of Freudian theory have become popular in twentieth-century Western culture, what is known as the Oedipus complex is perhaps the most prominent. Briefly, Freud (1961) postulated that because of the extended length of human dependence in childhood, and because mothers are most often the primary caregivers of infants, small children come to desire the mother as a sexual object. Echoing the classical myth from which the theory derives it's name, this desire is accompanied by a wish to get rid of the father in order to gain total possession of the mother. For boys, fear of castration by the father as punishment for this mother-love and father-hatred eventually represses the Oedipus complex. For little girls, however, the process is somewhat more complex; while a boy need only transfer his desire from his mother to women in general, a girl must go one step further and develop an attachment to men. "Penis envy" is the equivalent of the castration complex for girls. Because she holds her mother directly responsible for her "lack" of a penis, the girl eventually turns against her first love object. Like the daughter of Agamemnon in Classical Greek mythology, she then turns toward her father— and, by extension, men in general—in what is known as the Electra complex, believing that her lack of a penis can be compensated by him with a "penis baby." For both sexes, it is this "loss" of the mother that leads to the formation of the super-ego, or unconscious. The super-ego, in turn, is what allows individuals to function socially within a culture.

Drawing on Saussure's work in linguistics, Jacques Lacan (1985) reformulates this Oedipal conflict, replacing Freud's literal father with the symbolic "Law" of the father. In the linguistic order, identity formation is dependent upon the individual's initiation from the "Imaginary" pre-verbal realm of the mother into the "Symbolic" world of language and culture. During the pre-Oedipal period, a child is unable to distinguish between itself and other objects, living in an "undifferentiated and symbiotic relationship with the mother's body so that it never knows who is who, or who is dependant on whom" (Minsky 144). During what Lacan calles the "mirror stage" of psychological development, the individual begins to develop a sense of separate identity. However, a baby's own sense of identity is always based upon an image of itself that is reflected back to it through the gaze of someone else, that is (in most cases), the mother.

According to Lacan (1985), because initiation into the Symbolic realm functions as a kind of castration in the child's Imaginary, the individual experiences this as loss. Throughout his/her life, an individual therefore

constantly seeks to re-experience the fluid, blissful, sensation of oneness in the pre-verbal union with the mother. Thus the concept of "desire" itself can be seen as the result of an unconscious yearning to return to the Imaginary realm of the mother/infant duo.

In *Beloved* (Morrison, 1998), a pre-verbal, still nursing, "crawling already?" baby girl is prematurely separated from her mother when, along with her older siblings, she is sent away in order to escape slavery. Her mother, Sethe, is eventually able to catch up to her children, with a brand new baby in tow. After a brief interval of freedom, during which she blissfully nurses both her baby girls, Sethe is forced to make a decision. Faced with the prospect of returning to a life of slavery with her children, the bond between the girl and her mother is once again severed during a botched attempt at murder-suicide. Because this final "severance" occurs before she is ready to enter into the Symbolic realm of language—she is "too little to talk much even" (4)—the baby girl becomes trapped forever in the pre-Oedipal stage and experiences an exaggerated desire for her mother that cannot possibly be fulfilled. Beloved's insistent corporeal return can thus be seen as a very literal illustration of the symbolic function of desire.

The nature of a baby's love for the mother—primarily in relation to the breast and mother's milk—is insatiable. While it is possible for her to satisfy the baby's needs, a mother can never fully satisfy the baby's desire. Furthermore, the baby longs to be the sole object of the mother's desire and to "isolate" her mother "from all other calls on her potential to satisfy" (Minsky, 1996: 146). In Morrison's novel, even though Sethe herself feels that she has "milk enough for all" (1998: 100), Beloved is clearly disturbed by rival "calls" on her mother's attention. Indeed, she is angry and resentful whenever Sethe does or thinks "anything that excluded herself" (1998: 100). Although the baby ghost is largely successful in driving her siblings away, in true Oedipal fashion Beloved's main rival for Sethe's attention is Paul D. It is the arrival of Paul D. as phallic signifier that urgently prompts the ghost to take physical shape. Beloved sets out to remove her Oedipal rival from the equation and thus gain full and undivided access to her mother.

While the project of repairing the self by a return to the mother is viewed as positive, the possibly negative consequences of failing to (re)separate from her are illustrated in this novel. Psychoanalytically speaking, one of the "dangers" inherent in the pre-Oedipal relationship is that a "part of our unconscious identity is projected onto someone else in the external world which makes us very vulnerable if that person rejects us" (Minsky, 1996: 39). Beloved herself, in the typically narcissistic fashion of an infant, feels unjustly rejected by her mother: "She left me behind. By myself" (Morrison, 1998: 75). This feeling of utter abandonment later translates into the resentment and hostility that she exhibits toward Sethe. Again, Freudian theory postulates that the oldest reproach against the mother is that she gave the child "too little milk," which is construed as a "lack of love" (Minsky. 1996: 223). Because Beloved—

whose breath is "sweet" like that of a breast fed baby— is forced to share "her" milk with both her new-born sister and "Schoolteacher's" sons, she returns to satisfy her desire: "Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire" (Morrison, 1998: 240).

Commenting on French feminist Luce Irigaray's conception of psychoanalysis, Whitford (1991) points out that another "danger" in the symbiotic mother-daughter relationship, as perceived by psychoanalytic theory, is that the daughter will "eat the mother alive" using her "insides, her body, her mucous, her membranes, to form her own outer, protective skin; in the process, the mother, devoured and sacrificed, disappears" (74). Arguably, in the latter part of this novel, Beloved appears to be eating her mother alive: "Stooping to shake the damper, or snapping sticks for kindlin, Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (Morrison, 1998: 57). In her insatiable infantile desire, Beloved almost succeeds in totally consuming her mother by the end of the novel: "Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child...The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became.... Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (1998: 250).

Freudian psychoanalysis places great emphasis on "penis envy" as experienced by the little girl, and suggests that only having a baby of her own can ease her "unconscious sense of lack and injustice" (Minsky, 1996: 55). Feminist theorists have suggested that, far from stemming from penis envy, it is the fact of a girl's primary homosexuality (the desire for total possession of the mother) that causes her to want to have children.[2] As another prominent French feminist, Julia Kristeva, points out: "a girl will never be able to re-establish" pre-Oedipal "contact with her mother—a contact which the boy may possibly rediscover through his relationship with the opposite sex—except by becoming a mother herself" (1986b: 204). Perhaps this helps to explain why Beloved herself appears to have "taken the shape of a pregnant woman" (Morrison, 1998: 261) by the end of the novel. The "redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech" of pregnant embodiment is the kind of "libidinal fusion" (Kristeva, 1986b: 206) that Beloved herself constantly desires. More than a temporary healing return to the mother in order to feed a developing selfhood, Beloved's desire to permanently remain in the Imaginary is both dangerous and impossible.

Just as the once nourishing womb becomes potentially tomb-like for the fetus who is not expelled at term, if the "over-intimate bond with the primal womb" is not eventually severed "there might be the danger of fusion, of death, of the sleep of death" (Irigaray, 1991a: 39). At some point, on an individual level, one must eventually "reject" the mother because a symbiotic relationship with her threatens the existence of the self.[3] As is evident in the symbols and myths of many cultures, including western culture, the possibility of losing oneself in one's mother betrays itself in a "fear of the dark, of the non-

identifiable, a fear of a primal murder" (Irigaray, 1991a: 42). Denver has clearly developed a fear of the castrating and castrated mother: "She cut my head off every night" (Morrison, 1998: 206). "Watch out for her" Denver warns, "She can give you dreams" (1998: 216). Understandably, this fear of the "dark" and "primal murder" take on quite literal significance in the darkness of the wood shed.[4]

Interestingly, the symbolic role of the father also appears in Denver's dreams where she feels that her "daddy"—the "angel man" (Morrison, 1998: 209)—will save her from her mother: "I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me, loving her even when she braided my head at night. I never let her know my daddy was coming for me" (207). Sethe—the "monstrous and unmanageable" (1998: 103) mother— is excluded from Denver's fantasies about her father: "We should all be together. Me, him and Beloved" (209). Similarly, Beloved herself exhibits the fear, however mixed with desire, of her devouring monster/mother; in the dark place, Sethe "chews and swallows" (1998: 216) her.

On an individual level, psychoanalysis suggests that the unnatural extension of the pre-Oedipal relationship cannot lead to anything but psychosis. Viewed on a larger scale, however, it is clear that to deny an individual entry into the symbolic world of language and culture is to deny the healing potential of a communal memory. More specifically, in the context of the African Diaspora, Morrison's (1998) novel illustrates how becoming preoccupied with individual traumatic experiences can prevent the Afro-American community from working through the collective historical trauma of slavery and the Diaspora itself. While a temporary return to the "mother"—through the recovery of memory and recognition of ancestors—is a crucial first step in the development of an unfractured "selfhood," in order to function as an individual within a community it is necessary to (re)separate that "self" from her.

Perhaps as a positive symbol of hope, Morrison's (1998) novel follows Denver's gradual movement from the symbiotic mother-child relationship, through individuation and finally into the world of language, culture and community. At the beginning of the novel, even though Denver has "far too womanly breasts" (1998: 14), she is still "pushing out the front" of her mother's dress (1998: 11). Denver oscillates between longing to participate in the community and being too afraid to step out of the safety of the home. Unlike Beloved, who is prematurely deprived of Sethe's care, Denver has been (s)mothered. Realizing that Sethe is willing to prolong the pre-Oedipal relationship with her daughter indefinitely, Denver finally makes an attempt to sever her own ties. Her initial attempt to enter the Symbolic world of Lady Jones' "school" is unsuccessful, and the damage that is inflicted upon her through language leaves her unable to communicate at all in the outside world. She calls this time of retreat "the original hunger—the time when, after a year of the wonderful little *i*, sentences rolling out like pie dough and the company of other children, there was no sound coming through" (1998: 121). Denver's

social ambivalence resurfaces in her initial mistrust of Paul D., even though it is thanks to him that she appears to be well on her way to a successful (re)initiation into the community on the day of the fair: Paul D. "made the stares of other Negroes kind, gentle, something Denver did not remember seeing in their faces" (1998: 48).

However, this attempt at individuation is also destined to fail with the apparition of her sister Beloved, as all three women are eventually sent spinning back into an enclosed, pre-linguistic space. At this point in the novel, Sethe herself is more than prepared to permanently renounce any kind of community life: "Paul D. convinced me there was a world out there and that I could live in it. Should have known better. Did know better. Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all I need and all there needs to be" (Morrison, 1998: 183). The three female figures skating on the frozen pond can be seen as a perverted mirror image of the three hand-holding shadows on the way to the fair. In stark contrast to the sunlight and warmth on the way to the fair, where both Denver and her mother are initiated into community "life" (1998: 47) with the help of Paul D, in the "cold and dying light" (1998: 174) of the frozen pond, mother and daughters are locked in static fusion.[5]

By the end of the novel, Denver is finally able to step out of the safety of the yard and risk being "swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch" (Morrison, 1998: 243). With this final decision, Denver makes her way back to Lady Jones and is finally "inaugurated" into the world "as a woman" (1998: 248). Denver physically moves away from 124 Bluestone Road and the symbolic maternal ties loosen: "As Denver's outside life improved, her home life deteriorated" (1998: 251). Finally, as she develops a selfhood of her own, the "space" that her mother used to occupy is now open for heterosexual desire:

> It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve. And it might not have occurred to her if she hadn't met Nelson Lord leaving his grandmother's house as Denver entered it to pay a small thank you for half a pie. All he did was smile and say, "take care of yourself, Denver," but she heard it as though it were what language was made for. The last time he spoke to her his words blocked up her ears. Now they opened her mind. (Morrison, 1998: 253)

Fully inaugurated into the Symbolic world of community, Denver is now free to know what language is "made for."[6]

As Karin Badt suggests, the "incessant literary return to the mother" seen in much of Toni Morrison's work can be read both on an individual level as "an expression of a psychological desire to recover the repressed," and on a communal level as the "expression of a political desire to recover the past" (1995: 567). Clearly, there are strong connections to be made between individual and collective healing in *Beloved*. The importance placed on recovering memory—

of "rememory"—in this novel cannot be understated. For example, the terrifying reality of the Middle Passage is communicated through Beloved's memory. Allegorically, the liminal existence of the baby ghost represents the Middle Passage itself, and the unimaginable horror that every slave, adult and child, who was prematurely pried away from his/her mother's body (not to mention mother Africa) must have experienced. On a much larger scale, Beloved's individual return to the mother in order to repair the self should therefore be further understood as a "political project to repair the black mother" (Badt, 1995: 568).

The African Diaspora into the Western hemisphere has resulted in the reproduction of a "Diaspora consciousness," in which "identity is focused less on the equalizing, proto-democratic force of common territory and more on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the process of dispersal" (Woodward, 1997: 318). As Badt points out, in Morrison's work "the lost memory of the mother's body is similar to other metaphors of a buried past or a lost history that contributes to the rhetoric of oppressed people" (1995: 567). This is clearly the case with *Beloved*.

However, while a return to the mother—"to the roots of African culture" (Badt, 1995: 577)— is the first step in the cultural healing process and defragmenting of the self on both a personal and communal level, the fate of Beloved herself makes it clear that this return to the mother must only be temporary. Although a connection to ancestors and memory is important for maintaining the "motherline" (O'Reilly, 1999: 188) of Afro-American culture, the sense of "somebodyness" and the "new self-image" (King Jr., 1967: 124) that Martin Luther King Jr. speaks of, is contingent upon independent identity.[7] Like Denver, who is destined to move away from her mother and take her own place within the community, the cultures of the African Diaspora are clearly distinct from their "mother" African culture, lending truth to the idea that one is "reborn from maternal severance" (Badt, 1995 577).

[1]The problematic aspects of using psychoanalytic theory to analyse a book by an African American woman should be addressed here. Not unlike other Western knowledge systems, although most often masquerading as dispassionate "science," psychoanalysis itself is merely another discourse that has been shaped by the specific cultural and historical contexts within which it is produced and which, in turn, helps to shape culture and history. Psychoanalysis has therefore been criticized as "ethnocentric" by those who question the "usefulness of applying a method developed in one culture to the study of another" (Cornell, 1993: 170). In particular, western feminist psychoanalysis has been "forcefully critiqued for its attempt to universalize the experience of white middle-class women as if that experience could tell us something about women per se" (189). As a white, middle-class woman myself, I feel that I

should at least be sensitive to my own ethnocentrism in my reliance on psychoanalysis to look at Morrison's (1998) novel.

²As Irigaray points out: "Given that the first body they have any dealings with is a woman's body, that the first love they share is mother love, it is important to remember that women always stand in an archaic and primal relationship with what is known as homosexuality" (1991a: 44). In this case, it would seem more likely for a little girl to demonstrate desire toward their mother or other women, even though "the father sees this purely as something which has been staged for his benefit ... as the belief that a woman's desire can only be addressed to him" (101). Interestingly, Paul D. does not even entertain the notion that Beloved's "shine" could be directed at her mother: "But if her shining was not for him, who then? He had never known a woman who lit up for nobody in particular" (Morrison, 1998: 65).

³Of course, feminists challenging the hegemony of western phallogocentrism have challenged the necessity of this "rejection." Because the formation of individual consciousness is based on alienation, the "Other" becomes perceived as dangerous to the "Self" and is therefore rejected:

> Psychoanalytic theory and practice suggest that political and personal violence frequently springs from unconscious anxieties and desires which may nevertheless masquerade as the language of consciousness and reason. It suggests that if we want to understand the subordination of women (and other groups on the basis of class, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity), we need to attend to the unconscious formations (such as projection) behind these responses to difference. (Minsky, 1996: 18)

Kristeva's notion of the "abject" further explains how certain groups function as "cultural scapegoats" (1986a: 182). Abjection originates when, following the baby's pre-Oedipal experience of oneness with it's mother and her bodily products, the mother is symbolically castrated and denigrated. This explains why many of us are "unconsciously tempted to denigrate, attack or even destroy" the "bad" aspects of ourselves which we embody in "others perceived as different" (Minsky, 1996: 191) in order to retain our self-hood. In this way, the subjugation of the cultural "Other" (not to mention the female "Other") can also be directly linked to the repression of the Mother.

⁴More than a Medea-like attempt at female resistance in a male-dominated world, Sethe's murderous decision in the shed can also be read as subversive attempt to prevent the disruption of the pre-Oedipal bond: "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (Morrison, 1998: 164). Representing the "Law" of the father—and bolstered by the "law" of the Fugitive Bill—"Schoolteacher" arrives and threatens to disrupt the "twenty-eight days" of blissful unity mother and children have experienced. Rather than accept this disruption and become an accomplice in her children's progression into the Symbolic order, Sethe fully

intends to take both herself and her babies "over there" (163)—permanently. The woodshed itself is a dark, enclosed, protected, womb-like space. For those who exist in the light outside, the "light" of reason and language—like the sheriff who is desperate to "stand in the sunlight outside of that place" (151)—this darkness represents something unspeakable.

[5]Again, here it is important to note the problematic limitations of psychoanalytic theory. Many feminist critics have pointed out how the masculine Symbolic order of language (and "culture" itself) is based on the exclusion of the feminine, which is also seen as the bodily or the unconscious. Feminist proponents of a distinctly "feminine" way of writing propose that tapping into "unconscious desire" frees the text from "patriarchal control through the use of a specifically poetic language" (Minsky, 1996: 179). It could be argued that Morrison herself adopts such poetic strategies in this novel. For example, in the chorus of female voices, Morrison evokes particularly poetically the pre-Oedipal space, when the voices of Sethe, Beloved and Denver intermingle in three-part harmony and eventually fuse as one: "Your face is mine... Will we smile at me ... You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you?" (Morrison, 1998: 215-216). As Paul D. points out, Sethe herself did not "know where the world stopped and she began" (165). Far from a frightening image of madness, the community of women at 124 Bluestone Rd. can therefore be read as a subversive, even utopian, vision of culture beyond the phallus. Indeed, the "unspeakable thoughts" of this circle of women are completely "undecipherable" to male outsiders (199).

[6]To a certain extent, the inevitability of Denver's initiation into the (heterosexual) community is foreshadowed by her relationship to other phallic signifiers in the novel. For example, in addition to her "thrilled eyes and smacking lips" (Morrison, 1998: 136) when Stamp Paid introduces her to her first taste of non-maternal nourishment, he also prevents Sethe from sending Denver "over there" with her sister Beloved. Many references are also made to Denver's physical likeness to her own father, Halle. Paul D. immediately recognizes that she has got "her daddy's sweet face" (13), but it is not until the end of the novel that he realizes that, "thinner, steady in the eye, she looked more like Halle than ever" (267). When Denver decides to go out into the community, the promise of this fatherly likeness is truly fulfilled: "Her father's daughter after all, Denver decided to do the necessary" (252).

[7]In this novel it is "Baby Suggs, holy" who offers up this message of "sombodyness" and self-love to her community while preaching in the clearing.

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Trudelle Thomas

"You'll Become a Lioness"
African-American Women Talk About Mothering

> Being a woman is about ... having positive, reciprocal relationships
> with your lover, your husband, your friends, your family. In other
> words, if you give, you want to get back. I don't believe in uncondi-
> tional love. —Camilla Cosby (quoted in interview in *O: The Oprah
> Magazine,* May 2000: 307)

Not long ago, I found myself interviewing a young African-American mother.
"I wish I could tell young girls that when they have a baby, they will change....
You'll become a lioness. You'll protect this baby!" Kennedy went on to describe
with calm conviction the ways her ambitions and confidence and resolve had
grown stronger since her son's birth five years earlier.

Indeed, Kennedy's comments were typical of the African-American
mothers that I interviewed. These women articulated a model of contemporary
motherhood that is pro-active, pragmatic, and multi-faceted. This "Lioness"
model undercuts the mainstream "Giving Tree" approach to motherhood
which dominates Euro-American thinking; I believe the insights of these
African-American women can help all mothers, Euro-American and African-
American alike, who are searching for new metaphors for motherhood in this
post-industrial age. Because of its theological/pastoral slant, the following
essay will be of special interest to those in positions of leadership in Christian
churches and other institutions whose membership includes mothers. Those
working with mothers in the settings of social agencies or the medical world will
find valuable insights.

This essay summarizes a series of interviews carried out in 1999. The
interviewees quoted in this essay are all African-American mothers who are
currently raising young children. To interpret the interviews, I draw upon

theories of African American feminists (notably Collins, 1990; Cole, 1993) and also upon Euro-American scholars, including theologians.

In the course of my interviews four themes emerged, which I will examine in greater detail below, quoting from the interviewees themselves: 1) These women speak candidly of the complexity of mothering—the joys as well as the fears, struggles, and injustices. 2) These mothers are determined to set an example for their children which combines both the virtues of achievement and the virtues of nurturing. (They assume that they will work outside the home, and that they will strive for upward mobility, as a way to promote their children's well-being.) 3) For these women, motherhood has fostered an expanded sense of self and a deeper spirituality, even when such spirituality is not well supported by organized religion. 4) These women shed light on the practical and spiritual needs of mothers, needs that could (and should) be addressed by Christian churches and other religious institutions.

The interviews

This essay focuses upon six interviews with African-American women. These six interviews were part of a larger study that included open-ended interviews with 25 individual women (all living in the U.S., of various ethnic backgrounds but predominantly Euro-American), during which each woman talked about her experiences as a mother in relation to her own spiritual development.

Of this smaller group (i.e., the African-Americans), all were mothers of one or two children ranging in age from two to twelve. The women's ages ranged from 23 to 47. All were relatively well-educated; one was working on a B.A., while all the others had completed college degrees, and two had masters' degrees as well. Two of the women were married, one was divorced, and three had never married. All came from married, two-parent homes. Finally, all were affiliated with different Protestant (Christian) denominations ranging from Pentecostal to Baptist to Episcopal.

The six African-American voices provided a striking counterpoint to the Euro-American mothers I interviewed. What distinguished them was the dramatic way they diverged from the conventional rhetoric of self-sacrifice which ran through the other interviews. Most of the Euro-American women accepted a line of thinking that ran something like this: "When I became a mother, I learned how to sacrifice so that I could become a good mother. I learned to put myself on hold for the good of my children." Another spiritualized this sacrificial ideal: "As a mother, you just keep giving and giving—even when you think you have nothing left to give…. It's like Jesus says—'Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it cannot create new life.' As a mother, I must 'die to myself.'"

I was surprised that despite many decades of consciousness-raising in the United States, many mothers, even those who are sophisticated, progressive, and feminist in other ways, do not challenge the assumption that motherhood

is founded on endless self-sacrifice. Others (such as Miller-McLemore) have referred to this as the "Giving Tree" approach to maternity (1994: 185).

The term "Giving Tree" refers to a very popular children's book by Shel Silverstein (1964) which portrays the generosity of an apple tree (not surprisingly portrayed as female) toward a little boy who grows into a self-seeking and exploitative man. Early on, the boy and tree have an intimate and joyful mutual relationship, but as the boy grows up he takes the tree's apples, then her branches, and finally her trunk (which he makes into a boat). When the tree has nothing else to give, the boy returns as a tired old man and sits on her stump, and "the tree was happy," having given everything with no thought of return. This heinous little tale is widely read as an example of altruistic love.

In contrast, Kennedy and the other African-American women I interviewed endorsed a model of motherhood that is like a Lioness rather than a Giving Tree (or stump). My interview sample is small (six interviews) so it is, of course, impossible to generalize about all African-American mothers based upon them. Still, the interviewees' positive self-definitions provide insight into contemporary American experiences of motherhood. Because religious faith has been an important source and strength and hope for many African-Americans, I give special attention to the things my interviewees say about what they need from their churches and other religious institutions.

Speaking candidly of the complexity of mothering

The women I interviewed all spoke with passion about the joyful aspects of motherhood. Compared to the Euro-American women I interviewed, these African-American were much more ebullient in describing the joy their children had brought them. For all of them, new motherhood had occurred in less than ideal circumstances, and it had brought unexpected challenges. Yet they all spoke with great vigor of their love for their children and the pleasure their children had brought them. For example, Anita was 24 and engaged to be married when she became pregnant. For several months, she wrestled with whether to continue the pregnancy. In the face of her misgivings, a difficult pregnancy, and a complicated birth, Anita was surprised by the pleasure she experienced once her son was born.

> *When I finally held my baby and nursed him, I was in tears—I was so relieved and happy! I was so glad I made that decision! I was so happy! John [my fiancé] said, "I told you so. I told you [that] you would be happy." And my baby [now age five] has been my sunshine since birth.*

Another woman, Gail, was 35 when she adopted an infant after many years of infertility treatment. Like Anita, she is surprised by joy:

> *I was thrilled. I was so ready for a baby. All of a sudden, all the anguish and tears of not being able to conceive, wanting a child—it was all gone. I lost*

about 15 pounds because I dropped all that weight of depression. I'd been carrying that burden of grief for seven years! [Bonding with my daughter] was a magical process. She put a new level of joy in my life that I did not know existed.

Certainly, women have been speaking of the joys of motherhood throughout time, but still I was surprised by how strongly these women emphasized this aspect. Their comments seem to reinforce Patricia Hill Collins' assertions that motherhood is a source of growth and hope in the African-American community, as well as a source of status and power (1990: 115). Compared to the Euro-American women I interviewed, these African-American women spoke more freely, perhaps because they are part of a community that assigns a greater value to motherhood.

Nonetheless, these mothers took a very pragmatic view of motherhood, speaking candidly of the sorrows and costs brought about by raising children. They are very aware of the physical challenges of pregnancy and birth, and also of the enormity of their task of raising children in a hostile environment.

Anthropologist Kathryn March makes an important point when she observes that, in mainstream U.S. culture, we promote an unbalanced view of maternity. "[W]e surround ourselves with a discourse of joy, … deceived by our shared faith that chosen childbearing is always happy" (1994: 148). March studied women in Nepal who "publicly bewail infertility, repeat miscarriages, hard births, and deaths in [i.e., during] and near birth" (March 150). She found that Nepalese women "talk about loss and fear in mothering frankly and openly … they are part of mothers' talk" (1994: 152-153).

Similarly, the African-American women I interviewed spoke frankly about fear and difficulty, even as they spoke about maternal pleasures. They all struck me as remarkably pragmatic and tough-minded in their ready assumption that the world is a foreboding and dangerous place for children and mothers. Like the Nepalese women, they were blunt regarding the difficulties of pregnancy and birth, and they were candid about the long-term challenges of childrearing. Anita puts it this way:

I'm raising a '90s child. Things are happening with black males now—to children now—that didn't happen when I was growing up. I have to worry about things my mother didn't worry about—I worry about my son being molested. The Black community has to work together to raise our children. We can't expect anyone else to look out for them.

On a similar note, Marcia is trying to teach her 18-month-old daughter to toughen up:

When she's doing something wrong and she gets hurt, I don't come running. She needs to learn how to behave.... I want to be a "hands-off mother"—

to stand back—lay down the law. As a single parent, I have to lay down the rules. I've seen doting ruin children, so I'm not going to dote.

Another woman, Nina, prepares her children for challenges by strengthening their moral characters:

We've tried to bring [our children] up the right way—morally—and teach them what's right—even though it's not what they will experience or what peer pressure is. We tried very very hard [to prepare ourselves] before becoming parents. I thought to myself, "I'm gonna make sure my child does this and this and this, and this is the way I'm gonna build this child up."

Anita is trying to instill a deep religious faith in her son, to help him in the face of injustices or dangers:

I'm trying to teach him that you have to believe that God is going to bring you through any situation, through all the storms. Your faith will be tested. There will be obstacles put in your way. You have to rely on God to bring you through the storm.

While some of the women were more explicit than others in talking about racial injustice, all were sure that there would be "storms" in their children's futures, and that their task as mothers included "building [their children] up."

Moreover, the women I interviewed saw childrearing from the outset as solitary and difficult. Kennedy, for example, talks about the loneliness of early motherhood:

No one told me how difficult it would be.... I was by myself. [My first day home from the hospital,] my husband had a houseful of people wanting to see the baby. They weren't any help. I remember nursing [my son] in my room and crying and wondering when all those people would leave. Why couldn't they bring a covered dish or [greeting] card and leave? They didn't help at all.

Another woman, originally from Africa (Sierra Leone), comments on how lonely she finds childrearing in the U.S.:

[Our isolation] hits me whenever I have to fill out any forms for my kids— who should we contact in case of emergency? That particular line is always blank for us, because [my husband and I] have nobody here. It's a big struggle for us.

She poignantly compares her own experience with the treatment of mothers and children "back home" in Africa:

[Back home] when you become a new mother, you don't even cook for a long time. You just sit and take care of the baby—you don't even have to get up.... Everyone is at your beck and call. You don't even have to ask. People just stream to your house and do everything for the baby. They send food. [An older woman] will take charge of your baby and come every morning and wash the baby's hair, bathe the baby, do everything for you. you.... At home the family is very important, but here [U.S.] people don't tolerate the kids. They invite you but they don't want the kids.... Some people don't even want kids in their houses. They will have an animal and prefer that animal in their house to having a child....

All the women had received practical support in early motherhood from their own mothers; two said that their mothers came to stay for several weeks post-partem, and another (the only one who lived in the same city as her own mother) reported that her mother helped with child-care while she worked.

Still, of all the women I interviewed, only one (the oldest of the group at age 47) described a dense network of family and friends. All the others felt that the task of childrearing rested upon her shoulders alone, or upon hers and her husband's. This sense of isolation challenges Collins' 1990 assertion that Black mothers mother within a context of women-centered networks that support biological mothers. In fact, all the women I interviewed expressed a strong commitment to their extended families, especially their parents. Yet often family loyalty meant more responsibility, not necessarily more support. Kennedy repeats a common theme:

When [my son] was about three, I went home to take care of my mother [who was dying of cancer]. I'd take her to chemo, talk to the doctor.... Taking care of my mother ruined my marriage—my husband felt so neglected that he had an affair.

Several of the women were aware that daughterly care-giving had caused them to neglect other relationships, including spouse and children. Career advancement had also been affected. Some of the women mentioned that such care-giving was distributed unevenly within families. Sons, even much-favored sons, did not exhibit the same filial devotion as daughters. Marcia comments on gender roles within her family:

In my family, the brothers were cherished but not the girls. Myself, I wasn't mothered well. Most Black women will tell you that their brothers got better treatment, and so do their brothers' kids.... And not much is expected from them.

It is only fair to point out that even though these women experienced limited practical support, most reported a strong sense of emotional support

from their families. In the face of practical needs (including financial, child-care, health care, housing, etc.), most women felt they were on their own. Still, all said they felt very emotionally connected to family and friends. Anita, for example, lived at a distance from her family during her pregnancy, yet she reported that her mother and several sisters each traveled 600 miles to spend time with her. Marcia said that she had several friends who were away at school yet kept in touch with her, and Nina [the woman orignally from Sierra Leone] maintained ties with extended family throughout the U.S. and overseas by means of letters and family reunions.

For most of these women, a loss of practical support was a trade-off caused by upward mobility. All had moved geographically once or more for college or employment. Most would envy the situation described by the woman from Africa, who recalls, "Back home, there are always lots of relatives around. There is family right through your life. If you have problems in your marriage or with your kids, there is help. There is always someone to watch your child. You are never all alone." Perhaps the sense of isolation was a factor of age; most of the women were still completing their education or launching careers. Perhaps as they get older they will be able to tap into a network of support such as Collins (1990) described. It is unfortunate that for these women, as for most mothers in the U.S., the intense demands of early parenting coincide in time with the geographic mobility often required to advance their education and careers.

In summary, the women I interviewed expressed a thoughtful and complex view of mothering. While they were in touch with the profound joys of motherhood, they were also aware of racial injustice, fears for their children, inequities within their extended families, and social isolation. The word that came up over and over again was responsibility. All these African-American women were emphatic about the colossal sense of responsibility that came with children, much more emphatic than the Euro-American women I interviewed. I found myself wondering if this were a response against the internalized image of the "welfare mother" that Collins (1990) wrote about as a false and destructive stereotype. All were determined never to become dependent in such a way; rather, they had definite ideas about creating a better life for themselves and their children.

Setting an example for their children

The women I interviewed all speak of motherhood in terms that challenge the mainstream United States culture. Theologian Teresa E. Snorton points out that the "cult of true womanhood" has shaped how we think of family life in the U.S., yet that "cult" is Euro-centric, in direct contrast to the African-American understanding of womanhood.

> The [so-called] true woman is self-contained within her nuclear family, with specific and separate roles for men and women, and with an economic dependence on men, in such a way that motherhood is

one's true occupation" (Snorton, 1996: 57).

Psychoanalyst Roszika Parker describes the ideology surrounding motherhood in slightly different terms,

> Despite changing beliefs about babies' capacities and thus childcare priorities, the representation of ideal motherhood is still almost exclusively made up of self-abnegation, unstinting love, intuitive knowledge of nurturance, and unalloyed pleasure in children. (Parker, 1995: 22)

Such narrow views of motherhood may have little to do with contemporary reality, especially for the vast majority of African-American women. Snorton observes, "Flexible sex roles, outside-the-home employment, and a responsibility to and for one's extended family are certainties and necessities for most African-American women." (1996: 57) Hence motherhood as one's "true [and only] occupation" is a view that few African-American women have wanted to adopt. In prizing motherhood, rather, they have adopted healthy attributes that include self-sufficiency, independence, personal accomplishment, alongside the capacity for nurturing and caring (Cole, 1993: 71).

The women that I interviewed spoke with pride of their capacities to bring such a range of attributes to their mothering. Specifically they spoke of being an example to their children, providing a strong foundation, and passing on a deep religious faith. Kennedy, for example, speaks of her new self-confidence:

> *It used to be, my self-esteem was flat line.... Now I take a stand. I'm involved with my son's school—I have to protect him!... My [six-year-old] son sees me study. He'll lay on the bed beside me when I'm studying, and I'll say, "When it's your time to go [to college], maybe you'll appreciate it.... My being in school is gonna do you a world of good!" I can't let myself feel guilty. I'm making a better life for us!... I wish I could tell young girls that when they have a baby, they will change. You may be a passive wimp, but you'll become a lioness. You'll protect this baby!*

On a similar note, Marcia felt that her first pregnancy helped her develop virtues that lay the groundwork for the coming years:

> *The process of carrying [my child in the womb] was a spiritual experience. You have to reach in every day and find the strength to move forward. You gotta find a spiritual force to get up.... Through my pregnancy, I learned to lean on God, because I [as an unmarried mother with little support] was the one with complete responsibility.... To me God is a force, a spirit that helps you in hard times. I'm learning to be independent, self-sufficient—you have to!*

While some might think that "leaning on God" is incompatible with being "independent, self-sufficient," Marcia's experience suggests otherwise. Anita also links personal strength and determination with religious faith, and she sees all these as important traits to model to her five-year-old son:

After I finish my master's [degree], I really want to get a PhD. I want [my son] to see that learning is cool, that great things happen to people who go to college. But it's not enough for him to see "My mother goes to work and she brings home a paycheck and she goes to school and she's really smart"— he also needs to see my relationship with God. I am driven to be closer to God because I need to be an example to my son. He needs that spiritual foundation too! I want him to know that if you believe in God and have faith, good things will happen . That's what my life has been based upon.

According to Snorton, surrender to God is an essential way of coping for African-American women: "The womanist shifts her focus from the finitude of life to the transcendent nature of the human experience. This is not a 'pie in the sky,' [or] 'otherworldly' attitude but rather a survivalist stance" (1996: 57).

The women I interviewed embody a wide range of healthy attributes. On the one hand, they carry out the traditionally feminine tasks of nurturing, protecting, and training children, but they bring to those tasks many traits often considered masculine, including strength, determination, self-sufficiency, courage, and industry.[1] Other abilities that the women spoke of were the ability to juggle competing responsibilities, to cultivate serenity in the midst of difficulty, and to play and enjoy life. Many expressed appreciation toward their children for teaching them these latter traits.

Cole points out that strong African-American women have often unfairly been made to feel defensive or guilty for their strength (1993: 71). A more appropriate description comes from spiritual writer, Edith Stein (1891-1942). A Carmelite nun writing in the 1940s, Stein is an unlikely spokesperson for contemporary African-American mothers, yet her comments fit the African-American women I interviewed:

Christ embodies the ideal of human perfection: in Him all bias and defects are removed, and the masculine and feminine virtues are united and their weaknesses redeemed. That is why we see in holy men a womanly tenderness.... while in holy women there is a manly boldness, proficiency, and determination. (Stein, 1996: 84)

An expanded sense of self and a deeper spirituality

The strong emphasis on spirituality surprised me, in light of the fact that my interviewees all reported strained or disappointing relationships with organized religion. All were affiliated with Protestant Christian churches, yet none expressed satisfaction with them, and most felt that becoming a mother

had alienated them from their churches. For example, Anita, the daughter of a minister, felt hurt by her church:

> *My church said, "You're a disgrace for having a child outside wedlock...."*
> *I say, "You don't pay my bills—I don't need you —what right do you have*
> *to judge me?" But deep down it hurt me. I couldn't bring myself to go to*
> *church or read the Bible for four years.*

All had experienced difficulty finding a church where they felt at home. One felt uncomfortable with the formality of her husband's Episcopal church, others found their churches to be unfriendly or too large, and some felt their churches did not provide enough attention to their children.

Yet, in spite of this alienation from religious institutions, all the women expressed belief in God as a source of comfort, guidance, and strength. One woman asked to be baptized during her first pregnancy, and all felt it was important to raise their children as part of a religious tradition. And all the women I interviewed spoke of a deepening spirituality. Anita, for example, speaks vividly about her prayer life:

> *With a newborn son, I prayed more than I had ever prayed before. My labor*
> *had slowed down, so on the delivery table I prayed and cried and prayed—*
> *"God please let me push this baby through the birth canal!" God helped me*
> *give birth. Once I had [my son], I was so scared! I had never held a baby*
> *before. I said, "God, you have got to walk me through this process. Give me*
> *the knowledge and strength to take care of my son." He helped me. When he*
> *cried, I would sing, "Yes, Jesus loves me." That would soothe him and soothe*
> *me too—because I knew Jesus does love me.*

Gail also spoke about praying in an unconventional way:

> *I love walking in the morning when it's quiet—that's my serenity. I don't*
> *need organized religion.... I have this keen sense of another world. I'm*
> *raising a child, and I recently helped my mother die [by caring for her during*
> *her last months] and then my father.... All these things have made me grow*
> *spiritually.... Some new things are opening up in my life [and] when it's*
> *time, that door will open and I'll go through it.... I'll be ready for it, and*
> *that's what I want to teach my daughter. To be ready. To be ready.*

As the women spoke of spirituality, I was struck by the absence of an emphasis on self-sacrifice. According to theologian Brita Gill-Austern, Christians have historically been shaped by a theological tradition that views self-denial and self-sacrifice as the defining attributes of Christian love (1996: 308). Gill-Austern observes that for most women "the unholy trinity of self-abnegation, self-doubt, and false guilt [are] always knocking at the door"

causing them to feel they are less important, less valuable, and less essential than men (1996: 307). If self-sacrifice is held up as an ideal for Euro-American Christians, it is held up all the more highly for those within such traditions who are mothers.

The women I interviewed were aware of the ideal of self-sacrifice with its attendant false guilt and self-doubt, yet they do embrace that "unholy trinity"; it is as if self-abnegation, self-doubt and false guilt are intruders they cannot afford to admit. Several expressed ambivalence about having to leave a young child in child-care, for example, or sorrow about having to work or study long hours, but they did not speak in terms of feeling guilty. Gail was typical:

> *When I went back to work, I missed her terribly—it was physically painful. I hated it. Then you know you adjust and that was just reality. I come from a household where my mother always worked. That's a reality. Black women are used to two income households because financially most households needed two incomes in order to survive.*

Moreover, although all the interviewees were making personal sacrifices to ensure a better life for themselves and their children, no one sentimentalized or idealized sacrifice as a desirable ideal. Rather than saying "I will imitate Christ by suffering and sacrificing," these women seem to say, "I want my kids to have a better life. I will do what it takes to make that happen, and God will give me strength" (Gill-Austern, 1996: 309). Gill-Austern sees the Christian ideal of love as self-sacrifice as inherently misguided. She writes,

> Jesus' teaching was simply not disinterested or devoid of all self-concern. He wanted to show others how their life might be enhanced if they followed in his way. His way entailed suffering and required sacrifice but its promise, its ultimate destination, was abundant life and joy. (1996: 309)

Gill-Austern's emphasis on "abundant life and joy" resonated throughout all my interviews with African-American mothers, much more strongly than those with Euro-American mothers. They had their eyes set on the goal of a better, more abundant life, and were willing to endure what it took to realize that life; they had no need to seek out or idealize self-sacrifice.

Shedding light on the practical and spiritual needs of mothers

Since historically many African-Americans have looked to church as an important source of community and guidance, I asked each woman what they would like to receive from their churches. In some cases, I prodded them to think about needs that have not been traditionally addressed by churches. Six areas of need emerged that will be of interest to those in leadership in Euro-American churches as well as African-American churches. Social agencies

seeking to support mothers and children would also do well to listen to these themes.

a) *Practical support and knowledge.* All the women felt a need, especially in very early motherhood (i.e., the first few months), for practical support in the form of child-care, household help, and meals. During this intense period of adjustment, many women felt "spiritual help means practical help." In addition, women commented on the need for information on topics such as breastfeeding, child immunizations, CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation), nutrition, childhood illnesses, maternal health. Virtually no one felt they had received adequate information about these issues from the medical world, and many expressed the belief that these basic concerns went hand in hand with their desire for spiritual growth; spiritual needs could not be separated from practical health and household-related needs.

b) *Guidance in prayer.* Women expressed a need to "move to a new level" in terms of their spirituality. Personal prayer and communal prayer both become more important to a woman who is adjusting to new and ongoing motherhood. Anita's example of asking God to help her deliver her baby, and of singing "Jesus Loves Me" to her newborn baby suggest a few forms such prayer might take. Many women felt that motherhood forced them to grow spiritually and that personal prayer was an important avenue for such growth. To my surprise, few expressed concern for feminine images of God.

c) *Intergenerational support for childrearing.* Women expressed a longing for a church as a source of community, especially for their children. My interviewees felt the need and desire for people of a range of ages to help them to "build up" their children spiritually—by loving their children, advising them as mothers, and being role models for children. One woman said that single mothers were often not adequately included in church-communities. Another observed that African-American churches had a huge reserve of competent and wise older women and grandmothers who could be a tremendous resource for young mothers. One woman commented, "Churches could offer parenting classes. There's a wealth of resources in a lot of churches, a wealth of professions—people whose kids are grown, who have raised successful children—they could offer classes out of their experience."

d) *Good religious education for their children.* These women desire churches where their children are welcomed and receive good instruction. Some expressed impatience with "long, dull religious services" or with "enforced passivity" for children. Some mentioned children's church, a good nursery, and Vacation Bible School as desirable ministries in a church, and said that these were less common now than when they themselves were children.

e) *Preaching and teaching that reflect their own life experience as growing adults.* These women desire sermons and teaching that focus on growth and hope and "abundant life" rather than on death and self-sacrifice. They would like to hear from the pulpit their experiences as mothers and as people seeking to grow into full personhood. Both strength and vulnerability should be valued

for both men and women. Especially, women desire a place where they can express vulnerability and need and yet feel safe and cherished. All the women felt they were growing and that the church was a place that could help women grow into full personhood.

f) *An outlet for their talents*. These women were eager to give to a church community as well as receive from it. Many women felt they had untapped gifts. Anita, for example, said, "I would love to teach parenting classes—I would love to take that on. My friends [with new babies] come to me for leadership [because my son is doing so well]." Women want to contribute to their church without emulating "the giving tree model of spirituality," that is, endless self-giving without mutuality (Miller-McLemore 185).

[1]Philosopher Sara Ruddick (1995) offers a helpful definition by focusing on their work as mothers: "Mothers are not identified by fixed biological or legal relationships to children but by the work they set out to do … . [M]others are people who see children as 'demanding' protection, nurturance, and training; they attempt to respond to children's demands with care and respect rather than indifference or assault" (xi). Writing 50 years earlier, Stein speaks of mothers' inclination to "cherish, guard, and preserve" (1996: 73).

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C. Bernard, W. Thomas Bernard, C. Ekpo, J. Enang, B. Joseph, and N. Wane

"She Who Learns Teaches"

Othermothering in the Academy

A Dialogue Among African Canadian and African Caribbean Students and Faculty

Much of the feminist discourse in academic work renders African Canadian women's experiences invisible, seriously compromised and/or marginalized. In this paper, a group of African Canadian and African Caribbean graduate students and professors dialogue with each other about some of their experiences in academic settings. Most of these students are the first generation in their families to pursue graduate education. They are from diverse backgrounds, and study in a range of disciplines. However, what links them is their research about African Canadian women and their interests in pursuing African-centered studies. They will discuss some barriers and challenges they have encountered in trying to make visible the experiences of African peoples. The students will also speak about their fieldwork in the communities, their experiences in doing African centered research, and the links between their academic lives and their communities, particularly their connection with their professors, fellow students, program co-ordinators, and student advisors as othermothers. The faculty members discuss their experiences as academics and othermothers, and some of the challenges and contradictions they face. We begin with a discussion of Africentricity in higher education, and othermothering in the community and the academy. The paper concludes with an interactive discussion about approaches to eliminate gender and racial inequity in research, policy and action.

Africentricity in higher education

By Africentricity we mean using a worldview that sees African people as critical agents of their own experience. The core focus of the Africentric paradigm is the re-assessment of social phenomena from an African centered orientation (Schiele, 1994; Asante, 1987; Collins, 1990). We bring an Africentric

feminist perspective to this piece, which pays attention to issues of race, class, and gender, and the interlocking nature of these oppressions.

Schiele (1994) offers a creative vision of the use of Africentric theory in higher education. He asserts that Africentricity exposes white racism and culpability. Naming the student/teacher relationship as the most important social relationship in academia, Schiele (1994) states that under the Eurocentric paradigm, many African students experience fragmentation, dissonance and frustration. African students are often misunderstood, and are not able to get the supports they need in white institutions (Reid, 1990; Harris, 1998; Schiele, 1994; Cook, 1997; Bernard, forthcoming). Schiele (1994) offers a new vision and perspective. He suggests that the Africentric model would emphasize cooperation and harmony, as opposed to uncooperation, antagonism or aloofness. However, to achieve these goals, the academic must be humble, non-elitist and affable to promote and create a comfortable, nurturing and inspirational learning environment. These are congruent with the Africentric perspective, where the role of the teacher is to:

•emphasize and foster a subjective and cognitive experience of knowledge among students (the feeling intellect)

•be a change agent, promoting the transformation of students

•be an information provider and receiver (learning is seen as interdependent and bi-directional) (Schiele, 1994:156-157).

An emphasis on these roles would help African and non-African students feel engaged and connected to their academic environment. The challenge lies in the academy itself, and the institutional policies and practices that would prohibit the implementation of such progressive pedagogy. It challenges traditional notions of competition and individualism.

Schiele (1994) also offers a new vision for students who are operating within an Africentric paradigm. He suggests that students would:

•be seen as a collective group and be more interconnected

•see themselves more as a group than as individuals

•be seen as cooperative learners

•cultivate feeling intellect (Schiele, 1994:157-158).

The conception of Africentricity in higher education offers us an alternative to the Eurocentric view of the world and on higher education (Schiele, 1994:165). It provides a vehicle for the expression of cultural identity and ethos among African educators and students, and a buffer from the psychological and cultural misorientation that occurs in the education system. Schiele offers three distinct locations for the infusion of Africentric thought in the academy:

•promoting Afrocentricity[1] among students, colleagues and administrators

•integrating Afrocentric content in the class[room] and

•applying Afrocentricity in scholarly and professional activities (Schiele, 1994: 160).

In this paper, academics and students discuss the ways in which they try to

promote and integrate African centered perspectives and Africentricity in their study and work plans. One example is the repositioning of othermothering, locating it in the academy.

Othermothering

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) coined the term othermothering, which she uses to effectively describe the role that Black women play as community othermothers. She says that community othermothers build a different type of community in what are often hostile political and economic surroundings (1990: 131-132). In addition, their experiences as othermothers provide a valid foundation for the development of Black women's political activism. Bernard and Bernard (1998) talk of the highly politicized nature of Black motherhood. Referring to both biological and othermothers, they assert that Black mothers have been given the responsibility for providing education, social and political awareness to their own children, as well as the children in their communities. We suggest that Collins' definition of othermothers extends to the work we do in the academy. Othermothering in the community is the foundation of what Collins calls the *"mothering the mind"* [emphasis hers] relationship that often develops between African-American [descended] women teachers and their Black female and male students. We refer to this as othermothering in the academy, and see it as work that extends beyond traditional definitions of mentorship. It is a sharing of self, an interactive and collective process, a spiritual connectedness that epitomizes the Africentric values of sharing, caring and accountability. As Henry (1998) asserts, Black women teachers, who are also activists, are othermothers who assume responsibility for their communities.

Education is considered a cornerstone of Black community development, and as such Black women, as community othermothers, have placed a high value on education and have used it as a site for activism (Collins, 1990: 210). Academic othermothers also value education, and use their location to facilitate the education of others. As Schiele (1994) asserts, academic othermothers who operate within an Africentric framework, are change agents who promote student empowerment and transformation. This is the case for the two academics here who are engaged in reflective dialogue with students of African descent about their experiences in the academy. Motherwork in the academy is an inclusive process that strives to meet the holistic needs of students. The *mothering the mind* is also reciprocal, as students share their knowledge and expertise with faculty. The mentorship and nurturing helps to lay the foundation for the students' future roles as community and/or academic othermothers. Both groups of othermothers are marginalized in the academy and their respective invisibility gives them the determination to fight for space and a reclaiming of their visibility.

Claiming visibility

[B]ell hooks (1989) says that oppressed people resist by defining their

reality, naming their history, and telling their story. Each of the authors will claim visibility through the presentation of their brief biographies. Ekpo (2000) asserts that narrative discourse allows space to tap into forgotten memories and to revisit history. This provides us with the tools to *define* and *fight* for our space in the academy. As students we are isolated and marginalized in our respective programs. The two faculty members are also isolated, with few other colleagues of African descent teaching in the same program, or within the institutions where we work. Participant bios are presented in alphabetical order.

My name is **Candace Bernard**. I completed my undergraduate and graduate studies in Social Work at Dalhousie University. I am currently pursuing a Masters of Arts in Education also in Halifax in Mount Saint Vincent University. I am the only African Nova Scotian in my MA program. My thesis focuses on the intersection between race, class and gender and how that impacts on the school experiences of African Nova Scotian students. I interviewed people who have graduated from the system and I asked them to reflect on their experiences. I found that process very rewarding, but at times isolating and difficult.

I am **Wanda Thomas Bernard**, an Associate Professor of Social Work at Dalhousie University. I have taught at the University for ten years, in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. I am also a member of the Women's Studies Faculty at Dalhousie. I am the only African Nova Scotian faculty member at my School, and one of few African faculty at Dalhousie. I am frequently approached by graduate students from many sectors of the university for assistance, guidance and advice. I have had the opportunity to supervise many African students' research projects.

My name is **Chioma Ekpo**. I'm a graduate student at Dalhousie University, in the Women's Studies Department, completing my Masters degree. My undergraduate degree was obtained from the University of Toronto, with a double major in Sociology and Women's Studies, and a minor in Social Anthropology. I moved from Toronto to Halifax, Nova Scotia because of the rich Black Heritage in Nova Scotia and its overall contribution to Canadian history. So I thought that Nova Scotia would be a great place to obtain my Masters degree, as I was originally interested in African women writers. When I got there though, it was a different story entirely. My thesis addresses Black Nova Scotian women's narratives. I am the only African student, from Nigeria, in my graduate program.

My name is **Josephine Enang**. I recently graduated from the Masters of Nursing program, Dalhousie University in Halifax. I graduated last October. My thesis focused on the childbirth experiences of African Nova Scotian women. I'm a midwife by background so I have an interest in childbirth and am currently working in the IWK/Grace Health Centre. I also had a struggle not having role models or mentors in the program that we can look up to. I was the only African student in my program. My interest in looking at Black women's health was more of the result of lack of research or information around those

issues. Each time I wanted to write a paper I went through the literature and I found nothing relating to Black women. This motivated me to do something, at least to get something in the literature.

My name is **Bertyln Joseph.** I'm an Afro-Caribbean student at McGill University. I have Bachelors degrees in Sociology and in social work and I just completed my Masters in social work last year. I'm in the process of pursuing my PhD. The reasons why I chose McGill I guess is because of convenience; I live in Montreal. When I tried to get into the program there were a lot of difficulties to get into the program and when I got there, there were no Black faculty members and that was a struggle for me and it became a challenge up until my graduation.

I am **Njoki Wane,** an Assistant Professor in the Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto. I have taught at the University for two years, first as a sessional and as a tenure-track faculty in both the pre-service and graduate programs. This year I introduced a course on Black Feminist Thought. This was the first course that focused solely on Black women's issues. My hope is to design other courses that will examine in depth the many structural and systematic challenges that Black women face in their everyday lives.

Telling our stories through our own voices enables us to claim space and visibility. Sharing these stories in academic scholarship allows for others to develop an understanding of the struggles, barriers, and challenges we face in academia. We are also able to then analyze the gifts and strengths that we embody, and through this we hope to make a difference for others in the struggle. We agree with Walker's assertion that

> ...it is a great time to be ... a Black woman ... because from day-to-day our lives are touched with new possibilities, [and] because the past is studded with sisters who, in their time, shone like gold. They give us hope, they have proved the splendor of our past, which should free us to lay claim to the fullness of the future. (qtd. in Beaulieu, 1999: 21)

Our aim is to continue the journey, and to lift as we climb, in a way that assures others the opportunity to climb.

Barriers and challenges

It is well documented in the literature that Black academics and students face a number of challenges and barriers in the academy and in professional fields. Bernard, Lucas-White, and Moore (1993) discuss the triple jeopardy that Black women face in society, particularly in professional careers. They posit that "[W]e must still work twice as hard to build our credibility, to prove our competence, to attain whatever goal we have in sight, and then to hold onto it....The expectation, usually unspoken, is that we are representing our race and

our community, that we are the experts..." Such challenges place additional burdens on Black women in these roles. A similar perspective is provided by Carroll (1982) whose research revealed that Black women report working twice as hard in education and employment, yet they only get a minute portion of the opportunities available to white women and Black men. Black women professors and students are isolated, and have few people to share their experiences with (Carroll, 1982). Additionally, they are assumed to be experts on "minority" issues, and are expected to be willing to provide advocacy around those issues. Cook (1997: 100) says that the isolation that many Black women in white academia experience contributes to their self-doubt, confusion, anger, and oftentimes shame, as they attempt to sort out the emotional toll that they bear in being Black, female, competent and alone in white academia.

Similar findings are shared here. Black women are affected by both racism and sexism. Wanda asked the students to reflect on some of the barriers and challenges they faced as graduate students in their respective responses. Their poignant responses follow:

Josephine... As the only Black woman in most of the courses I took in my program, I found that my experiences were sometimes distinct from the dominant group and sometimes my reality was interpreted differently. Based on these experiences I perceived my location to be at the margins or periphery of society. To me, the centre of society is where activities of the dominant culture take place and many Black women, like myself, are located at the margins as a result of our identities such as race, gender and class. This is reflected in the validity of voices and whose points are regarded as relevant even in classroom discussions. The literature acknowledges that identities are given meaning and value based on their proximity to the centres and margins.

The lack of nurses from marginalized groups in positions of authority, supervisory capacities or faculty positions often makes me wonder about my future. Sometimes I question whether there will ever be an opportunity to realize my full potential as a professional nurse. The absence of role models (no point of reference) decreases ones' confidence in her ability to succeed and it is stressful having nobody around who truly understands what it like to be Black in a position of authority. Another challenge in most of my training is the limited information available on the care of people from marginalized groups (lack of incorporation of racial and multicultural issues in schools' curriculum). All these issues create stress and isolation for marginalized people who constantly struggle to "push the margins" away from them, and those who cannot maintain their strength to keep pushing the margins, give up and stop creating their desired future.

Chioma... I was a newcomer to Halifax, in the province of Nova Scotia ... I didn't know anybody...I just knew that I wanted to go to this province that would embrace me ... For an entire year I really didn't know what I was going to do for my thesis work. I originally wanted to do something on African

women writers, but I changed my mind and so for the entire year I was struggling with developing a thesis topic. I knew I wanted to focus on something that would be celebratory in nature, where Black women were concerned. I didn't want to pick an aspect of Black women's lives that was a problem, problematize it as was typically done in research. I didn't want to say, "Okay, Black women have this problem and what do we do about it?" I wanted to celebrate who we are as Black women and celebrate their achievements and accomplishments, without necessarily glossing over some of their concerns. I realized that for me to get to that point meant that I had to sincerely look inside myself and access how I was going to do that. I was going to have to do something that would enrich me; that would allow me to grow as a graduate student and as a Black woman; that would centre me in the research and allow me to learn in the process without just picking a topic for the sake of doing a Masters thesis and getting a Masters degree and leaving it at that.

I still remember the moment of rupture, when I found myself objectifying Black women and the issues in their lives, just so that I could get a topic and do this thesis and get out. I remember that I would be walking down the street and be looking at Black women and start thinking of what part of their lives I could pick out for my own academic purposes. Painfully, but luckily, I came to see that that was not the way to go about this process. I saw that I was actually doing something I had critiqued other people in white academia for doing, which was objectifying Black women for the purpose of doing research. So I had to stop immediately and brutally assess the implications and underlying message in my struggle. So, in that sense, mothering came into play in that I was able to talk to some great Black women in the community.

I learned some interesting things through this harrowing experience. What I learned most importantly was that I had to engage in research that would be impassioned, which means doing something that I wanted to do, really do. To do something that would be academically and spiritually affirming; that which would celebrate who we were, are, and aspire to be as Black women. It's extremely hard, to say the very least, to do that when there is an extreme paucity of Black female and male professors in the university. It then means that your choices of people to share your pain with are limited, because it is burdensome on the very few Black professors who are present to be the sounding board for our cries and pain. When your white-centred feminist research and methodology texts do not have examples of Black women doing research, or when they do it is merely one or two pieces as if that speaks to the entire diversity of research carried out by Black women, you don't have anything to build on; you don't have anywhere to expand from. Those are some of the problems I had in this journey.

Josephine... For me, I think that some of the barriers that I encountered was not having people in teaching positions that understand the issues you are interested in. You have to be explaining to your professors what it is you want to do. I remember when I first identified my topic, and I thought of this one

professor that I respected so much and I went to her to get her opinion on my research topic. I talked about my research ideas and I had two options. And she asked me, 'Why do you want to ask these women about their experiences, is there something wrong with the system is there something that is prompting you to look into this area?'. I said well certainly there are issues and I just gave an example of when I went in and had my own baby as a Black woman and I gave an example of some of the things that I did learn and she said, "How do you know that white women don't experience this?" So I just felt like, she doesn't understand this. And it's an issue that I dealt with throughout that whole process of my thesis writing. That is really difficult, when you are in the position of a student you have to educate your professor and have to say, this is why I think this is necessary. And she keeps challenging and telling you "I don't see the connection." The need to constantly try to educate them was the big challenge for me.

Bertlyn... My thesis stems from my personal experiences of racism in a child welfare agency. I was so frustrated by the experiences I had at the agency at the time, as well as from observing other Black workers going through similar experiences, I decided to write about my experiences of racism. I had written a paper based on this and received feedback from my professor who encouraged me to pursue this as a thesis topic. I think he's the only person in the university who tries to support Black students in terms of their research interest. However, you still have to deal with the other professors who are not supportive. For example, one Black student who was interested in Africentric research was given the impression by her advisor that it was an interesting topic to pursue. After formalizing the agreement that she would be her main advisor, subsequent meetings were discouraging, as the advisor decided that an Africentric approach was no longer important. She was devastated and frustrated because it was too late to change advisors.

Another example is the experience of an international student from Africa who came to McGill because of its international reputation. She wanted to do her research on child soldiers, the experience of child soldiers in Africa. A few professors encouraged her not to conduct this research because they were not familiar with the subject. She left the School of Social Work and went to another faculty where she found support for her research topic.

Moreover, there were about five Black students taking a qualitative research course and we all got the same grade, which the students considered an *ethnic grade*. Collectively we wrote a letter to the Director of the Department to make a complaint. Most importantly, some of the students went to the Director to talk about how they felt as Black students in a predominately white university. It's a constant struggle for Black students in the academy. Black students encounter frustrations on a regular basis in the Eurocentric academic environment. The one supportive professor we had, who was an *"othermother"* to Black students, went on sabbatical recently, and that left a void in our academic experience.

Candace... For me I feel like we have to work two or three times as hard. Listening to you talk and all the hurdles we have to go through to find people who have expertise in our subject area. That is my experience too... I've had to go outside the university. I wanted someone of African descent on my committee and the university has a general rule that you can't have a person without a PhD on your committee. So that made it very difficult to find somebody with expertise in the area that I was doing. When you're in your classes, in terms of what you're learning, sometimes you feel like you're invisible because your experience as a Black woman is totally negated within the university. In addition, the way you're treated in the classroom can be a problem. I've experienced racism in the classroom. And it's very difficult when you're the only person of African descent in the classroom. You have to challenge that. Sometimes you have to pick and choose your battles, because it happens so frequently. Challenging racism can also be difficult because the professor that's making a racist comment is also grading your work. And it's difficult to speak out against that because it can effect how you do in the course and possibly the entire program, if you get labeled as a troublemaker.

Wanda... Funding, or the lack of funds can be a major barrier. How have you managed to deal with that problem?

Chioma... My Mom, Teresa Hibbert, funds my research, thankfully. If it weren't for her financial support and emotional guidance, I would not have had the opportunity to experience this journey and complete it; a journey that I would later discover was a liberating one in many respects. And I say this acknowledging the privilege of being in such a position as I am in, because juggling financial and academic demands puts a big strain on one's concentration level. How do you think of ways to affirm yourself as a Black woman in academia while worrying about rent, food, and school supplies? The research funding from the graduate studies department is limited and in some cases you have to appeal for more funding, which was my experience. Luckily, I was successful with my appeals.

Bertlyn... I work full-time and I go to school part-time and it's very difficult to juggle both. I can't give up work for school and I don't want to give up school because it's my future. It's very difficult to do both.

Josephine... I can't give up work because I need the money to support my program. But I've also been able to get some scholarships that assisted me. I had to compete with other people for scholarships and I got funding that way.

Candace... It's very difficult because there are so few scholarships. At Dalhousie for example there is only one scholarship specifically for African Canadian students. There is one scholarship per year for both Masters and PhDs, in all disciplines, and for people across Canada so the chances of getting it are very slim. I see a lot of us having to juggle work, school, home, community. Throughout my time in university I have had to work part time during the year, and full time in the summers, whilst a full time student. I have benefitted from a few small bursaries and scholarships, however, it has been necessary to work

to support myself. In addition, a lot of us feel the need to be in the community and that's a lot of work as well, juggling it all together.

Juggling work and study is how we manage to get an education. This certainly affects grades, as you cannot devote full time to your studies. It may also affect your work performance. Additionally, studies are balanced with all of the other systemic barriers, such as those documented in the BLAC (1994) report. They posit that the cycle of poverty, the lack of job opportunities, and racism on the job all form part of the average Black student's reality and daily struggle. There is pain in each of these experiences, but as hooks (1988) says, we learn to theorize through our pain. That which does not kill us, will make us stronger. We each have stories of struggle and survival. To be where we are, and to stay there, means that we have learned to survive and succeed against the odds. But what accounts for that success? We now dialogue about the strategies that helped us find a way to succeed.

Succeeding against the odds

Wanda... As I have stated elsewhere, when I reflect on my work in the academy, I realize that one thing that keeps me there, and keeps me enthused about my work, is *hope*. Much of that hope comes from my community, from the struggle and resistance of my ancestors, and the hope that I imagined helped them on their journeys through very difficult periods in our history. They resisted with fewer privileges, resources and opportunities than I have at my disposal today, and somehow, those memories and reflections help me to put things into perspective. I still work twice, maybe three times as hard, because of the demands from within the academy and the community (Bernard forthcoming). I have learned that sharing my experiences is also an act of empowerment (Collins 1990).

Cook (1997:107) asserts that for some Black women academics, finding their way has meant finding ways to express their cultural values and selves within the dominance of white culture. They are solidly located in their communities and committed to their students. They are more likely to spend "...excess hours providing service to students, conducting action-oriented research programs, and using experiential-learning teaching methods" (Cook 1997:102). Both Wanda and Njoki live that experience. However, they also recognize that there are two sides to this coin: their experiences as Black academics, and the experiences of Black students. The students share their stories of resistance and empowerment, as they find their way in the academy.

Njoki... Life in the Academy as an immigrant student and now as a faculty member has been very challenging. Coming to a new culture, a culture that was so foreign to my children, was extremely difficult. I can still recall sitting in a classroom and wondering whether I had made the right decision to go back to

school. Everything was so foreign. Most of the time the readings and examples given in class did not make sense to me. Although I am faculty now, I cannot say that things have changed. In most cases when I go to my pre-service class, I am the only visible minority in my class. I have to constantly validate my credentials as a professor and scholar. It can be very tiring. But, I am hopeful that things will not always be like this.

Josephine... From the difficulties we've talked about that we've experienced in addition to our graduate school workload, you can plainly see that it makes it extra hard for us to perform our other roles. Being a mother, I have two children at home.... that makes it difficult because I have to work extra hard. For example, like Candace, I couldn't get somebody of African descent to sit on my thesis committee. It took me months to look around, searching in the Black community with the set criteria that this person has to have at least a Masters in nursing and I couldn't find one Black nurse with a Masters degree. I was going everywhere in the province. It was my good friend Elizabeth who I'd met in a conference and told me about Wanda, so I went to see her, and that was a big, big help. But in addition to that, you have to constantly keep struggling. But I must say the positive aspect to that is that I met my thesis supervisor, she's a white woman professor, who was very, very supportive, I think she's worked with each one of us here, she basically made me feel like I had the responsibility. She said 'You couldn't even find one Black woman to sit on your thesis committee, who do you expect to do this work for others?' She basically made me feel like I had the responsibility to go out there and do this research because if I don't do it, who do I expect to do it? If I don't go and find the issues, who will look for it?

Bertlyn... Listening to you when you were talking about some of the difficulties you experienced when you were looking for a thesis advisor made me think of a similar experience when I had to go outside the province to find someone. I had a white advisor who was fine, but some part of me was missing. I knew that it would be difficult to do this research without having the support of a Black advisor. I had to go to Ottawa to seek out a Black advisor, at my own expense. The university was concerned because she was a sessional instructor at Carleton. Fortunately she came on board and I was lucky enough to find her.

I then went to a Black Social Workers conference in Atlanta where I met Wanda and I discussed my experience and frustration in finding a Black advisor. We maintained contact and once I had Wanda on board I felt such a relief in that I don't really have to worry anymore. I was comforted to know that I had someone that I could really trust, who would understand, know what I'm talking about. It's a struggle for a lot of Black students who don't have any professors who can support their Africentric research. For example, Wanda lives in Halifax and I live in Montreal, she's going to be my external for my PhD. There are few Black professors available to sit on my committee, therefore I am considering inviting Black social workers to sit in as a community panel, since I don't want to have four white professors dominating my committee. I prefer

to have a diverse community panel, people who have some knowledge and expertise on my topic. I also want to be surrounded by people who will be supportive and nurturing. It is reassuring now that I have Wanda to mother me through this difficult, yet very important journey.

Candace... I was just thinking that in terms of what you all have been saying about the lack of mentorship and connecting with my own experience. Sometimes I feel like I'm not getting the rich experience that I deserve, having to put myself in the educator's role when I'm actually in the position of the student. In my social work program we're supposed to be there to get mentorship and talk about issues related to social work practice, for instance I have often been asked "What camp are you in, what theory do you come from in your practice?" and I said well, I'm an Africentrist and I do Africentric social work and that's my theoretical perspective, and I've been looked at as if I have two heads. So how am I supposed to get any mentorship if my professors do not know anything about my theoretical perspectives? I don't think I've really ever had the opportunity to talk to a more seasoned African social worker who uses Africentric theory and that's been difficult for my own learning process. I've also noticed as a graduate student, the higher up you go the fewer people like me I see. And, listening to our experiences, I know that it's not because we're not capable, it's because we're not being encouraged. And from my research, I see that we're not being encouraged from the time we enter school. Many of us who make it through high school, don't get the encouragement to make it through university. Those of us who make it through university, don't get the encouragement to go to graduate school. The few African graduate students I have met are saying they want out. They're not being encouraged to do PhDs. There's a lack of professors of African descent across the country in every discipline, but there just aren't enough people of African descent entering doctoral programs. Universities should be recruiting people from graduate school and from the community.

Acts of resistance and self-determination permeate these stories. To survive we have to work exceptionally hard, to gain credibility and recognition for our work. We do this with little encouragement from the academic setting. However, those who are supportive, can have life changing impact on Black women in the academy.

Njoki asks... Can we get motherwork or othermothering in the academy recognized? I think this is very difficult question. I do recognize the importance of motherwork in the Academy because the more effective it is, the better the performance of our students. But these institutions are structured in such a patriarchal fashion that would dismiss it without even reading a prepared docier of othermothering at the Academy. I find that most women do othermothering in the academy, and we have here testimonials from Black students about the significance of this for their own survival. I guess this would require research

and verbalization of othermothering by as many women academics as possible. I feel that a collective voice could make a difference.

Wanda... I agree that our work in the academy as othermothers needs to be recognized, but it will only be if we make it visible. Writing and dialoging about it does render it visible work, and scholarly work. I also believe that we should document this is in a more formal way, perhaps through a research project. I surmise that we will find that it extends beyond race, that other women and pro-feminist men are also engaged in othermothering in the academy.

Doing African-centered research in white academia

Research is the cornerstone of our work in academe. However, not all research gets equal standing. Hall (1992) reminds us that the political economy of academia actively discourages community based and collaborative or participatory research. Yet, most African centered research is closely linked to communities, and is more likely to be collaborative and involve participants in meaningful ways. How does this affect African students and academics who want to engage in community based research? Reid (1990) asserts that many find it difficult to find willing collaborators, and students have a hard time finding qualified supervisors. Similar views are presented through the evidence provided here in each of our experiences. Stoecker (1998) quotes Hubbard (1996) who posits that community based research is neither valued in academia or the activist community, therefore academics are pressured to construct the research in a way to give it a higher academic profile. How do African students and academics respond to such pressures? What are some of their struggles in doing African centered research from the location of white academic institutions?

Wanda poses the question... One of the things I'd like to hear you talk about is doing the research and working with participants... African communities have been researched to death. They've been researched a lot by non-ethnic academics and students. And not much ever goes back to the communities. So it becomes more and more difficult to get people to agree to participate. I wonder if you'd talk a bit about that, flipping the coin. You've talked about the struggles in the academy, but what about the other side where you're going back into the community. For me, this is another link to the mothering theme as well. Can you talk a bit about what that's been like for you?

Chioma... When I finally decided to do research *with* African Nova Scotian women, the next concern was deciding whom do I select, whom do I choose and how do I go about doing that. I didn't know anybody, and at the time I wanted to talk to Black women activists in the community. So I had to go around asking different people for name suggestions. It's kind of interesting to hear of the names of women who get mentioned frequently as suggestions for me to talk to, and those who get sidelined. I knew I didn't want to talk to

women who get profiled continuously, who are popularly labeled as community activists, inside and outside of the community. I wanted to talk to women who were activists in their own way, not necessarily on a publicized scale, who did mentoring programs and things like that in their own homes and their own private spaces. The women whom I wanted to be a part of my work happily agreed to engage in the personal narrative work. In the process, they ended up mothering me. Their personal triumphs and experiences growing up Black and female in Nova Scotia and Canada encouraged me in my own fight to engage in research that would bring me out and make me feel alive; research that would affirm me and honour our collective heritage. In this sense I got mothered. They opened their arms and encouraged me to do the work that was here, it was very helpful. The three women I ended up working with were just incredible. I mean they would come to my place and pick me up and drop me off, or arrange for my transportation. They fed me and were just accommodating, you know. It was just great. It was like going to an Aunt's home and when I'd address them I felt like addressing them as "Aunty" because that is how we address our elders with respect and endearment. It was nurturing and that was exactly what I needed—to be cradled in this struggle and thus feel validated as I celebrated who they were and who I was. Other women and men from the community also helped enrich this experience and so I got mothered from the community. One cannot forget the extreme support and affirming words that has come from family, friends, fellow graduate students, and professors. They have definitely mothered me.

In talking about mentors and othermothers, I have to say that my mother, Teresa Hibbert, has given me the wonderful gift of this opportunity. Her defiant spirit has pushed me to push myself. Also, my friend Ruramisai Charumbira has also mothered me and encouraged me in this journey. I do believe that our ancestors were watching over me and made it possible for Ruramisai and I to meet. She's been there for me, and she's seen me cry and she's cradled me and nourished me even as she struggled through her own journey pursuing her Masters in International Development Studies at Saint Mary's University. She's doing her PhD now at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto and she's still mothering me long distance. For that I thank her very much. My point here is that if we don't have an outlet, a safe space, if we don't have mentors or fellow graduate students that we can share experiences with and get through this process, it will be a very lonely and crushing experience.

Josephine says... Feminist principles and Participatory Action Research (PAR) were the basic tenets that guided this research process. My interest in the use of feminist research methodology stems from my conscious effort to explore the multiple layers of oppression encountered by African Nova Scotian women: racism, sexism, classism. Traditional scientific research is unlikely to explore these concepts. Moreover, although reductionist research methods may be important in contributing to the understanding of the health of African Nova

Scotians, they do not allow for the voices of the participants to be heard. Feminist research on the other hand, employs a critical social science approach which explores various experiences of marginalized groups. Feminist research values both objectivity and subjectivity as ways of knowing, analyzing and understanding, and they should not be independent of one another.

Participatory action research was chosen to enable me avoid the "rip and run" practice of extracting data to support theoretical interests and career advancement needs without a reciprocal process of some research. Marginalized people often feel betrayed when research findings are not used to improve their everyday lives but are instead used to justify policies of subordination. Participatory action research methodology provided opportunity for these women to tell their stories without the language constraints inherent in questionnaires and structured interviews. As clearly articulated in their discussions, this approach is empowering because it overcomes the invisibility and silencing they have been so familiar with. PAR also provided a forum for them to take collective actions to address their needs.

Bertlyn adds... Listening to you share your experiences brings a smile to my face, because I know how that felt, when I connected with Wanda. It was a relief. I felt that everything was going to be okay, that there was somebody who could give me support. It's not easy, it's a very cold world in academia, you're left to struggle and fight for yourself. We need mentors to encourage us to carry on, and without them it is easier to give up on your academic and personal goals. I am elated that I am here and moving forward, and that I have someone that I can call on for assistance and support. At times I feel that I call her too often, it feels like it could be petty, but I know she will never make me feel as if it is unimportant. It is so reassuring to know that I can do that, and because of that I'm moving forward and I thank you Wanda.

Candace reflects... Well I had a very different experience with participants, and I think what's interesting is that you were all interviewing older people and my experience was actually focusing on a younger age group. I had a difficult time getting participants for my study. I didn't think it would be difficult because I've often heard people say "we need more African Nova Scotians doing research, with us instead of on us," so I didn't think I'd have a problem at all. But I had a very difficult time. I sent out an email to a couple hundred students. I had managed to get the email address for every single African student in the province registered at a university and I got one response from Chioma saying "Good Luck." Unfortunately she wasn't educated in Nova Scotia so I couldn't interview her. So that was very frustrating. And I sent notices to several of the major community groups, but nothing materialized. So I had to end up going to the people that I knew that fit the profile and asking "Will you please participate in this?" "Are you interested?" I did end up getting people that way. I also had a few no-shows. It ended up being a very rewarding experience, but I was very surprised. And I think it's what you were saying Josephine that there's been so much pain created by the research that's been

done, that has perpetuated stereotypes and participated in the oppression of African people there's sort of resistance to participating in the process, whether you're an African researcher or not. And it can be very frustrating for students wanting to do the work and not getting the type of response that you anticipate.

In terms of mentoring, I think I've been very fortunate to have my biological mother Wanda. She's been an important role model for me because she's the only Black woman in Halifax that I see doing this work. And sometimes I think, if she wasn't around, where would we all be. I see you (Wanda) working two and three times as hard, not only to keep up with the expectations of the academy, but the community has so many expectations of you as well. As one of the few African social scientists at Dalhousie you are in demand, you want to be there for students and you're being pulled in different directions. It's very difficult and we need more people like you out there. We need to be adequately represented in the academy in all disciplines. And we need to change some of the things that are going on in the academy.

One thing that I think we all wanted to do in our research was make a connection in the community and the text books don't tell you to do that. They tell you to go and do research on people, not with them. There were no structures in place to help me do research with people and not on them. And that's something I found very difficult. Another thing is the language that's used. Some people that are writing claim to be emancipatory, claim to be writing for people in the community at the grass roots level. But I've asked several people in the community have you read this, have you read that and they haven't because they can't understand it. They tell me all the time that the language used is very exclusionary, so I don't understand how it's emancipatory, when the people they are trying to liberate can't even understand the work. I think that's exclusionary. I think there needs to be more links between academia and the community. It's difficult for us as students to break those barriers.

She who learns teaches

Through pain there's healing. Through struggle there's triumph. Through oppression there is emancipation. What are the lessons to be learned here? What are some suggestions for change? How can we make othermothering in the academy visible?

Josephine... It requires hard work. It requires putting in extra work and it pays off when you persist. The victory for me was getting that connection from the community, and once I had that support from the community we were able to come together as a collective group and do the social action component that was creating a multicultural health program in the health centre that I work for. That program has been quite successful and rewarding.

I'd like to see more incorporation of racial and multicultural issues in the curriculum. Academia should form active partnerships with communities to research their issues. Active recruitment efforts are needed to increase Black

faculty and students. Mentorship programs would help with retention. Regular use of innovative research approaches such as PAR to promote efficient inquiry about the complex health issues of marginalized people.

Bertlyn... I think the victory for me was to document Black social workers' experiences of racism in the child welfare system and other social services agencies. Even though I knew that racism exists, it was important for me to document it so that I could expound on the subject for my PhD. In my doctoral program I plan to continue the research to explore racism in child welfare, but also document the experiences of people of color in academia. I'm trying to challenge the status quo. I want people to know that we are aware of the injustices and oppression in social institutions. I am ready to push forward on this issue. My ultimate victory was linking up with Wanda because there are no Black professors at McGill's School of Social Work.

Candace... I'd like to think that some day I will be able to provide mentorship for somebody else. It gives me the encouragement to keep going. Making a positive contribution to research and to the African Canadian community through my studies empowers me to continue the struggle. Also, the opportunity to dialogue with others and share experiences inspires me.

Chioma... When I look back at the research experience, I wouldn't give it back for anything else, in spite of all the pain and struggle that I experienced. That is why I say it is a gift from my mother, Teresa Hibbert. One great victory has been coming to know what it means to challenge myself and fight to design research that moves me. Even realizing the pain in the process and what that means so that one does not give up, has been a life lesson. We see that we are all going through the same struggles, unfortunately, but we all push on and cradle each other, and that applies to both students and professors. That is the essence of "*She Who Learns Teaches*," passing it on so that we can collectively empower ourselves. And I keep thinking that if we don't do it, no one else will, in terms of contributing to a loving and liberatory Black epistemology. If we sit back and say, there's no information, there's no research, no topics, then we fail to see the significance of insisting on generating Black epistemology and research. So taking the step from myself and saying, I have to do it in spite of everything, I think has been the biggest lesson for me, a moment of rupture.

Njoki... The greatest thing that I have learnt as a Black woman in a western academy, is the importance of being there for each other. The networking, the support system and connecting with other scholars, whether faculty or students, with whom you can engage, both at the ideological level and at emotional level is essential to our collective survival. Scholars whose experiences I can identify with as a Black woman. Many times, I find students come to my office and we theorize about Black women's issues. At other times, we just talk, talk about families, our struggles, our fears and our hopes. Our ideas are great, if only we had the resources! One of the things I regret is the fact that there are far too few people of color who are academics. That puts a strain on the few that are there. Sometimes this strain is not visible—but it is there. One

thing I have learnt is not to give up or lose hope. We have to be hopeful at all times...

Wanda concludes... We are able to be effective mentors and othermothers because others have already done it for us. As challenging as it may be, taking time to help develop the brilliant minds of the future is not only a *privilege*, but a *responsibility*, if we are to truly "lift as we climb." As Africentrists we are cognizant of the struggles and lack of opportunity afforded our ancestors, that is why we believe that "she who learns must also be willing to teach."

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[1]There are numerous variations on the spelling of Africentricity. The original spelling is Afrocentricity;, however, more recently the term Africentricity has been used in the literature. We use Africentricity, unless in a direct quote. Essentially, the terms mean African centered, and Afri is a direct derivative of Africa.

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Rishma Dunlop

Birthday Poem For Rachel

I want to whisper you awake
this morning
your body warm in a nest of sleep

the sky is a smile of light
the sun's breath rising,
writing the lyrics of your limbs
into the still waters of the bay

water birds are calling your name
steeple stemmed herons ankle the wetlands
white cranes stilt across the mudflats

scarlet poppies seed themselves
in wild grasses for you

seaweed glistens,
wraps the beach with
streamers of emerald ribbons

Child, you are my hymn
my anthem
my bloodline calling

I wish you gifts:
to feel along the heart

Rishma Dunlop

to sense with the pulse
to find the light that breaks
through secret places
unbolting the dark

to dance fleet-footed
through corridors of dreams

on your year's turning
may you find the map of love
charted in these shores
whispered in winds
and in the sleek mouths of seals.

Arlene E. Edwards

Community Mothering

The Relationship Between Mothering and The Community Work of Black Women

The role of Black women in American society is said to be unique (Grant, 1989; Omolade, 1994), in that the institution of slavery rendered the gender of Black women almost null and void. Though women, they were treated in the same manner as Black male slaves, and different from white women. They were expected to bear the burdens, the lash and children for their respective masters (Omolade, 1994). The ability to perform these feats left the Black woman at a disadvantage for the protection of her virtue as a woman (Gilkes, 1985; Collins 1991a, 1991b), while also continuing her historical role in her community as keeper of culture and preserver of traditions (Payne, 1989; Reagon, 1990).

The historical role played by women in African communities has had the concept of mothering as central to its practice (Collins 1987). Motherhood in this setting was different from the norm, which was defined by dependence on men and separation from the community by functioning in the home. Greene states that "the role of mother itself is an important one for many Black women and is accompanied by tasks not required of their white counterparts." (1990: 208). According to Orleck the accepted though inaccurate definition of motherhood is one of women who are "apolitical, isolated with their children in a world of pure emotion, far removed from the welter of politics and social struggle" (1997: 3). Reagon defines mothering as "the holding of life before birth, the caring for and feeding of the young until they assume independence. (1990: 177). Collins (1987) in her reference to the reassessment of Afro-American motherhood cites the work of Dill (1980) who in her study of Black domestics made note of the strategies they used to ensure that their children would succeed. Gilkes (1980) is also cited based on what Collins termed "the power of Black motherhood." Gilkes observed that many of the Black female political activists had become involved in politics as a result of their earlier

agitation on behalf of the children of their community. Effective Black mothers were said to be the ones who are "sophisticated mediators between the competing offerings of an oppressive dominant culture and a nurturing Black value-structure" (Hale, 1980).

Reagon relates that the practice of this type of mothering is a clear choice: "a woman must come to terms with herself, her life, her sanity and her health as well as with the health of life around her" (1987: 178). She asserts that this type of mothering is not based solely on biological reproduction, and meshes with scholarly and other professions. Clark-Hine (1986) supports this assertion in her work documenting the roles Black women played in the struggles for freedom, woman's suffrage, and education for girls among other things. The teaching profession was seen not only as laudable for Black women during the late 1800s and early 1900s (Harley, 1982), but also substantiates the professional, scholarly mode of mothering presented by Reagon. The roles community and church mothers played may be due to: (1) recognition of familial influences on social functioning, (2) the tradition of female leadership in Black society, (3) the fact that these women served as bridges between the worlds of men and women (Gilkes, 1986). The title of 'mother' was often conferred on these often older women who were seen to possess wisdom and experience tailored to their communities' needs in particular, and to the needs of the race in general.

Black women's mothering experiences: othermothers

James (1993) defines othermothering as acceptance of responsibility for a child not one's own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal. She states that this practice stemmed from West African practice of communal lifestyles and interdependence of communities. The experience of slavery saw the translation of othermothering to new settings, since the care of children was an expected task of enslaved Black women in addition to the field or house duties. James states that the familial instability of slavery engendered the adaptation of communality in the form of fostering children whose parents, particularly mothers, had been sold. This tradition of communality gave rise to the practice of othermothering. The survival of the concept is inherent to the survival of Black people as a whole (Jones, 1984), since it allowed for the provision of care to extended family and nonblood relations. James also views the concept as forming a link toward developing new social transformation models that are Black and feminist.

Community Mothers

The role of community mothers often evolved from that of being an othermother (Gilkes, 1983; Reagon, 1990). In reporting on Black community workers, Gilkes found that these women often "viewed the Black community as a group of relatives and other friends whose interest should be advanced, and promoted at all times, under all conditions, and by almost any means" (1983:

117). Her subjects were all middle class professional women who possessed a sense of "nation consciousness." The term describes a group of middle class people who in its political and social agitation seeks social change by allowing the needs of the Black community to influence their individual orientation in educational and employment activities. Gilkes refers to the term "going up for the oppressed" to describe the activities of this group. She defines going up for the oppressed as "a type of economic and career mobility that comprises a set of activities aimed at social change and the empowerment of the powerless" (1983: 119). Three characteristics describe the career mobility of these women: acquisition of a focused education, the dialectical career, and commitment maintenance.

Black Clubwomen

Another example of community mothering came in the form of the Club movement by Black women. The Club movement stemmed from the arrival of a Black middle class as the first collective crop of formally educated Black people living in Black communities. Education and the social privileges it brought placed this group in positions to appreciate and achieve the American dream. They were also in the best position, literally and figuratively, to uplift the race.

Formal inception of the Club movement is dated as occurring on July 21, 1896 in Washington, D.C. at the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church (Kendrick, 1954). At this time the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) came into being as the representation of the collective body of colored women's clubs. Impetus for the formation of the Clubs was also provided by the horrors visited upon the Black community through lynching. The protection of white female virtue as a reason for lynching was also attacked, as well as the sexual abuse perpetrated on Black women by white men. According to Lerner (1974), this expression provided ideological direction for Black women organizing to defend Black womanhood as an integral part of defending the race from terror and abuse.

Black Clubwomen were professionals themselves, or married to professional men. In either case, given their status in the community, they possessed access to economic, political, and legal resources necessary to address many community needs. Community mothering was now done in the form of Clubs designed by prominent community women desiring to address the needs most prevalent in their communities. They formed these Clubs and charged themselves dues which were used in turn to implement their programs. Their middle class status was seen as a means to the end of racial uplift, and in line with the motto of the NACW, of "lifting as we climb."

Church mothers and civil rights women

The Black church has been described as the only autonomous organization functioning specifically to address the needs of African-Americans (Lincoln

and Mamiya, 1990; Morrison, 1991; Marshall, 1970). Women have been the majority of congregants and, consequently, church supporters (Levin and Taylor, 1993). These Black church women have contributed their efforts toward community development and maintenance, often without the rewards afforded to men who have done the same (Gilkes, 1975; Grant, 1989). Despite the lack of acknowledgment, they continued in their determination to "uplift the race" through different community-based interventions.

The concept of othermothering in giving rise to community mothering is also exemplified in the work of church mothers. These are a particular type of community mother in that they conducted their work primarily through the church. Use of the church as an organ of intervention was based on their vision of the need for moral mothering of the community (Gilkes, 1985). Club membership was by invitation only, and said invitation was only proffered to professionally trained women (or women married to professionals), therefore, in some regions, the church provided an almost professional means of mothering which could be recognized by the community. Work conducted by church mothers centered on teaching Sunday school, conducting home visits, caring for the sick and missionary work. Often the mission field was their community.

> These women took up membership in church women's groups, female
> auxiliaries to fraternal orders, and benevolent societies, which often
> required less affluent lifestyles, less active public roles, and had more
> practical benefits for their members than did predominantly middle-
> class reform associations. (Harley, 1982: 260)

Though the women were not perceived as leaders, they nevertheless formulated strategies and tactics to mobilize community resources for their collective actions (Barnett, 1993). In examining the experience of power wielded by church women in the African Methodist Episcopal church, Dodson (1988) suggested the concept of surrogate leadership. Women of this church possessed the numbers, organizing talents, and resources which are prerequisites for participation in power relationships. As a result they were able to exercise influence on church policy to a certain degree.

The civil rights movement is said to have been precipitated by the expansion of the community roles of Black church women in responding to needs in their community (Burks, 1990). Prominent women in this movement, such as Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Rosa Parks, relate the influence of older female family members whose Club or church work served as examples which they followed in their work. Ella Baker is said to have reported seeing her mother caring for the sick and needy in her community, and being someone to whom people went to for advice (Payne, 1989). These were women who came up in the church, were schooled on their role of racial uplift, being "race women," and who also believed in the strength of their religious faith to pull

them through their trials.

Work for community improvements was a continuation of Black women's work as leaders in the struggle for freedom, education, and self improvement (Cantarow, 1980). Payne (1989) in his tribute to Ella Baker states that she worked for social change by building organizations while encouraging the growth and empowerment of individuals. Baker was the first full time director of the Southern Leadership Christian Conference and was considered the mother of its activist phase. She was instrumental in the formation of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Commmittee as a separate organization, and was an advisor to Martin Luther King Jr.

Church women who participated in the movement were sometimes influenced by other women who worked primarily in the community. Annie Bell, Robinson Devine, and Unita Blackwell all indicate having a spiritual purpose in persevering through their work as civil rights workers. Crawford (1993) traces resistance strategies used by these women activists to three factors: First, their inherited spirituality and early church upbringing, which assisted them in facing the rigors of activism; second, exposure to older community women who served as role models; and third, a level of individual autonomy which allowed them to be willing to challenge the status quo.

The examples presented indicate the roles played by Black church and community women. The expected courtesy based on their contributions should have been acceptance into leadership positions, since their support has been intrinsic to the survival and functioning of the Black community. Black women working for their communities have beliefs such as going up for the oppressed (Gilkes, 1983), lifting as we climb (Peebles-Wilkins 1989; Shaw 1991), the knowledge that ignorance of needs observed could affect the survival of the community (Reagon 1990), and an inborn heritage of mothering and nurturing the community (James 1993). According to Clark-Hine,

> The creation of educational, health care, and recreational institutions spearheaded by diverse Black women's clubs and voluntary organizations followed no standard pattern. Rather, women launched new projects or worked to transform existing institutions into structures more adequately designed to address the needs of their respective constituencies. Recurring concerns were for education for the young, food, shelter, and clothing for the aged, medical and nursing care for the sick. (1986: 238)

Method

Reagon (1990) suggests that mothering may be used as a source for data categorization, and as a method of data analysis in acquiring a historical picture of the Black community's method of evolving and surviving. Of this she states,

> using mothering as a data category affords the researcher the potential

of examining mothering in its ideal from, where each generation is born into a situation that is very healthy and affirming for them....When applied to the examination and analysis of cultural data, it can reveal much within the historical picture of how a culture evolves and how and why changes occur in order to maintain the existence of a people." (1990: 177)

James (1993) provides three reasons for the usefulness of an understanding of the roles of othermothers which gives shape to rationale and to the purpose of this study. First, understanding the roles will address feelings of importance by indicating historical ways in which Black women empowered themselves. Second, understanding allows for reconceptualization of power as a means toward action rather than a commodity. Third, the talents exhibited in analyzing and critiquing situations and developing workable strategies may be viewed as possible resources for addressing contemporary community needs. Given these premises, the study investigated the concept of mothering as it relates to the community work experience of Black women, through use of phenomenological research methods.

Qualitative research methods such as interviews and observation were used to collect and analyze the data. It is a useful method in this instance because it is inductive, and aims to gain valid knowledge and understanding by representing and illuminating the how and the why of people's experiences. Aspects of qualitative research such as unstructured interviewing and observation were used to produce data supportive of the mothering experiences of the women. Nine women who work in Black communities and churches participated in the study. The women were chosen based on their involvement in community work, and because they were at least at the ages at which the title of "mother" is conferred. They ranged in age from 43 to 84 years old. Except for those used to gather demographic information, questions asked were open ended. A total of twenty-one questions were used to investigate the concept of mothering in the community work of the women who were chosen. Constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the findings.

Results

Eight themes and subthemes emerged for the data. For this paper, mothering (theme) and work, choice and need(subthemes) are discussed. The theme, mothering, does not fit the entire definition of emerging. Though it was later allowed to emerge, its presence was assumed prior to the beginning of the study. The others emerged in true qualitative style. The women participating in the study are presented (using their initials) as well as excerpts of their statements as they relate to the themes being discussed.

Community women reported holding positions on the Parent Teacher's Association (PTA), designing and implementing programs, volunteering in community organizations, and sitting on local community boards. Settings in

which the church women worked often included different church organiza-
tions and community boards designed to assist church members or to provide
services to the community.

Few differences were found between the two groups of women in this study
and the work they did, or the methods they used. Church women tended to
work primarily with older adults in the community through visitations and
providing comfort and counsel. Community women on the other hand worked
primarily with children, and to a lesser extent, with adults. There were church
women who also worked with children, and there were community women who
worked with adults. All the church women provided assistance in the commu-
nity as well as the church. One community woman reported working in the
church in addition to community work, while the other three did not report
church activity.

Another small difference was means of involvement. While church
women more readily reported being asked, or being chosen to do community
work, community women usually reported responding to needs they observed.
This difference seems to be in keeping with the settings in which the women
function most intimately. Church mothers for example, are in more of a
position to be approached by someone in the church or surrounding commu-
nity because of familiarity and consistent contact. A community woman on the
other hand would be more likely to respond to a need she observed in her child's
school or community rather than being asked to do so partly because of a lack
of this type of familiarity.

Both groups of women reported using innovative means to conduct their
work. For example, one church woman reported her work in the Progressive
Committee, raising funds for scholarships or for purchase of a sign for the front
of the church. The money is raised through whatever means are deemed best
and that will result in the most funds. Community women reported determin-
ing the existence of needs through observation, but then meeting them through
coalition building and protest or support of each other.

The following excerpts are some of the ways these women express their
community mothering. NJ and LM responded to being asked to define
community mothers, and whether they believed the description could apply to
them (the other excerpts occurred spontaneously):

> NJ: *I consider myself to be a neighborhood mother, because whatever
> neighborhood I live in I automatically get to know all the children around,
> and my house becomes the Kool-Aid house. I immediately adopt all the
> children in the neighborhood.*

> KW: *I don't know why they do that, you know, some people I didn't know
> they, um, mentioned this the other day, they will mention things to me that
> they won't mention to somebody else. You know like a member could come
> and say "hi sister so-and-so how you doing today?" and they may say "I'm*

all right." "'You need anything?" "No." But then I could call, I don't know why it's like that and they'd like say, "I do need so-and-so and so, if you don't mind, or if you have time..." But I don't know why. You know, I don't know why. But that happens.*

HR: *So I'm very close to the family and you know they consider me more or less as their mother. And it's quite interesting that my neighbour on this side often says, "I want to be just like you when I grow up." And my other neighbour that owns the house on the other side—she's moved out—she uses that same terminology.*

TA: *Because these are children who walk up to me and hug me, and I fuss at them, I yell at them, I scream at them "why are you doing that, don't you know better, why did you say that word."*

TA: *But on Mother's day all of them chipped in and got me the film Sankofa. And they got me a card saying if we had a mother to choose it would be you. And so to me that was much more prestigious than any award anyone could give me, or recognize.*

This type of behavior resembles mothering because it is spontaneous, nurturing, supportive, and it is accomplished in a familiar way. For example church mothers are older, respected members of the congregation, who are also familiar with church members. These women could enquire as to the whereabouts of absent members without seeming intrusive. Based on the response to their inquiry, a plan could be developed to meet any needs arising from the reason for the absence.

In both groups, the spontaneous choice and subsequent helping behavior is reminiscent of mothering. Though this may resemble the simple act of volunteering, it is not, since once the need was recognized, the woman usually had to devise a way in which to meet the need (Collins 1991a). Statements describing this subtheme include:

HR: *She has a roomer but the roomer works all the time. And so that's my individual project in the neighborhood to take care of that one.*

TA: *And some people may say it's selfish, but I think everyone must listen to what their calling is and I don't think that my purpose is to sit in meetings. My purpose is to talk and tell the story and uh, and get as many people to listen, both white and Black.*
SG: *Because there are lots of young people in our community as well as our church that need some activities as well as things to do.*

LM: *I started out as a tutor because there was a definite need.*

HR: *And also during the period of time that I worked there I had to apply for a notary seal. So I would be able to notarize different documents and my notary is still active and I have community members that often call upon me to notarize different things for them.*

UR: *I was interested in what they were doing and I just decided that i would do whatever I could to help.*

KW: *I feel a lot of times our service means a lot more to people than money, than going in to give them a donation of flowers.*

SG: *And I'm the type of person would work anywhere I'm needed not just no special place.*

These excerpts are similar to the points made by Gilkes (1975, 1983, 1985), Reagon (1990), and James (1993) regarding the types of behaviors community mothers and othermothers engage in as they perform mothering activities. Reagon's (1990) reference to othermothers as culture keepers and James' reference to them as being central to the community is signified in the behavior of these women in responding to recognized needs without being asked, or, being asked with the confidence that the request would be honored. Based on the way the church women reported being chosen, it seems there is an expectation of being mothered or handled in a motherly manner on the part of the recipient; for example, congregants in the experiences related by KW (members bypassing other women and seeking her out to ask for assistance) and HR (members telling her they just felt she could help them). In these instances the recipient believes that the women are capable of providing the service before they make the request. TA and LM, who are community women, report mothering behavior in their administration of community work. As the following excerpts indicate, the women have particular methods of doing community work, and often their community work in method and implementation includes motherly behavior, or what seemed to be a motherly frame of reference. This behavior and the accompanying expectation may be seen as an example of how these women use strategies that are not only innovative but also motherly when doing community work. For example,

LM: *A community mother would make sure that if you see a child walking up and down the street and the child does not look like he or she belongs on the street, they would at least say "Baby where you going?" Not that it could be any of my business.*

I think that's a role they see me in. Because they know that if they do something wrong and I catch them I will get on the phone and call their mother. And I think the children understand that it's not snitching on them, it's caring. If I see a child crying in the hallway for no reason, I will come

> home that night and call the mother and I'll say, "you know I say so-and-
> so crying in the hall and I couldn't find out why, and it was just too early
> in the morning, and no one could find out why and I just want to let you
> know so you can find out what happened."
>
> And our children don't feel protected. And they see me outside the school
> building and I'll break up a fight. And I'm not scared of them. And that's
> another thing, too many of us adults are scared of children. The children
> know I'm not scared of them, and I think they appreciate that. I think they
> see me as more than just my daughter's mother. I think my daughter gets
> jealous sometimes, but I think they see me as more than just my daughter's
> mother. By how they respond to me.
>
> SG: And so anyway, after they all went back in and I went upstairs and
> I came back down she said … and she was standing there laughing. And I
> said … "what are you laughing about?" And she said, "I'm laughing because
> of what the kids [said] when they saw you come out. They said 'here comes
> the principal.'" I said, "the principal? I'm not the principal." I said, "that's
> bad." She said, "no, no, no, no it's good." She said, "they respect you enough
> to know that when you come out you want them to go back in. You know
> you don't have to say anything, they know if you want them; in other words
> they're not supposed to be out here congregating in the hall."

Discussion

Mothering emerged in review of the literature and provided a framework to investigate the underlying, motivating factor for Black women doing community work. Therefore mothering was studied as a phenomenon intrinsic to the work. As suggested by Gilkes (1983) and Omolade (1994), open-ended questions were used to allow the uniqueness of these Black women and their community work experiences to be reported accurately. Dickson (1987) and Murray (1987) also suggest caution in researching predominantly ignored populations such as women.

Mothering was an expected theme in doing this study. Statements were made that both directly and indirectly described the concept. Direct mothering may be seen when the community or church woman attempted to influence another; for example, scolding a child, providing some type of service that is nurturing, or satisfying a need. Indirect mothering may be seen through the responses of others to the presence of the woman, or her assumed presence, or expectations tied to her presence without her direct input. Examples include others changing their behavior due to the woman's presence or knowledge that she is approaching, and continuing behaviors she had suggested without the woman being present to reinforce the behavior.

Mothering is present in the reasons given for choosing to do community work. Johnson-Reagon (1990) and Collins (1987) report on othermothers who wielded influence by the knowledge of their presence as well as their actual

work. These women served as role models for young Black women by behaving in a manner that was often entirely different from what society prescribed for women in general, and Black women in particular. One participant (TA) stated her role in providing an "unconventional" example for her daughters and their friends. Gilkes (1985) provides examples of the legacy of community work done by mothers of the Sanctified church, and Grant (1989) supports this indirect work through her statement of women being the literal and figurative "backbone" of the Black church. According to the literature and statements made by the women in this study, the work was accomplished without expectation of an expression of gratitude.

Though the discovery of mothering was not a goal of this study, it served as a framework to investigate the community work of Black women. Its presence in the review of the literature and its influence on the choices of early church, community and othermothers raised the question of whether mothering continues to influence the community work of contemporary Black women. Additionally, its presence in the language of the women in the study solidifies its intrinsic presence as a motivating factor and possible reason for doing community work for contemporary Black women.

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Rishma Dunlop

Stories From Boundary Bay

The road winds
a black ribbon
through the sky,
herons and cranes gracing
fields of grasses,
hawks on fenceposts
as I return to Boundary Bay
to the open arms of the sea
to the smell of kelp and ocean mists.

I arrive home
weighed down
with briefcase and groceries
stacks of term papers
to grade.
My students write about Romeo and Juliet
blur distinctions between text and film
Clare Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio
new heroes
to make their hormones surge
Shakespeare has never been so sexy
proclaim the slogans on posters
homage plastered on walls of
teenage girls' rooms

Rishma Dunlop

The Boundary Bay girls,
my daughter Rachel
KaseyBrookeSaraHaley their names inseparable
multisyllabic, all for one
the phone rings incessantly

they are playing
in the front yard
petals strewn across the pathway
Haley in a veil of white sheeting
another the groom, the taller one
enactments of the marriage script

sometimes they do funerals

Daughters of feminists
spend hours
in front of mirrors
agonize about hair and nails
they pore collectively
over *Teen* and *Seventeen* magazines
wearing Tommy Girl and fragrances from The Gap:
Grass, Earth, Dream, Heaven
Letter from Colleen
her mother died of cancer.
Years ago
LorieColleenDebbie and I
spent summers reading Seventeen magazines
on hot days by the
Beaconsfield Swimming Pool

I see Colleen's mother finishing
the pale yellow hem
of her daughter's prom dress,
pins in her mouth
tenderly, tenderly
touches the corsage on her wrist

Today in Boundary Bay
the young girls gather
fluttering moths
to watch Brooke's older sister Nadine

prepare for the graduation dance

She is beautiful, glowing sleek
a slip of a dress-deep violet
hair upswept
the breathless waiting
for a young boy to pick her up
corsage her
time stands still
in the amber air of summer
such a bathing of expectancy
luminous promise
with its burden of radiance

and all around us
marriages fail
middle aged men leave their wives
for younger women
middle aged wives take lovers
or find basement apartments
Haley's mom left her second husband while he was out fishing, Rachel tells me

in the unrest of passion, the disordered lyrics of love
paralysis and fear threaten to choke
the neighbourhood houses
at night the sounds of the sea, the tidal winds
mingle with the mooing of cows in farmers fields,
raccoons scavenging, stealing goldfish in backyard ponds,
coyotes howling in the woods
and in our gardens
pampas grasses whisper
stories trapped in women's mouths

we lift each other up
when our knees buckle
underneath us
our children's needs
relentless magnets
anchoring us to the earth

I sit by the window
watching the night sky
the mother writing poems of girls

the art on white sheets like love
this one will be strong and fierce
this one will be tender and she will sing
shaping angels, prophets for the world
such terrifying beauty

in the gaps between my words
my daughters and their girlfriends slip
trying out to be cheerleaders
painting their fingernails blue and green
dreaming of bouquets from lovers
romancing the script.

Njoki Nathani Wane

Reflections on the Mutuality of Mothering
Women, Children and Othermothering

> Your books and pens are the tools of your trade; master them, put
> them to good use. They will assist you ... until you find your destiny—
> a destiny different from mine. I do not know whether it will be better
> than mine. Look at you, you cannot even hold a hoe properly. I do not
> blame you; it is rough on hands. Look at my hands; see what years of
> struggle and hard work have done to my hands. Touch them! Rough,
> eee! (Recollection of my mother's repeated counsel, 1970) (Nathani
> 1996: 116).

When I was growing up in Kenya, my mother was always the first to rise and
the last to go to bed. By the time the rest of the household was awake, she had
been to the river and back; collected elephant grass from the riverbed for the
cows; fed and milked them; swept the floors; and prepared a breakfast for the
family. I normalized these acts of mother-work and gave little thought to what
they meant to me, my mother, my siblings and the community at large. I now
look back and realize that her sacrifices, hard work and commitment to change
enabled me to be where I am today. It was her advice and refusal to treat girls
differently than boys that instilled an intolerance of sexism in me. My mother's
exemplary mothering practices, passed down to her by her own mother, must
be passed down to my children. In "Passing the Torch: A Mother and Daughter
Reflect on their Experience Across Generations," Bernard and Bernard exam-
ine how "Black mothers have historically been charged with the responsibility
of providing education, social and political awareness" (47). As they eloquently
state, Black mothers are expected to pass on the torch to "their daughters, who
are expected to become the next generation of mothers, grandmothers, or
othermothers, to guard future generations" (47). As I discuss later in this paper

othermothers look after children whom they have no blood relations or legal obligation. There is usually a mutual agreement between mothers, aunts, uncles or fathers who play the role of othermothers in a given community. A woman elder who mothers both adult and children assumes community mothering on the other hand. She assumes leadership roles and she becomes a consultant for her community.[1]

This paper is a reflection on mothering. It is based on my Canadian mothering experiences and on the mothering experiences of the Embu women who participated in my research on the role of women in indigenous forms of food processing technologies. I do not want to essentialize, or idealize African motherhood or motherwork. I certainly do acknowledge the difficulties in mothering, especially when practised in the midst of other work, such as school activities, household chores or farm work. My intention is to illustrate and underscore how women interweave motherhood and other aspects of their lives.

In 1991, after a one-year separation, my three-year-old daughter came to live with me in Toronto. I would have brought her with me at the time of my admission, but there was no vacancy at the university's family housing. Although enrolled as a full-time student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, the decision to bring my daughter to Canada as soon as I got an apartment was an easy one. I knew I could organize for babysitting with other mothers in the family residence. Coming from Kenya, a neo-colonial country that was experiencing the effects of structural adjustment policies (SAPs), including substantial cutbacks in the social services, I was more than prepared to mother my child here on a limited student budget. At no time did I imagine that her presence might interfere with my studies. Feminist writers, including Gloria T. Emeagwali (1985), Patricia Stamp (1992) and Vandana Shiva (1990), assert that SAPs[2] reflect patriarchal guidelines and depend on patriarchal social relations at the household, community, national and global levels to support the entire structural adjustment process. The reduction of government and donor support for social services has increased the work done by women in the home and community; strengthened the gender division of labour in the household economy; and reduced women's access to formal employment. Lower household incomes have forced women and girls to engage in difficult and unpaid household work. Not surprisingly, the implementation of SAPs has brought increased suffering to the poor, particularly to women and children who have had to bear the heaviest burden of the current economic crisis in Kenya. Many women have had to resort to traditional methods of social organizing that rely upon pooling resources. Their communal activities include helping each other with farm work, and raising funds for school projects or tuition through *Harambee* (the Swahili word for "let us pull together").

Although women have formed mutual groups as a way to deal with the current cutbacks, the social formation of mutual groups reflects the principles

of African collectivism. In other words, they form in response to the needs of a community, a village or a group of women. The mutual groups hold no set rules or written mandates to organize their collective efforts. By natural inclination, the group members know their obligations. There are different types of mutual groups seeking different goals, but all are governed by communal needs. For instance, some groups meet to help a mother who has given birth. Others meet to work collectively on members' farms and share the plowing, planting, weeding and harvesting of crops. The only form of remuneration is reciprocity, cohesiveness, and strengthened community ties. In some instances, mutual groups meet once a month. The purpose for the meeting is to contribute money to a common fund, and each member receives the money on a rotational basis. Women's collective efforts have given them voice and confidence, and enabled many African women to own property, send their children to school, and raise their families' standard of living. When my daughter arrived in Canada, I did not hesitate to find out whether or not similar principles of mutuality would work in Toronto.

Harambee Spirit in Toronto

Within a few weeks of my daughter's arrival, I talked to four other mothers in my apartment building. We agreed to take turns picking up our girls from daycare and babysitting for each other. This schedule was organized on a weekly basis, so each mother would pick up the children only twice or three times each semester (thirteen weeks in one semester). In addition, our arrangement involved feeding, bathing and assisting the five children with their homework. As a result, the five of us, who were graduate students at the University of Toronto, were able to schedule our classes, study routines and work without worrying about babysitting arrangements. The communal childcare arrangements I made upon my daughter's arrival in Canada were not new to me. I had come from a community where a child is not the sole responsibility of the biological mother, but the responsibility of the larger community.[3]

When I first came to Canada, my niece, who was still breast-feeding her own daughter, did not hesitate to mother my daughter during my absence. Therefore, it was quite natural for me to talk to other women who had children of my daughter's age and arrange for community mothering. We had very little in common except for the fact that we were all graduate students. We came from different cultural backgrounds and different parts of the world. Three mothers were from Africa, one from Europe and one from Lebanon. But we trusted each other, despite the fact that we barely knew one another. This paper explores the roots of my mothering experiences in Canada as a single parent, graduate student and Kenyan woman.

Roots of African motherhood

A brief survey of pre-colonial and colonial societies is useful in understand-

ing the structure upon which African motherhood is based. Most of pre-colonial Africa was founded upon and sustained by collectivism. Social systems sought to achieve a balance between the physical and metaphysical world by being in tune with, rather than in opposition to, nature (Nathani, 1996). Communal and cooperative values were privileged over individualism and accumulation. Labour was organized along parallel rather than hierarchical lines, thus giving equal value to male and female labour. Social organization was based on the principle of patrilineal or matrilineal descent, or a combination of both Mothering practices were organized as a collective activity (Nathani, 1996).

During the colonial and neo-colonial period, my mothers and grandmothers still employed the mothering practices that had been passed down to them. They still prepared foods, bananas, yams, arrowroot, green vegetables and fruits, using the traditional methods. They would roast, boil or fry foods, then mash them using a pestle and mortar to make them soft for their children. My mother breast-fed us until our milk teeth starting falling out. I still recall that when something would get into my eye, my mother would open the eye wide and either blow on it or use her tongue to remove the object. Our mothers, aunties, sisters and community mothers carried us on their backs until some of us were ready for second *Mambura*.[4] Boys and girls learnt to take care of young ones, to balance them on our backs and feed them. Seven-year-old children were taught how to carry newborn babies on their backs, and taught how to comfort them if they cried. Women like my mother played an integral role in ensuring that such community mothering practices survived. These women practised what they preached.

However, during the colonial period schooling interfered with mothering practices. Initially, only boys were sent to school.[5] As a result girls had to carry out the boys' work, which included looking after the herds and running errands, in addition to their own work. It also meant the mothers and the grandmothers had to adjust their mothering practices. The mothers were conscious of the fact that caring for young siblings, a duty that had previously been shared by boys and girls, had now become the girls' responsibility. It was not long, however, before various communities realized there was a benefit to sending all children to school regardless of their gender. Unfortunately, in addition to attending school, girls were still expected to carry out their household chores.

By the time Kenya achieved independence in 1963, most people believed that a Western education was beneficial. Unfortunately, the cutbacks introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank eroded educational opportunities in Kenya, particularly for women. The cutbacks that marked independence forced many women to adjust their lives to accommodate all the mothering responsibilities bestowed upon them. During my research, it was evident that mothering responsibilities had tripled. Due to the social cutbacks, the government has reduced funding for pre-school institutions, hospitals and higher education. Women are expected to care for children

who are unable to attend pre-school, prepare traditional herbs for the sick, and engage in fund raising to send their children to university. As previously discussed, women have had to rely on their collectivism in order to cope with the impact of SAPs. Women have had to compensate for the loss of government services due to SAPs in the areas of health, education and economics. Despite the cutbacks, Embu women have not relinquished their responsibility of educating, socializing and "passing on the torch" to the next generation.

To situate motherwork in African contexts requires one to examine how African women in their local, everyday lived realities negotiate the meanings of mothering. During my research in Kenya I could not help but admire women's commitment to their children and community. For example, Wangeci, a single mother with a grade-seven education told me she had made a commitment to her ten-year-old daughter when she was born:

> *I will sacrifice my life for this baby. I will do what it takes to make sure that she does not end up like me, no education, no money and no land. At present I am not sure how I will do it. But all I know is her life will be different and better than mine. I let my mother down by dropping out of school, I have to do something that will make her know that her efforts, her sacrifices were not in vain…it appears pretty hopeless now, but I know things will change.* (interview, 1994)

In her late 20s, Wangeci spoke with determination and dignity. I was not surprised when I visited her two years later to find that she had managed to send her daughter to a private boarding school. When I asked her how that was possible, she pointed to her head, then spread out her hands to show me the palms and almost in a whisper she said:

> *Hard work. I work in peoples' homes, on farms and in coffee plantations or factories. At the end of the day, people offer me grains, beans, cash or space to cultivate my own food. Once I have accumulated enough grains/beans, I sell them and save the money. I get very little for the work I do, but as the saying goes "kidogo, kidogo ndio kina jascha kipapa" (bits and pieces fill the pocket or a penny earned is a penny saved).* (interview, 1996)

Wangeci's main goal is to educate her daughter. Among African people, there is a saying that when you educate a girl, you educate a whole clan. Wangeci might not be an orator, or a renowned feminist; nonetheless her commitment to make a difference in her daughter's life speaks volumes. Wangeci is an activist who is very aware of the struggles and sacrifices she must make as a mother to provide her children with the opportunity for better lives.

Nyawira, a woman in her mid-sixties was another participant in my research. She has five children who have all completed their secondary education. She spoke of her children with passion:

> *Although all my children are grown and live in the city, I still prepare large*
> *amounts of foods. I recall many times, I would prepare homemade cookies*
> *to go and sell to raise school fees. Sometimes I did not sell even one, and some*
> *other times I sold everything. I sacrificed everything I had to put my children*
> *through school. My husband had to sell part of our land to raise school fee.*
> *But here I am alone. All my children have moved to the city. I am lonely,*
> *but I am happy for them.* (interview, 1994)

Situating these women's narratives in pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial knowledges on mothering enables us to understand the dilemma mothers face in contemporary Africa. However, I would like to state that although there are commonalities in mothering practices across African communities, I do not wish to generalize about these practices because African communities are not homogeneous. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a shared African philosophy that views parenting, especially mothering, as an integral component in the survival of African traditions and cultures.

The practice of mothering is not universal, and the way it is conceived, celebrated and practiced differs across cultures. In some instances, mothering as a practice is portrayed as oppressive and problem-laden both socially and culturally. For example, in Western feminist legal theory, motherhood has often been seen as problematic for women because mothers are seen to embody dependency while simultaneously being trapped by the dependency of others (Fineman, 1995: xi). Thus, motherhood, based on Western ideologies, tends to be conceptualized as a dutiful obligation. Often women's economic and social problems are presented as partially or primarily linked to motherhood (Fineman, 1995: xi). Western feminists often promote the notion of "shared parenting" as one possible solution to the social problems that have come to be linked to mothering. Typically, they envision fathers as "equal" parents with corresponding rights and obligations within the context of an egalitarian family. As a result, western feminist theorists often continue to privilege patriarchal family structures, and subsequently continue to formulate social and legal policies that position the nuclear family as the paradigmatic core social institution (Fineman. 1995: xi).

The notion of "ideal" or "good" mothering and the culturally specific assumption that a woman must be a mother before she is considered a mature, balanced, and fulfilled adult, promotes compulsory motherhood. In other words, it promotes the belief that becoming pregnant, giving birth, and exhibiting nurturing behavior are integral to fulfilling one's gendered destiny (Kline, 1995: 118). According to Wearing:

> A "good" mother is always available to her children, she spends time
> with them, guides, supports, encourages and corrects as well as [loves]
> and [cares] for them physically. She is also responsible for the
> cleanliness of their home environment. A "good" mother is unselfish;

she puts her children's need before her own. (Wearing qtd. in Kline, 1995: 118-120)

Kline explains that motherhood has been ideologically constructed as compulsory only for those women considered "fit," and not for women who have been judged "unfit" on the bases of their social location. During the last century, this has held true for disabled women, Black women, First Nations women, immigrant women, Jewish women, lesbian women, women who are the sole-support of parents, poor women, unmarried women, young women and others (1995: 120-121).

The social construction of the good or ideal mother demonstrates the extent to which mothering remains a site of struggle. Slaughter argues that, "The forces of social power are always at war. "[Our] task [as women] is to resist and unmask the power behind the institutions and discourses that name" (1995: 77). The ideology of motherhood, therefore, speaks not only to gender roles and behavior, but also privileges specific locations within the social relations of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. Historically, White, middle-class and able-bodied women have been most likely to be viewed as "appropriate" mothers as Kline notes:

Thus, motherhood is better conceptualized as a privilege than a right, a privilege that can be withheld, both ideologically and in more material ways, from women who are not members of the dominant groups in society or who are otherwise considered unfit. Within this framework, so-called unfit women who want to have children are often confronted with serious barriers and difficulties. The bad mother, by corollary, is constructed as the 'photographic negative' of the good mother. (Kline, 1995: 122)

It is my belief that assumptions about which women can and cannot be mothers or good mothers are a form of social control embedded in the capitalist mode of production and rooted in patriarchal systems. Ideally, assumptions about who constitutes a good mother would not be based on one model of mothering, but be determined in culturally and community specific contexts. In Toronto where people from various cultures often live together in the same building or in close proximity, individual mothers should be free to make choices about how to mother across cultural differences. This is what I have had to do in mothering my daughter. Understanding who I am as a person and the cultural contexts that have had an impact on my life have been the best preparations for being a parent. With a grounded understanding of "self," I have been able to better understand the different cultural environments in which I find myself and to begin choosing which aspects of these cultures to embrace as I mother my daughter away from my culture. Recognizing myself as a diaporic subject has also enabled me to more effectively address the challenges

mothers face when mothering away from their familiar communities. When attempting to understand differences in mothering practices, I have discovered that we tend to resort to the most readily available reference points—our own cultural frameworks. The use of a different cultural context as a basis for understanding mothering is inevitably challenging. However, having a strong cultural reference point is essential as women's mothering practices are often judged in relation to the institutionalized mothering practices carried out in schools and daycares, and represented by the media.

Mothering among African communities

Within African communities, mothering is not necessarily based on biological ties. Established African philosophy suggests that children do not solely belong to their biological parents, but to the community at large. This philosophy and tradition inform what we refer to as "other-mothering" and "community mothering." Significantly, even in the face of Western concep-tions of mothering, which often view community-mothering practice as deviant and negligent, African understandings of mothering continue to thrive. Throughout the African Diaspora, Black women care for one another and one another's children regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Stanlie James clearly states that mothers among African American communities incorporate nurturing responsibilities for children other than their immediate offspring (1997: 45). Evidence indicating that this practice is still prevalent in African communities with polygynous relationships, suggests that shared parenting or othermothering is part of the value system inherent to pre-colonial Africa.

Othermothering in Black communities involves the same hard work, self-sacrifice, mentoring and love that Black women give their own children. The bonds that are created between those who mother and those who are mothered are passed down through a "lineage of mothering" (Wane and Adefarakan, forthcoming). Although I focus on Black women who mother children and one another, such practices exist beyond gender and racial boundaries. It is not unusual to find young boys mothering their younger siblings and uncles and fathers mothering their nieces and/or nephews. My mothering experiences in Toronto have also shown that women from different racial backgrounds may step in as othermothers or community othermothers. Othermothers usually care for children. Community mothers take care of the community. These women are typically past their childbearing years. They are usually charismatic and embrace a communal spirit. According to James: "Based upon her knowledge and her respected position, a community othermother is also in a position to provide analyses and/or critiques of conditions or situations that may affect the well being of her community" (1997: 48). This is not to suggest, however, that community othermothering does not differ from culture to culture.

"Othermothers" may also be defined as mothers who assist blood mothers in the responsibility of child care for short or long-term periods, in informal or

formal arrangements. They can be, but are not confined to, such blood relatives as grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins or supportive fictive kin (James, 1997: 45). They not only serve to relieve some of the stress that can develop between children and parents but also provide multiple role models for children. As othermothers and community othermothers, Black women keep the traditional African value systems of communal sharing and ownership alive. James argues that the entire community benefits from Black women's motherwork and suggest that it serves as "an important Black feminist link to the development of new models for social transformation" (1997: 45). In short, whether we are mothers, othermothers or community othermothers, African traditional notions of community are functional strategies that sustain the survival of African peoples all over the world.

As an African woman, I am gravely concerned about the way in which racist and colonial discourses have constructed Black female-headed households. While the dominant society denigrates Black single motherhood, and often dismisses these women as welfare queens, Black female-headed households have been the core of survival for African peoples in Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas and Europe. When Black men were absent from home due to migratory labour, family abandonment or other reasons, Black women were left with the difficult and challenging task of caring for themselves, their children, and other community members.

Mothering within African communities can be understood as a form of cultural work or as one way communities organize to nurture both themselves and future generations (James, 1997: 44). Among Embu women, mothering is a cultural phenomenon. Women without children prepare meals as if they are expecting a number of children for both the midday and evening meals. If no child drops by, the women pack the food and take it to a home where there are children. The actions of such women stand as evidence of the extent to which mothering is not limited to females with biological offspring, but is a community practice (James, 1997: 44). For example, women in traditionally polygynous relationships, who are compatible with each other, often share the care of all the children in the household so they can more easily and efficiently carry out their daily responsibilities (James, 1997: 44). As James (1997) explains:

> In addition to patterns of shared childcare in polygynous households, childcare responsibilities were also diffused through the common African practice of fostering children. African communal societies were characterized by high degrees of interdependence and the belief that individual self-development and personal fulfillment were dependent upon the well being of all members of the community. Fostering children was one means of promoting these communal values and ensuring the likelihood of co-operative interaction. (46)

Thus, women in an African context do not foster children simply because

they are orphaned. Othermothering is a way of extending children's primary relationships to a larger number of people within the extended family and the community at large. It is also a way to relieve mothers from some of the responsibilities associated with nurturing young children. Similarly, community othermothering, a role usually preserved for"elders," recognizes the value of communal mothering practices.

Conclusion

Mothering is a very complex institution. It is only by documenting our mothering experiences and telling our stories that we can begin to understand and appreciate its complexity. Every time I visited my grandmothers as a child, they always had a story for me. Looking back, these stories did not always make sense to me at the time, but have now become my source of reference for mothering. Each story illustrated some aspect of our culture. From them, I learned about our culture, clan lineage, and rites of passage. Here in Toronto, I have tried to follow in my mothers' and grandmothers' footsteps. When my busy schedule permits, I sit with my daughter and tell her stories. I tell her stories about Kenya, and stories about the Embu people, my mothers, and grandmothers in particular. I do this with the hope that she will pass on these stories to her children, my grandchildren, and in so doing, pass on the torch to the next generation.

[1]For a more detailed discussion of the notion of community mothering in Africa, see James (1997).

[2]For further reading, see Emeagwali (1995).

[3]Coming from Kenya, subsidized day care services for children were quite new to me. My experiences with children services were interesting and informative. I was pleasantly relieved to learn that I would only pay a dollar a day for my daughter's daycare services.

[4]In traditional societies, the significant stages in one's life were marked by a special ceremony referred to as *Mambura*. The most celebrated stages were the birth of a child, ear piercing, circumcision for both girls and boys, and marriage rites. The ceremonies were marked by community gatherings. During these ceremonies there would be drinking, eating, dancing, rejoicing, and teaching. Unfortunately, by the time I initiated my own research on Kenyan community practices, most of these rites were no longer being practised. The practices had been outlawed, been rendered too lavish under the current economic conditions, or lost their significance.

[5]For further reading on the cultural barriers, see Mwagiru and Ouko (1989).

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Laurie Kruk

the art of thumbsucking

this bundle of will and wet diaper, searches
for thumb: blind hand hovering
over shut eyes and craving rose mouth
trying out the fit of fingers and lip
to nest between tongue and still-toothless gum

already, you are crawling away—
creating your own mother
in self-soothing, wet suckles,
choking back tears and snot-snuffles
as I watch, watch and cradle-rock
you closer to dream—

or the pulsing dark cave
from which you came, carried
in all high-waisted, sentimental labelled
dumb bigness of the breeding female

little girl, suck in the outside: you mother me
when you find such comfort, simplicity
in what is already to hand

Karen Flynn and Cindy-Lou Henwood

Nothing To Write Home About

Caribbean Canadian Daughters, Mothers and Migration

These women, our mothers, a whole generation of them, left us. They went to England or America or Canada or some big city as fast as their wit could get them there because they were women and all they had to live on was wit since nobody considered them whole people. (Brand, 1996: 230)

Introduction

Faced with high unemployment and economic instability, Caribbean peoples began mass migrating to the United States, England and Canada in the early 1950s and '60s. Simultaneously, transformations in the post-World War II economies led to changes in the racialized immigration policies, facilitating the passage of Caribbean migrants. Taking advantage of new found opportunities, young Caribbean men and women left their homelands in hopes of finding employment and making a better life for themselves and their families. While several studies have explored the impact of state policies on directing and controlling the flow of migrants to Canada (Bolaria and Li 1988; Calliste 1989), few have examined the impact of these policies on Caribbean-Canadian families. Besides Silvera (1989) and Das Gupta (2000), for example, there are no studies that we are aware of that deal with the effects of migration on Caribbean-Canadian mothers and daughters.

This paper explores the often volatile and contradictory relationships between mothers and daughters separated through migratory circuits between the Caribbean and Canada. Utilizing oral interviews in conjunction with feminist and anti-racist scholarship, we examine the ways in which four women of Caribbean descent conceptualize their post-migratory relationships with their mothers.[1] We argue that racist immigration policies which prevented

Caribbean mothers from migrating with their children, coupled with a lack of preparation for the kind of racism, sexism and alienation the daughters faced in Canada, fostered family breakdown after migration. A couple of points need to be made here: First, our intention is not to reinscribe notions of the "bad mother," but rather, to complicate the migratory experiences of a particular group of women. Second, while we recognize that this group's experience is not generalizable to all Caribbean-Canadian women, we argue that certain commonalties can be deduced from these relationships. Before we pursue our discussion of post-migratory mother/daughter relationships, it is important to provide some context of these relations prior to migration, beginning with a brief overview of mothering in the Caribbean.

An overview of mothering in the Caribbean

Scholars suggest that motherhood in the Caribbean is marked by two key factors: a high representation of female-headed households (Barrow, 1996; Silvera, 1989; Brand, 1993), and a socio-historical link between motherhood and wage labour (Silvera, 1989; Brand, 1993). In the Caribbean, high numbers of single mothers have existed for generations following the systematic dismantling of traditional families that directly resulted from slavery. Matrifocality, extra-residential unions and alternative patterns of parental responsibility are some of the adaptive features of the Caribbean family. In this sense, family patterns in the Caribbean directly challenge the widespread conviction that the nuclear family is natural, universal and essential. For example, residential separation of mother and child occurs frequently within Caribbean family structures. Young children are often entrusted to other relatives in order that the mother can be better equipped to financially support her children (Barrow, 1996; Silvera, 1989).

In addition to female headed-households and "other-mothering' as central features of Caribbean family structures, there is also a strong connection between mothering and wage labour. Although women in the Caribbean have traditionally been socialized for parental and domestic roles, they have also been expected to perform relatively high occupational roles. Social expectations of these women have always included the expectation that they would work to provide for their families. This phenomenon may also in part explain why migration was such a viable and important option for Caribbean women. Many saw the opportunities offered abroad as the chance to provide for their families in a manner that simply was not possible at home. Racist immigration policies did not allow them to bring their children when they migrated. Subsequently, many children were left in the care of family members, primarily grandmothers. Most of the literature seems to conceptualize the phenomenon of other-mothering as a positive adaptative feature of the Caribbean family structures. Based on our interviewees, there is a contradiction to some extent between what the literature suggests, and their own experiences. While the participants did not express any resentment towards the family members who raised them, they

were nonetheless affected by the lack of contact that characterized their relationship with their mothers.

Most of the daughters testify that after migration, their mothers rarely kept in regular contact with them. The daughters themselves speculate that their mother's expectations of Canada and what it had to offer was far from the reality they encountered. It is conceivable that when the mothers of the women in this study decided to migrate, their intentions were not to "abandon" their children, but rather to make enough money and subsequently send for their children. In fact, many Caribbean women, upon migration, were concentrated in minimum, low wage work, making it difficult to send remittances back home, particularly during the early stages (Brand, 1993; Das Gupta, 2000). Furthermore, the alienation, lack of family support, patriarchy, racism and sexism that these women confronted on a daily basis are plausible explanations for limiting contact because there in that sense, there really was nothing to "write home about."

It is impossible to know, without interviewing the mothers themselves, why they did not maintain regular contact with their daughters. From these interviews, however, we can begin to conceptualize how the daughters perceived their mother's reasoning. In listening to the testimonies of these women, it is clear that the seeming disinterest on the part of their mothers was both painful and difficult to understand, especially during childhood. Once their mothers had emigrated from the Caribbean, most remember seeing them only a few times before "being sent" for. In the majority of cases, the time between their mother's migration and reunification with their mothers spanned many years. Because their mothers left them in the care of other family members at such young ages, participants often describe their relationship with their mothers prior to their migration as one of detachment and unfamiliarity. During their mother's occasional visits, for example, the daughters seemed to regard them, at best, as interesting and exciting in the way a stranger or a foreigner might be. Paradoxically, the daughters testified to feelings of anger and resentment, especially when their mothers would attempt to take on a disciplinarian role. The following testimonies offer insight into the often distant, conflictual and explosive nature of these relationships:

"Smells like foreign": mothers and daughters prior to reunification

Claudette Thompson, 33, migrated to Canada in 1981 at the age of 14. Her mother left Jamaica when Claudette was only two years old. Unlike the other participants whose mothers rarely visited, Claudette's mother returned to see her four or five times. Despite these intermittent visits, Claudette's feelings towards her mother were filled with uncertainty. She acknowledges that as a child, her resentment towards her mother was largely influenced by the fact that she was required to interact with—and obey—a woman who had never played a significant role in raising her. In describing her mother's visits, for example,

Claudette's emotions often vacillated between resentment and awe. Thus the "mother-figure," for Claudette, epitomized an unsettling mix of the exotic and the unknown. "I remember those visits with mixed feelings," she states,

> *As a child, I was always excited to see her because she brought foreign things for me. She even smelled like "foreign," you know? Like a fresh, new package of clothes mixed with perfume. That made me happy. What really made me mad, though, was when she wanted to discipline me. When she insisted that I say my prayers, for example. As far as I was concerned my grandparents were the only ones who should discipline me. My mother was, after all, a stranger, someone who dropped in and out every now and then. Even at such a young age, defiance shaped the nature of our relationship.*

Suzette Bennett, 28, immigrated to Canada in 1983 at age the age of eleven. When Suzette was only three months old, her mother immigrated to the United States, leaving her daughter in the care of an elderly woman who, though not biologically related, had played a primary role in raising Suzette's grandfather. While most of the women in this study lived with their mothers immediately after they were brought to Canada, Suzette moved in with her father and stepmother. Suzette's stepmother had adopted Suzette and her sister prior to migration which made the immigration process easier. Furthermore their father was in a better position financially to support the sisters than was her biological mother. Like the other participants, Suzette's interaction with her biological mother was very limited once her mother left for the U.S. Letters, money and food came infrequently, Suzette states. Unlike the other interviewees who were born in the Caribbean, Hope Summers was born in Canada, sent to Jamaica at the age of four and returned to Canada in 1988 at age ten. She too remembers having very limited contact with her mother. She maintains that while her mother never wrote, one of her principal childhood memories involves receiving a Barbie doll from her mother for Christmas one year. Unlike the previous participants, Hope's memories of the visits are tinged by moments of emotional and physical abuse. She recalls:

> *I remember my mother coming once, and this was soon before I migrated. It was just after Hurricane Gilbert struck Jamaica. The thing that stuck in my memory, besides the storm, was when my mother was buying me school supplies for the next year, I think they came up to $300, and she was angry that she had to spend so much. But that's how things were in Jamaica. I was very happy that she had bought those books for me, and I sat with her as she wrote my name in each one. As she was grumbling about how much she had to spend on me, I gently pulled a book from the poke so I could read it. Without warning my mother slapped me and started to beat me so ferociously I nearly wet myself. She never gave me an explanation, but I figured she was mad about the money she had spent on me.*

One of the most poignant testimonies to the pain and isolation these women felt in being in some ways "abandoned" by their biological mothers at such young ages comes from Hope, when she is asked to describe her relationship with her mother prior to migration. Hope's words decry the multifaceted and complex emotions held by these women towards their mothers. For the participants in this study, feelings of resentment and ambiguity were often overshadowed by a real sense of loneliness and a deep longing for their mothers. According to Hope:

There was no relationship. I would think about her a lot. My grandmother always had a graduation picture of her on the wall. I would imagine where she was, and I wanted to be with her. I figured that where she was must have been better than where I was. And I wanted to be there with her. I missed her and I wanted my mommy. I was a very lonely child—I wanted to be normal. I idolized her because my grandmother told me stories about her growing up as a child. I just wanted to be in her life.

Judging from these responses, it is possible to conclude that this early migratory process interfered with the formation of a bond between mothers/daughters. The fact these daughters were left in the care of other family members at such young ages likely contributed to the unpredictable relations that emerged after reunification. Despite the unpredictable nature of these relationships, there remained, for many of the participants, an expectation that things would dramatically improve once they were reunited with their mothers. These young women had heard the myths about Canada—that, as Suzette maintains, it "was cold, [but] everyone was rich, like in the soaps." Going to "a foreign place" then, held the promise of greater financial, material and emotional security. Above all, there was the belief that they would finally be able to secure a stable relationship with their mothers, and "live happily every after." Although all of the participants testify to having believed as young children that their standard of living would be greater increased once they were reunited with their mothers in Canada, what many found, was that the reality they encountered fell far short of their expectations. Not only did their expectations for an improved relationship with their mothers not come to fruition, but these participants also found themselves in a strange and unfamiliar world, a world where they themselves had suddenly become "the foreign." There was little or no emotional and psychological support for these children, all of who faced sever culture shock and few of whom had been prepared by their mothers with the skills necessary to integrate them into their new society.

Schooling in Canada
One of the primary locales that participants profess to have experienced difficulty, confusion and anxiety was the school system. All of the participants corroborate tales of excessive and brutal disciplinary techniques used in the

Caribbean school system. However, it should be noted that while Canadian schools may not have followed these same methods of discipline, participants profess to having faced other, often more troubling difficulties, including racism and sexism, both subtle and systemic. Hope's expectations of Canada, for example, were largely influenced by her experiences with the school system in Jamaica. She expected things to be much better in the Canadian school system, including a "school system that didn't beat its students." Hope hated school in Jamaica and deeply resented the harsh ways in which students were disciplined.

Immigration to Canada did not make schooling any easier for these young girls who faced a whole new set of difficulties. Corporal punishment was replaced with institutional, systemic and everyday forms of racism, patriarchy and sexism. It is worth noting that in the Caribbean, teachers are held in the highest regard, as parents believe wholeheartedly that teachers have their children's best in mind. Unfortunately, Caribbean parents often believe this of teachers generally without considering the structural and systemic inequalities that exist in the Canadian school system (Hale, 1995; Thornhill, 1984). Therefore, it is not surprising that the girls had such a difficult time adjusting to the education system. For example, several participants discussed the difficulties they encountered as a result of their accents. They were ridiculed, made fun of, and many teachers treated them as inferior. Thus Caribbean students were seen as less intelligent with less potential than the white Canadian students (Frances *et al.*, 2000). According to Hope, most of the Caribbean kids were put back a year or two. Teachers would actually suggest to these children that they were better suited for community college or technical school, or for careers as mechanical labourer, and secretaries than for pursuing academic degrees (Lewis, 1992). Like Hope, Suzette experienced problems in adjusting to the school system. Suzette began internalizing racism to the point where she wished she were apart of the dominant group to alleviate the differential treatment she faced daily. Suzette notes:

> *The school system wanted to put us back a grade even though our grades from Jamaica were good. I was not prepared for an almost all-white school. My speech was made fun of, my braided hair and my scars. I was not selected for any award although I was qualified. I was forced to participate in sports, although I was not particularly interested. Culture shock, the ways of life were quite different which lead me to withdraw and appear shy (totally opposite from my personality in Jamaica). Sometimes I wished I were white so that I wouldn't be treated differently. I started hating my hair, lips and skin color and I also tried harder to "speak English as Canadians."*

Unlike the other participants, Claudette's mother did prepare her to some extent for the realities of life in the Canadian school system. A week before she began school, her mother explained that she would probably be the only black

child in the class. She also spoke to the guidance counsellor that she did not expect her daughter to be streamed. Additionally, Claudette's mother arranged for extra academic help when necessary. Despite the attempts made by her mother to prepare her, Claudette was initially traumatized by the transition from Jamaica to Canada. She states:

> *I hated being here at first. Sometimes I still do. It was cold in a way that made me want to cry. School was especially hard. Almost everyone was white and they seem to talk really fast. I had a strong accent, so I was terrified of speaking in class. At first, I wanted to shrink and disappear. I thought the kids were especially rude and barbaric. They swore and smoked! These are things I would have been immediately expelled for in Jamaica.*

Dawn Green immigrated to Canada in 1974, at the age of three; therefore her relationship with the education system in Canada was different from the other women in this study. She sums up her experience as follows:

> *...Growing up in small town Canada was virtually hassle free. My brothers and sister encountered more racism than I growing up simply because they came from straight from Jamaica into a Canadian school system. They dealt with the name calling and got in their share of fights as youngsters but were able to "win over" their adversaries in a short time. This is I think, was due to constant support of our parents who instilled in us a strong dose of Jamaican pride. So I guess my brothers and sisters paved the way for me, because by the time I started school my family was legendary. We were well liked and well respected, while retaining my "Jamaicaness." Sometimes I think my blackness may have facilitated some of my success, because I initially stood out physically, and then having got their attention, I was able to back it up with either athletic prowess, social skills or intelligence. That was what it was like growing up in Stratford.*

For most of the participants in this study, the immigrant process was one filled with pain, loneliness and isolation. Their experiences, however, are corroborated by the research of scholars such as Dei (1996) and Alladin (1996). Due to the amount of time spent in the education system, schooling loomed largely in reminiscences for these women. School, in a sense, can also become a barometer for judging the larger society. It should be noted that these women's experiences were not limited only to school system as they faced the everyday forms of racism that are so intrinsic to Canadian society; for example, the name calling they endured as children, being followed by store clerks and facing employment discrimination as adults. Drawing on the example of Dawn, it is possible to make the assertion that with additional support in parenting, a politicized sense of the inequalities that existed in Canadian society, along with a stronger mother/daughter bond prior to migration,

integration into Canadian society would have been easier.

Nothing to "write home about": mothers and daughters, post-migration

Coupled with the already disruptive experiences with the school system, the mother/daughter dyad was further strained by the fact that the daughters had very traditional expectations of their mothers even if they did not recognize it at the time. The mothers were simply unable to live up to these ideals. For example, Claudette thought of her mother as:

> *... a well dressed party-girl who drove a nice red shiny car, and who looked like a fashion model. In a lot of ways she wasn't real to me—not the way that my grandmother was. She didn't cook and clean or look after a family like my grandmother had, so in a lot of ways her life seemed strange. The first years of living with her were very, very hard. I'm sure for her too although we never talk about it. I also hated living in an apartment. I felt very restricted and claustrophobic as I had been used to playing outside almost all of the year.*

Hope's relationship with her mother was characterized by power struggles and extreme physical and mental abuse which eventually forced Hope to run away at the age of fifteen. She states:

> *It was a power relationship with her, her authority was always to be acknowledged. She would beat me for anything. I felt that I was the mother in the house, I was given primary charge in raising my one-year old brother. It was like I was a slave. She knew that I was raised to "honour and obey" and she exploited that. A lot of emotional weight was placed on me and I had to be the strong one for my sister and my brother. I hated my mother, and she made me hate myself and my life. I would go to bed praying that I didn't wake up.*

In these cases, it seemed as if the longer the separation between mothers/daughters, the more tenuous the relationships. Dawn who was reunited with her mother at the age of three pointed out that "we didn't face any difficulties until I was a teenager, basically "the rebellious teen thing" that most girls go through with their moms." Although Dawn admitted that the earlier separation between her and her mother might have contributed to their strained relations later on, she states that, for the most part, they got along extremely well.

Tensions between mothers/daughters were also amplified particularly if the mothers had an already established family. At first, Suzette's stepmother appeared "nice and caring, " and she remembered having positive feelings towards her. Suzette notes that after living with her stepmother things soon

began to take a turn for the worse. She notes: "After a few months of living with my stepmother and father, I realized there was favouritism between her children and my sister and myself, who were not her biological children. It was a very tense home environment."

Even though Suzette's stepmother had children which created additional tensions, this is not necessarily unique to a stepmother/daughter relationship. Similar to Suzette, Hope's mother also played the favorite child game. Hope's sister had lived with their mother in Canada while Hope was living in Jamaica, and based on this, Hope was given preferential treatment. "She was jealous of me for living in Jamaica, maybe she felt I was given better things because I was away. When I asked for a Barbie doll, I got one, and she didn't." Hope continued:

> *My mother had favorites. One day my sister would be favorite and the next day I would be. When my sister was the favorite, which was most of the time, my mother would complain to my sister about me. They were in cahoots. As my sister grew older, and teenage trouble started, my mother would more and more confide in me.*

Daughters were also expected to take on traditional domestic and child-rearing responsibilities which were often the purview of the mother. While these daughters may view these practices as unfair, it is also possible that the extra assistance was needed to alleviate some of the pressures the mothers were facing. Most of the daughters concurred that their mothers did work extensively to provide for them. Despite this acknowledgement, their daughters did feel resentment. Hope mentions that in taking care of her brother, she:

> *...was the hired help without the pay. I did everything except buy the diapers with my own money. He took priority over school, over anything I wanted to do with myself. I couldn't do anything or go anywhere with my friends.*

Suzette also questioned the distribution of household work, especially when she felt ignored, unwanted, and taken for granted by her stepmother.

> *We did not communicate much. She didn't take much interest in my life-school or social life. I was given much home responsibilities which I thought was unfair when compared to those of my other siblings. I received little or no encouragement in school or life. There was no motherly affection.*

Conclusion

The women in this study all expected being reunited with their mothers in Canada would bring about certain improvements in their lives. They expected not only to enjoy an improved standard of living, but also to form a closer bond

with their mothers. What they found, however, was that they were, for the most part, estranged from their mothers. In addition, the difficulties they encountered in adjusting to life in Canada were magnified by external factors such as racism, sexism and patriarchy. Their testimonies reveal that their mothers, who most likely did not have any preparation themselves, did not provide their daughters with adequate information or enough support on coping with migrating to a new society. Moreover, some of these girls felt exploited in terms of the amount of work they were expected to do in the family, especially when their mothers did not appear to take an interest in their lives.

It should be noted, however, that although the interviewees did not have ideal relationships with their mothers, at least not according the Eurocentric standards, they did not engage in the same type of "mother-blaming" (Caplan, 2000) typical of North American society. Instead what we see is some understanding regarding the decisions their mothers made. While the daughters do question what they construe as abandonment on the part of their mothers, and their mother's silence when they attempt to address these issues, there is still a real sense of admiration and respect present. Suzette pointed out that she admired her stepmother because she was a hard worker, and had an entrepreneurial sprit.

> *She worked hard. I can't remember her missing a day of work. She was ambitious and business minded. She tried different ventures to make extra money. She opened a small fashion boutique, planned dinner, dances and fashion shows for fundraising purposes.*

As an adult, Claudette is able to critically analyze her childhood experiences and her relationship with her mother as being in large part shaped and defined by the process of migration and state policies on immigration. She notes that:

> *Now that I understand that what my mother went through is part of how colonialism, racism and patriarchy operates I can appreciate the tremendous obstacles she faced and overcame. She is a woman with a great deal of courage and resolve. I admire her determination and her inner strength above all else.*

Anne Oakley (1995) argues that there is "a mismatch between motherhood as a moral ideal and motherhood as a social reality. What mothers are supposed to be is very different from the resources and positions they are allowed to enjoy." Racist immigration policies made it difficult for Caribbean mothers to bring their children with them upon migration, as a result, families estranged from each other for many years face difficulties upon reunification. Taken out of context, Caribbean mothers are then held responsible for the problems their children face. Although the women in this paper were able to

contextualize to a certain degree their mothers' experiences despite the anguish they faced as children, more attention and research is needed to document the experiences of Caribbean mothers and children following migration.

[1]These interviews were conducted in the Spring of 2000 The names of the actual participants were changed to protect their identity.

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Crystal'Aisha PerrymanMark

Resistance and Surrender
Mothering Young, Black and Feminist

Somethings are about Resistance
 and
Somethings are about Surrender
Speaking on Revolution
                    and God
Meditating on Fight and Spirit
Waging battles in
            Mothering and Motherhood
Each dealing in Sacrifice,
All about Self-
                    Confrontation
Knowing that too
Motherhood is   a
                birthed institution
Subverted by my Resistances
                but continued....
By my Surrender to its conventions.
                    —Crystal'Aisha PerrymanMark, 2000

This article focuses on the experiences of resistance I myself have had as a young, Black, teenage mother; as well it explores some informal research I have been collecting on women of similar circumstance and social location mothering within the confines of a racist, sexist, capitalist society. Over the years, I have kept my eyes open and ear to the ground—listening, talking, and trying to understand Black mothering as an identity for myself and others. It has been my experience, and those with whom I have spoken, that we do not fit the

stereotype of the "uneducated, poor, Black, teenage welfare mother" that is often scapegoated by racist ideology that continues to permeate this society. I have discovered that the perpetuation of racist stereotypes, and our acceptance of and resistance to them, are players in the circumstances under which Black women are becoming mothers and choosing motherhood. Dealing with complex and intersecting social identities, Black mothers have had to face a paradox paradigm I have chosen to name "resistance and surrender." Through reading, hypothesis, observation, and inquiry into my peer group, I have come to find there are many similarities and differences that encompass the perspective of the "Black mother"—both from her own and the "otherized" gaze. With striking duality, feminism and traditionalism are combined to create the assertion that motherhood is our right.

In *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns*, Nina Lyon Jenkins (1998) discusses the disparity in research conducted primarily by men, both Black and white, who view Black teenage motherhood as deviant. Jenkins' counter-analysis of Black motherhood as not deviant, demonstrating that it is possible for us to create new analyses that are grounded in our experience, was one of the many factors that influenced me to delve into the common, yet varied, experience the Black woman/mother shares (1998: 209). I attempt to add to the research conducted by Jenkins in an effort to further broaden the discourse. I believe our voices, both scholarly and personal, add to the plethora we hope to establish, focusing and validating the lives of Black women. I'd like to relate my own experience and that of other women I spoke to, linking their experiences to a larger theme of resistance in a raced, gendered, and economically oppressive society.

I am 21 years old and I had my daughter three years ago when I was 18 and still finishing high school. Though I was encouraged to continue and finish, I felt there was a perception that I would become a "welfare mother" and a "crutch" on society. I believe that Black women are seen by the public on whole as the largest group of (unwed) teenage mothers. Though I have not come across any research to suggest that this may be true, personal experience has afforded me a first-hand perspective of the distinct difference in the motherhood experiences of Black and white women who have not yet reached the age of 19. Drawing from within my community, I saw that there were roughly equal numbers of Black and white teenagers having children. However, I felt there was a stigma attached to being both Black and pregnant, a stigma that carried with it assumptions that Black women were more sexually "free" than white women, and that we would not succeed as far socially, educationally, or economically as our white counterparts.

I was met with obstacles, hostility, and animosity when I pursued post-secondary education after having my child in OAC year. Though there was encouragement from a favourite teacher, many authority figures patronized me with a "you'll get through it" rhetoric, assuming that I could never be anything other than a highschool graduate. When I was actually admitted to a university

Crystal'Aisha PerrymanMark and daughter.

and began attending classes, many of the students and teachers I knew from my highschool couldn't belive it. My motherhood, then, has come not only as a vocation—raising my child as I do with my partner—but also a lifeline, a resistance, an activist work that may not be recognized on a large scale, but one that I do with all my heart, ensuring (in my own small way) that Black mothers are out putting an end to the "assumption of deviance" that, unfortunately, is often internalized by young, Black, and pregnant (single) women. I began talking out, asking questions, and relating my experience to others like me. Determined to resist racist, classist, and sexist ideology that I was not "good enough" because I was Black, poor, and now also a "teenage mother," I began to see motherhood as triumph of self-discovery and a chance to challenge people and systems in their beliefs.

I spoke informally with seven young mothers whom I personally know, talking about the ways in which their mothering has been a resistance to the conventions of society—and, at times, a surrender. I found there was constant duality. The most reluctant position, but the most forthcoming perspective, was that mothering was an assertion of their womanhood. Mothering, not teenage pregnancy, but the actual raising of children, was an honour to them.

Crystal'Aisha PerrymanMark, with her partner and daughter.

It created that bridge from girl to woman and from Black woman as Other to Mother. Becoming a mother puts them in a category where they find themselves and an identity. Whether or not it is chosen, or wheher it is a construct of heterosexual hegemony, was left uncertain. There appeared to be a lack of a "sense of entitlement," as one woman put it, to womanhood and life in general. Becoming mothers thus affirmed their "womanhood." This was resistance to the confines of racist and sexist society wherein their "womanness" was not viewed on par with that of white women. Implicitly, it was this traditional view of women's role as mother that empowered Black women into their womanhood as a right. Their assertion harkened to Sojourner Truth's "A'int I a Woman?"—redefining the ideology of womanhood as commonly defined by white norms of femininity. While this was revolutionary, it was also problematic because such assumptions of womanhood equalling motherhood reverts back to stereotypical notions of what a woman's role/purpose is in our society. It is an easy trap to fall into. Motherhood, as a societal convention, abounds with essentialism, one where many Black women, teenage or young parents, have found security, respect, and adulthood. I have been there. I loved mothering; I loved the external power rewarded with such a position—a

position itself in constant duality, shifting from celebratory to martydom. Our ideological society personifies and accentuates this pedestal construction of motherhood as a woman's supreme task. Many of the Black women I spoke to found their niche as "women" through motherhood.,

Despite the many differing ways in which women got pregnant and their particular stances on choice issues—using birth control, not using birth control, pro-choice, anti-abortion—once becoming pregnant, the choice to have children was based on two things. One was a resistance to the idea that young, Black motherhood was "deviant." I myself had wondered why my pregnancy was some grave "social problem" that had more to do with my race than the fact that I was not yet 18. That is when motherhood became political for me.

Race, economics, and sexuality only further complicate and burden the cicumstances of women. There is a pathology constructed around the perception of the impoverished Black mother who has no "baby-father" (as they say), and I found by a simple comparison of women's stories that their experiences of mothering were vastly different based on whether or not they had a partner. One woman said,

> *All of a sudden, we're the poor Black mother, sucking up off the system—and apparently doing so for years. I don't know what they think but I'm not on welfare, and my parents, and those of all the teen moms I know have always been hard-working people. I am sick of Canada's idea that Blacks are one lump of people they can criminalize anytime something goes wrong.*

Of the seven women I interviewed (eight including myself), I was the only one who, at the time, had a permanent partner who was my child's father. This difference in family composition made my experience of motherhood completely different. Once people were sure Kevin, my partner, was going to stay, that we lived together and had plans for marriage, I was affirmed by my community members, my other parents, and told what a "good girl" I was, that "I was doing the right thing." To many, having a partner meant that I was "legitimized" and somehow "better." The flip-side to this shallow assessment of my ability to succeed based on the presence of a man (my child's father) in my life was that those around me, in this same circumstance but without partners, would end up at the very least working class and/or poor. My best girlfriend was discouraged from even attending post-secondary school and was told that she just wouldn't make it with a child, with no father and no support.

The second resistance came from the women's claim to their right "to mother." Though there are a lot of reasons why young teenage women become pregnant, by the age of 18-20 there is an awareness that comes out of a Black nationalist discourse, as has been discussed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), that Black women feel compelled to have children so that Black people can survive. The idea expressed by all the mothers I interviewed, and upheld by myself at the time, was that we *had* to keep Black children forthcoming. There was a

spiritual sense of doing God's work in the Black community by continuing the legacy.

I have concluded that the Black women's mothering experience is a combination of feminism and Black pride. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) has touched on the same issue. With a critical feminist and Black nationalist perspective, the women I interviewed were asserting that a) they could have children and b) under the tyranny of anti-Black racism as a means of survival, it was imperative to do so. It was much more difficult to pry out of the women I spoke to any confirmation that young mothering might have something to do with asserting their heterosexual identity. As for myself confronting sexuality became a non-issue once I became pregnant. It was generally assumed that I was "straight" and this led me to think about the ways in which heterosexism is forced upon the young woman and the young woman mother from both dominant ideological and community cultural codes. When I spoke with the women about how motherhood is synonymous with straight womanhood, many agreed. Despite such agreement, the women I spoke to did not engage my proposal that heterosexism is rampant in our society and that for the Black woman who finds herself in the midst of at least two subject positions—woman and Black—having a child at a young age confirms one's "straightness." This "normalization" process happens to many young girls too young to adequately address fears about her changing sexuality and her varying subject positions. After much discussion, most women were willing to admit that while it was not a factor in their choice, it was certainly a possible circumstance.

The women I interviewed were resistant to the nuclear patriarchal family model. While all of them were either currently employed, or had been at given points since the birth of their child, they all felt that for a woman to stay at home with kids while "daddy" is the main breadwinner is a luxury of the "upperclass." They all felt that the Black woman and her family rarely fit this model. There are a complex arrangements of family models from extended to blended to single in this group of women and these differing family arrangements were all deemed acceptable and necessary for their children to thrive. Toni Morrison has been quoted as saying the problem has not been that teenagers are having babies, because that has always been; what the master narrative is upset about is that they are having these babies without men (qtd. in Moyers, 1990). The affirmation and validation received as a young Black mother with a partner, in contrast to the exile, shame, and ridicule experienced by many of my peers, confirms that the patriarchal role model is opposed to the contemporary experience of many young Black mothers, no doubt because the construct is an idyllic one, framed within a racist, sexist, and homophobic discourse.

Women, despite these obstacles, find themselves networks of support and negotiate (often informal) spaces where they can find agency and continue to negotiate their motherhood and their survival. Despite the fact that they may be impoverished or have little economic means, they have to make sense of their life and their new child's life and put concerns into context. While I do not

believe unplanned pregnancy is the ideal social location in which to have children, as I know the effects from lived experience, I believe that young motherhood needs to be supported. The scholarship and association fostered by organizations such as the Association for Research on Mothering give validity to what I believe is a political concern and a space to engage this notion of "motherhood" and not just the white, heterosexist, patriarchal, capitalist convention of the nuclear family. I put this work into context with what I have termed my "wholistic feminism," an inclusive model that reflects the lives of many. There is a need to create a safehouse for young women having children while safely engaging in scholarship that invites them to discover their own agency. Working together, we can find ways to improve their quality of life and our quality of scholarship.

One can see the many complex dimensions and ways in which these findings play out in relation to the notion of "resistance and surrender." The motherhood experience for young Black women is one of contrasting and fascinating duality. There is resistance to major oppressive ideologies of Blackness, womanhood, and motherhood. At the same time, there is an essentialism conveyed that sees motherhood as a definition of what it means to become a woman in the contenxt of production, gender, and race in a capitalist society. My hope is that I can continue to talk about motherwork as a site for engagement in activism and writing in relation to a wholistic, anti-oppression praxis. I dare to delve into what is relatively an unexplored discourse in feminist mothering praxis, yet is often pathologized by mainstream research. But, as Barbara Smith (1982) has said, "All the Blacks are men, All the Women are White, but Some of us are Brave." Brave enough to shift paradigms, effect resistances, and choose our destinies. I chose to theorize specifically on Black women and motherhood because it was important to me that my activism reflect my experience. I saw that my life and the lives of others became a basis for theory, one that shifted the paradigm. I recognized the potency, the need, and demand for theory that supports our lives and what bell hooks calls "revolutionary parenting" (1984: 133). To find something that represents one's circumstance, one must be willing to resist many conventions of society. However, there is are also compromises to be made and surrendered. The idea of the privatized, nuclear family is a notion that has existed as normative for far too long at the expense of many other kinds of families. My approach may seem radical, but I view it as lovingly feminist.

To politicize mothering is to give voice to a feeling I have always had, but could scarcely name. A mother interviewed by Fiona Green states that "to Mother is to have an entire generation is one's hand" (1999: 101). This is a power mothers and othermothers—aunts, friends, grandparents and caregivers— have had, and continue to have, and that is passed down to us.

Being the first in my family to attend secondary school, I feel grateful as many do looking back on the efforts laid down so I could realize my fullest potential. I envision a time where my child(ren) can reap the benefits of the past

as I have. I look at motherwork as a site of activism, information sharing, and community conscious developing. I developed my political eye with this in mind and view my entire feminist politic in this vein of resistance and agency. I believe that motherhood as a life journey is informed by our spiritual, political, and collective consiousness. This "wholism" has been my milk and manna; this motherwork, my integrity.

Kin

My Army
My Warriors
Are
My children

Womb warriors
Who came to
Change the Earth

Birthed to Existence
Resistance
They will fight

Of my milk and manna
Breast and Body
I will teach them
To resist all conventions
of
Silence.
To have
No Fear
& forget the things for which
I hesitated
To disregard
The Fort of Society
And destroy the embargoes of their freedom

To raise their fists, minds and Spirits in
protests
And create R/evolution
Out of their heart's desire
<div align="right">—Crystal'Aisha PerrymanMark 2000</div>

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Laurie Kruk

First Birds

for Elena, 8 months

There are birds, flying
out of your throat
birr birr, birrr

and I glance   up
at the empty window
where moments before
wings whirred, beaks dipped
in seed reservoir then flashed, back
into absence:
leaving your words, winged.

You stick tiny, tenacious hands
right into the heart of things,
like my opening lips, too close for a kiss—
tugging at tongue, teeth and mouth
as if to unlock
birr birr birr!
the swallow-starling fountain
of talk, of sound. Of meanings
that fly. Those wings, words. And write
the air.

Camilla Cockerton

Mothering as Motive and Mechanism

Women's Contributions to a Tswana Diaspora in Colonial South Africa

Mothering in the African diaspora is a particularly important topic as the international diaspora literature tends to neglect gender and privileges the male gaze (Anthias, 1998). Although the African diaspora is often understood as cross-Atlantic communities (See Gilroy, 1993), many transnational, diasporic communities arose within this spatially large and ethnically diverse continent as well. For instance, the Tswana diaspora in colonial South Africa originated from the Bechuanaland Protectorate. This article on mothering in a Tswana diaspora not only contributes a gender analysis to the diaspora literature, but reveals the significance of mothering to the dynamics of the diaspora. It also contributes to the motherhood literature, as this extensive body of literature tends to ignore both African experiences and mothering experiences within diasporas (Chodorow, 1978; Cosslett, 1994; Daley, 1982; Yural Davis, 1996; Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan, 1994). Within the colonial Tswana diaspora, Tswana mothering was both the dominant motive for women seeking transnational work and the mechanism that made circulation possible.

Tswana diaspora in South Africa

Historically, South Africa's borders were relatively porous. Despite severe and heavily enforced immigration restrictions, both "legal" and "illegal" migrants from all over the continent found their way into the "land of milk and honey." Although many BaTswana (Tswana people) resided in the Western Transvaal, the BaTswana from the Bechuanaland Protectorate formed a distinct diaspora within South Africa, rarely entitled to citizenship. After crossing the transnational divide, this diaspora mainly settled just over the border in farms and small towns in the Western Transvaal. Many women and men eventually migrated to the Witwatersrand (Rand), particularly Johannes-

burg, the location of the highest paying jobs on the continent. This period of migration stretched from roughly the mid-nineteenth century until present times (Cockerton, 1996). The Tswana diaspora in South Africa remained closely connected to their homeland. While reasons behind this connection differed within the community, it could be argued that women's ties were particularly strong as mothering played a pivotal role in this diaspora (Cockerton, 1995).

The force of congregation was very powerful. Tswana women congregrated in certain towns and areas, socialized with one another, depended upon each other for assistance, and kept alive talk of home. Most women actively participated in church groups and burial societies on the Rand. In fact, women often sought a South African church of the same denomination as their village church. As in Bechuanaland, these were the main forums for women to actively participate in their society. With people often moving backwards and forwards, there would also have always been a fresh flow of news from the home village. These were not "marooned" immigrant communities but groups of people or a dynamic diaspora in constant touch with home through a vibrant oral network.

Tswana *dikgosi* (chiefs) tried to reach out to the Rand by making visits, collecting taxes, and organizing cultural activities (Miles, 1991).[1] Here, they "inform[ed] BaKgatla of the activities and developments at home" and "attend[ed] social activities such as dances, films, etc...." (Morton, 1982). Ntonono Jack Ramotswetla recalled, "[*Kgosi*] Isang used to visit Johannesburg and he had a house in Newclare. Because he could not use the chief hotel in Johannesburg, he had to buy his own house" (Morton, 1982). It was very common for the mines to sponsor visits by chiefs from the Transkei and Basutoland to visit their followers and to collect tribute. Schapera (1947) discussed how *dikgosi* visited mines in the Western Transvaal to collect tax money. BaKgatla also stationed a "chief's representative" on the Rand. Originally, BaKgatla in Johannesburg unofficially chose the most senior royal "for leadership and guidance," then a "chief's representative" was officially elected (Morton, 1982).

The Tswana diaspora in colonial South Africa was heterogeneous, with spatial and temporal variations, and divided by social axes such as class, age, and gender. Recently, several theorists on diasporas depict the diaspora experience as marked by heterogeneity and diversity rather than essentialism and reductionism (see Hall, 1990; Cohen, 1997; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994). Diaspora identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves. In particular, women's experiences in the Tswana diaspora differed sharply from that of men's experiences.

Gender is crucial to analyse within diasporas, as Anthias (1998) convincingly argues, since the diaspora literature has consistently failed to analyse gender. She argues that the first level of analysis of "gendering the diaspora" requires a consideration of how men and women of the diaspora are inserted

into the social relations of the country of settlement, within their own self-defined diaspora communities, and within the diaspora's transnational networks. Anthias (1998) provides a fascinating agenda for gendering the diaspora. Other sets of loci which could be added to her agenda include a mapping of the spatial dynamics of the diaspora, and an analysis of the shifting gender composition of a diaspora, along with some implications of this transformation. For instance, most Tswana women initially engaged in a women-only diasporic network then eventually participated in a mixed diaspora some time after settlement in South Africa.

Tswana women's diaspora in South Africa

One of the dominant characteristics of the Tswana diaspora in colonial South Africa is its highly gendered nature. For many women, migration was largely unauthorised and initially took the form of escape from patriarchal controls. Groups of young women literally "ran away" by foot in the middle of the night. In the 1920s and 1930s, the chiefs issued a series of unwritten, though widely known (if not observed), decrees prohibiting females from leaving their homes without the consent of their guardians (Botswana National Archives, 1933a). These legal measures coincided with the period when Tswana women were migrating to South African cities in rapidly growing numbers. These restrictions were part of a broader resurgence of neotraditionalism, designed to shore up the erosion of chiefly powers. Especially with respect to migrant women, *dikgosi* began to enforce a stricter interpretation of Tswana tradition. The most extreme view held that women were "not expected (indeed she is forbidden) to earn a living" (Botswana National Archives, n.d.). *Mosadi* (adult females) was reinterpreted from "the one who is prohibited from leaving" to "the one who stays and tends the home" guardians (Botswana National Archives, 1933a). The chiefs were particularly exercised by the growing trend towards unauthorized, unmarried women finding employment on the Rand.

From the available evidence it is impossible to accurately reconstruct how often Tswana women migrants went to South Africa during the course of their lifetime nor how long they stayed there when they did go. What is certain is that the periodicity of women's migrancy was not as regular or predictable as that of most men who left (and returned) on fixed contracts. Since women's migration was far less regulated than men's and their ability to return was determined more by their own resources than those of a recruiting agency, they tended to stay away for longer periods than men. From his own biased perspective, *Kgosi* Bathoen criticized the fluidity and variability of women's movements, and erroneously attributed their longer stays in South Africa to greater job satisfaction rather than often severe economic desperation:

> Women seem to remain away much longer than men, because they mostly work as housemaids and cooks, and these particular employments are easy for them. The men at the mines, on the other

hand, find conditions unsatisfactory, and return home on the completion of their contracts, unless they stay longer to acquire more money for some special purpose. Women seem to move to and fro more leisurely than men, since they are not bound by obligations. (*Ksogi* Bathoen II qtd. in Schapera, 1947)

Individual migrant histories also seem to have varied quite considerably from woman to woman. Athough it seems likely that as time passed women tended to go to South Africa more often and for longer periods. Schapera thought that women generally remained away much longer than men (*Ksogi* Bathoen II qtd. in Schapera, 1947). In fact, the pattern was highly variable. Some women while away in South Africa returned to Bechuanaland every weekend or every month; others, like the men, returned only once or twice a year Cockerton, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a; Morton, 1982). At the other extreme was one woman who returned to Bechuanaland in 1927 having been away for 30 years, though this was clearly the exception (Morton, 1982). In sum, most women engaged in an irregular and extended form of circular migration between their rural Bechuanaland village and their final destination point.

The 1946 Census estimated that over two-thirds (70 percent) of women had been absent from Bechuanaland for less than four years (Bechuanaland Protectorate Government). Almost certainly, this was not the first time absence from Bechuanaland for many of these women. Rather what the figures seem to represent is the fact that when they did migrate, the vast majority of women did not stay away for more than four years. This conclusion would have to be tempered by the fact that the 70 per cent would also include young women who had migrated within the previous four years for the first time and who might well eventually have stayed away much longer.

Schapera suggested that the type of destination influenced the length of absence:

The general impression I received from conversation with people both here and in other tribes is that women going to urban areas, and particularly the Rand, [to work as domestic servants] tend to stay away for several years consecutively, if they come back at all. On the other hand, those seeking work on farms, etc., in the Western Transvaal normally return after a couple of months, usually at the end of harvesting season. (1947: 72)

Schapera's commonsense argument seems to miss the fact that by the 1930s and 1940s, many women working on the farms were simply using this as a stepping stone to more distant urban destinations (Cockerton, 1997). Most Tswana women eventually returned home after some time abroad: very few, in fact, remained permanently at their South African destination. Some, probably a very small minority, never returned, taking up permanent residence in South

Africa.[2] In 1943, Schapera recorded the names of 29 Tlokwa women who people called *makgelwa* (deserters) (1947: 69). Except for one divorcee, and another who had deserted her husband, they were all single when they left (Schapera, 1947: 69). Of these, eight had been away for over ten years, and the remainder for less than that time. The evidence, limited as it is, seems to indicate that only a small minority of women were *makgelwa* but that it may have been more common in the 1930s than it had been before. Even the fact that they were defined in Bechuanaland as *makgelwa* did not necessarily mean that they did not return at some later point or keep contact with other people from Bechuanaland while at work. Indeed, the striking thing about Tswana women's migration is how, even if they stayed away for long periods of time, they did not cut their links with home and eventually returned. As one informant commented, "most of them build themselves homes in Botswana. The main purpose to come here is to work. They like to go back to their farms"(Cockerton, 1993b).

Those Bechuanaland women who remained permanently on the Rand had arrived initially as single women, often met Tswana men from the Transvaal, married, stayed at their husbands' place, and raised their children on the Rand. Others had been very poor in Bechuanaland, and came from large families of seven to twelve siblings. Still others, such as widows or childless women, had been ostracized in their rural villages and saw little reason to go back. But even those who made a conscious decision to stay in South Africa did not always cut their links with the Protectorate, though the pressures to redefine South Africa as "home" were considerable. As Emily Moralo explained, "According to our custom, the wife follows the husband. Her husband is from South Africa, so she will be buried here. This is her home. Those who return to Botswana have husbands who were born in Botswana" (Cockerton, 1993c)

Tswana women's migration was rarely a permanent move. This raises an apparent contradiction: female migration was an escape from patriarchy yet, at the same time, women maintained strong links with home. And these bonds were preserved not simply because the patriarchs wanted it that way (see Cockerton, 1995). Several factors combine to explain this paradox, but the primary reason was women's responsibility to their children. And the new household structure and mothering arrangement was the vehicle by which this responsibility was achieved.

New mothering in new households

As the twentieth century progressed and patriarchal controls began to erode, men's migration to the South African mines disrupted traditional marriage patterns in colonial Botswana. Men were often absent for long periods of time, and increasingly found lovers, partners, and sometimes wives from various ethnic backgrounds in South Africa. Married women "left behind" in Bechuanaland increasingly complained to their chiefs that their husbands refused to return home or send money to support them and their children.

Single women found fewer single men left in their rural villages. The sizeable exodus of Tswana men facilitated the formation of new household arrangements and categories of women in colonial Botswana. In particular, the numbers of single, divorced, widowed, and separated women began to mount as women increasingly rejected male controls and struck out on their own (Kossoudji and Mueller, 1979). Some returned to their natal family; others formed their own households. A sizeable body of associated literature on female heads of households in colonial Botswana indicates that male labour migration increased the vulnerability and poverty of these households that lacked access to land and cattle (Brown, 1989, 1983; Murray, 1981; Izzard, 1985; Hansen and Ashbaugh, 1991; Glickman, 1988; Koussoudji and Mueller, 1983). Most women nourished close links with their natal family. For many of them, the previous norm of marriage and gradual incorporation into the husband's lineage was less important than their dependable natal ties. Women cultivated strong links with their own parents, siblings, and children.

Increasingly, divorcees returned to their natal home or unmarried mothers formed their own households within their parents' or male guardians' compound (Cooper, 1979; Brown, 1980). Schapera and Roberts (1975) discovered that between one quarter and one half of households contained unmarried women with children before the second world war. This trend accelerated during the following decades.[3] Although male relatives cared for most unwed mothers, older daughters maintained increasingly close economic ties with their mothers (Schapera and Roberts, 1975). As traditional marriage began to disintegrate, more unwed mothers lived with their mothers rather than in the traditional patrilocal home. This created new genealogical connections through women, as children born with no bridewealth took their mother's name (Glickman, 1988). A pattern of matrilineality increasingly developed where the female line decided descent.

In response to the erosion of traditional marriage arrangements, women increasingly began to form their own female-headed households. Some of these households were the poorest in Bechuanaland (O'Connor, 1991; Peters, 1983).[4] As kinship ties loosened, "husbandless" women could rely little upon their male kin to help them with difficult chores. They also had less cash than male-headed households to pay workers to do certain tasks (Schapera, 1947: 178). These women devised alternate strategies such as female work parties to compensate for the lack of male assistance. But ultimately, the pressure to earn cash was much greater in female-headed households, and many female heads (and especially their daughters) were forced to migrate (VanderWees, 1981).

Women often returned to their parents' home in Bechuanaland to give birth to their children. They might stay with the infant for up to six months and then leave it with the grandmother in her village and return to South Africa (Cockerton, 1993d). Flora Rambotha, for example, first ran away to South Africa in 1940 and did not return permanently to Botswana until 1992. Over the years, she had eight children, all of which she delivered in Odi, in

Bechuanaland (Cockerton, 1993e). One informant commented that most Bokaa women in South Africa would "come back being pregnant... They came to their parents so that they can take care of the babies" (Cockerton, 1993f).

Many women did not, or could not, raise their children in the urban areas. White employers of domestics did not usually allow women to keep their children with them (see Cock, 1980). Towns and farms almost always lacked adequate daycare, health facilities, and schools for black children. The South African urban environment was often violent, unsafe, and unhygienic. One Phokeng woman, Ernestina Mekgwe, summarized her distaste of urban life:

> Life was not pleasant in the townships, you'd find a man and his wife drunkenly fighting and swearing at each other in the street. The next day another man is beating his wife because she had slept next door with another man. Being in the midst of such decadence is just not for me. I come from Phokeng, it's a small community where people are friendly and respect each other. I also don't like to see my children growing up in such as environment. (Mashabela, 1983).

Children were therefore often sent back to be raised in their home village in Bechuanaland (Cockerton, 1993g). The Protectorate schools, meagre though they were, far excelled anything available on white farms or in towns.

Thus, one new household form in the colonial period consisted of a three-generational matrilateral relation linking daughters, mothers, and grandmothers (Cooper, 1979).[5] All three generations eventually worked in South Africa. Pauline Peters defines these female-headed households as matrifocal households based on consanguineal links rather than conjugal bonds (Peters, 1983). The high status given to the position of mother, both in the family and in the wider society, fashioned the basis of matrifocality (Larsson, 1989). Wendy Izzard argues that increased matrifocality corresponded with the declining social and economic importance of the father figure within Tswana society (Izzard, 1982). It was also especially pervasive within female migrant households (Cockerton, 1995). Even on an interpersonal basis, village relations shifted more towards matrifocality.[6] Within this context, women's casual, daily, friendship networks greatly infused the village's social life with female social bonds (Maher, 1974).

These new female-centred families supported female migration by providing a stable rural home where female relatives raised a migrants' children. They, in turn, came to depend economically and materially upon female migrants. These older women were especially dependent upon female migrants' remittances. Young women initially depended upon their female relatives in the natal home to raise their own children and later, when they were older, depended on their own children's labour. Women actively nourished these new household arrangements and female-centred ties of dependence. Most of a migrant woman's earnings went to the support and education of her children. Indeed,

women's remittances from South Africa often exceeded men's despite their lower earning power (Sefiwa, 1992; Syson, 1973). Tswana women were far more diligent remitters than men, often bringing furniture, clothing, and cash from South Africa (Cockerton, 1995).

Despite migrant women's continuing strong links with their natal homes, and the fact that their remittances were proportionally much larger than those of male migrants, the Tswana chiefs actively invoked images of migrant women as irresponsible. *Kgosi* Marobela painted a vivid picture of the irresponsibility of young women, noting that "these days these children run about all over, doing things they should not do, being young womenfolk who should be responsible women in the future, responsible in the way of bringing up a responsible generation" (Bechuanaland Protectorate African Advisory Council, 1957).

Ironically, both colonial and indigenous patriarchal authorities portrayed migrant women as immoral, untraditional, and irresponsible, in an attempt to reinforce crumbling patriarchal controls over women's behaviour (Kobokobo, 1982; Eales, 1989). British administrators agreed with such representations of the immorality of migrant women, as did South African officials (Botswana National Archives, 1935; Helping Hand Club for Native Girls, 1928; Eales, 1989). Native authorities shared the Union government's view that urban life was corrupting for women and children. A rural upbringing was perceived as inherently superior and more "suitable" for African women. A common belief was that returning migrants brought "bad" changes—such as "untraditional" marriages—into the village (London School of Economics, 1935). This came from contact with foreign people, who were typified as "rough" characters. These "strange" urban ways, according to *Kgosi* Seboko Mokgosi of the Bamalete, "pollute[d] the morality of the rising generation" (Steenkamp: 188). Tswana men and missionaries chastised the women "left behind" for their "slacker moral standards as a result of men being away" (Read, 1942: 20). One *kgosi* even described unmarried, celibate women "as the cause of immorality, prostitution, and general moral deterioration amongst races" Botswana National Archives, 1933b).

Women's informal urban work, (of either colour), alarmed colonial officials and produced acute tension between black women and black men. Even Schapera wrote that some urban women "do not even seek work, but live either by illicit beer-brewing or as prostitutes, sometimes combining the two" (Schapera, 1947: 69). *Dikgosi* similarly devalued women's urban work. One Inspector of Native Labourers claimed that most black urban women were "moral on arrival, but they invariably fall to the wiles of the men, and soon learn how to earn money to spend on themselves" (TAD, 1923). Few patriarchs recognised Tswana women's remarkable efforts to economically support the poorest sections of Bechuanaland villages, female-headed households.

Ironically, the colonial hierarchy in Botswana was oblivious to Tswana mothers' increasing status, and the new mothering patterns in the Tswana

diaspora. In 1930 there was, for the first time, a sustained discussion within the Bechuanaland administration over women's status. The impetus for this discussion was global rather than local, as a League of Nations' conference requested responses from all administrations on the issue. Britain's Dominions' Office blamed Bechuanaland's "low state of health" (including a troublesome decreasing population growth rate) on women's low status (Botswana National Archives, 1937, 1930, 1932). The High Commissioner responded:

> It has further been represented to me that the status of native women is in some places scarcely distinguishable from that of slavery... I shall be glad also to be furnished with your recommendations as to how such conditions might be improved, with the object of raising their standards of health and intelligence, so as to make them better mothers and better qualified to rear their children afterwards, thus ensuring not only an increased birthrate; but also, what is no less important, the creation of a healthier and better-developed stock.

The High Commissioner clearly felt that all women should be mothers and breeders, "stocking" the Protectorate with good-quality babies for the Empire. A declining population, in colonial eyes, "spell[ed] stagnation of the natives—which mean[t] stagnation of trade" (University of Botswana, 1928). The High Commissioner was concerned only that the oppressive conditions and low status of women compromised these functions.

Returning home permanently

When a migrant woman returned permanently to Bechuanaland, it was often to care for her daughter's children so that the daughter, in turn, could seek wage employment. Mothering remained the dominant motive, if not the initial impulse, for seeking work and was the mechanism that made such circulation possible (Gay, 1980). But these patterns also showed that the decision to migrate could shift from being an individual to a household one throughout the woman's life course. In addition, inter-generational dynamics among women increasingly structured patterns of migration.

Tswana women migrants also had the means to return home to the Bechuanaland Protectorate. To the question "Why did so many women return to Botswana?" Molefani Baruti in Dobsonville, Soweto explained that "It's an individual choice. Most of them build themselves homes in Botswana. The main purpose to come here was to work. They like to go back to their farms" (Cockerton, 1993b). Thus, many women returned to Bechuanaland after they had accumulated sufficient earnings.

Tswana women, not unlike black women from other regions, had a very strong belief in the need to be buried among relatives. For most female migrants (single, divorced, and separated women and those married to local men), this meant the place of their birth. This differed for the few women who married

"foreign" men. When I asked Mrs. Motshegare, if she would eventually leave
Mmabotho (Mafeking) and return to her natal village in the BaRolong Farms,
she explained, "I will be buried here because the grave will be next to my
husband" (Cockerton, 1993h). This aspect of Tswana cosmology underlines
the respect accorded ancestors. Schapera even called the worship of the dead
"the outstanding feature" of Kgatla religion. Thus, diasporic women upheld
some aspects of Tswana traditions, while challenging and transforming others.

Some conclusions

In colonial Botswana, mothering was not only done by mothers, but by
grandmothers. Mothers increasingly became producers and breadwinners in
South Africa, while grandmothers became the primary care-givers in rural
Botswana. In this context, both mother and grandmother shared the increas-
ingly high status given to the position of mother. In other contexts, the high
status of mothers leads to the exclusion of mothers from other forms of social
activity. For instance, in the United States and Europe, this was based on the
deliberate idealisation of motherhood after the second world war (Cosslett,
1994; Daley, 1982; Chodorow, 1978). In the Botswana context, mother's high
status might be more inclusive and not bring about social isolation.

Instead, women formed these stronger female relationships in response to
their eroding traditional social status. Female relationships strengthened in the
face of declining traditional kinship ties, the breakdown of the ward's political
and judicial functions, and the absence of men (Kooijman, 1978; Molenaar,
1980; Schapera, 1970).[7] New female dependence relations marked a dramatic
shift in gender relations. Rather than strengthening old ties of male depend-
ence, migration made women less dependent upon men. They depended more
upon other women and their children instead. The Tswana diaspora in South
Africa was highly dependent upon these new women-and-children-only
households and grand-mothering care-giving to migrants' children. Mother-
ing was the impetus and main mechanism behind the Tswana diaspora in
colonial South Africa.

Yet it is important not to romanticise these new arrangements. "Menless"
women had little of the economic security of "women with men," and even less
of men's economic independence. This varied, of course, with class. Most
women were unable to build up the assets of fields, housing, and the stock which
women normally only accessed through men. Although the old patriarchal ties
loosened, the shift away from male control was never complete, as women
entered similar patriarchal structures in South Africa. Working and living
conditions on the farms and in the towns of South Africa also presented a new
set of challenges and hardships for women to cope with. But at least in South
Africa, women had relatively more freedom to make independent choices.

[1]Again this was very clear in the Swazi case though it was directed at both men

and women.

[2]This pattern became evident during my fieldwork (Botswana National Archives, BNB 230, Pim, Financial and Economic Position, 32).

[3]Forty-six years later, Barbara Brown (1980) discovered that many of these unmarried mothers in Mochudi moved from their natal home to their own *lolwapa*.

[4]Peters (1983) has argued that the category of "female-headed households" fails to take into account the life-cycle of the typical household. Further, female-headed households—not a uniform group by any means—were poorer than their male counterparts overall, though only a subset were disadvantaged.

[5]Some late colonial Bokaa households consisted of unmarried mothers (and their children) of unmarried mothers (see Cooper, 1979; BNA 1964 Census).

[6]Izzard (1982) has discussed matrifocality extensively in her studies of women's migration within post-colonial Botswana.

[7]Tswana villages were composed of several wards. These clusters of small, clearly defined, circular hamlets contained homesteads belonging to a particular family-group. They formed a distinct social and political unit under the leadership and authority of a hereditary headman or wardhead.

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Nicole Willey

Ibuza vs. Lagos

The Feminist and Traditional Buchi Emecheta

Buchi Emecheta is an excellent example of an African writer who is influencing critical theory through her writing (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 22).[1] Her writing explores Igbo culture, both before and after colonialism's impact. She exposes problems and proposes solutions, but above all, she challenges. She critiques what are thought to be the common relationships and patterns between individuals and society, humanity and nature, and men and women (Fishburn, 1995: 48). It is important to keep in mind that these relationships in an Igbo world view are obviously quite different from Western constructions. This is an obvious point, but one that is easily forgotten by Western critics. Therefore, we need to keep Nfah-Abbenyi's admonition in mind: to understand a work, we must understand the "indigenous theory" in which it is embedded (1997: 20).

 Because Emecheta challenges these relationships, critics often paint a one-sided picture of her themes. Many critics call her a feminist, and imply the Western meaning of that term. They assume that if she exposes or challenges problems in the Igbo system, she has changed allegiances from Nigeria to the West. In a discussion of her novel *Kehinde*, Pauline Ada Uwakweh says, "[the work] leaves one wondering if Emecheta's feminist position is not more Western than African... " (1996: 402). This is an important question, and one that can only be answered by examining the women in her novels and the solutions they propose for their situations. As will be shown, the survival and networking tactics used by most of her characters amply prove Emecheta to be an African feminist, a position that combines both her tradition and her feminism. Furthermore, Katherine Fishburn notes that her works, particularly *The Joys of Motherhood*, are complex (1995: 106). In other words, they cannot be seen as simply supporting one vision and challenging another. It is easy for a Western reader to see every one of Emecheta's criticisms as an indictment of

the entire culture. Instead, a balanced reading shows that for every attack she makes on traditional culture, she makes a counter-attack in which the values of the traditional culture can be shown as positive (Fishburn, 1995: 64). Yes, she does often challenge patriarchal notions of Igbo culture that hurt women, but she also questions, just as ardently, the imported sexism of colonialism (Christian, 1985: 147). It is this "plurality of protest" (Fishburn, 1995: 52) that makes Emecheta so dangerous for both the patriarchy and colonialism/imperialism.

The Joys of Motherhood (Emecheta, 1979) is an exceedingly complex novel. Because I cannot begin to cover all of the issues it presents for women in terms of colonialism and traditionalism, I will instead focus on several key women characters' lives and their relative agency, particularly as related to motherhood, within traditional or colonial society, or in a mixture of the two societies. I will try to show how each woman is able to be (or not to be) a full human being based on the restrictions society places on her, and her ability to thrive using the African feminist principles of networking, survival tactics, marketing skills, and gender flexibility to her advantage. Clearly, the women who choose to live their lives in a traditional context will have a much easier time than the others, but part of the message of *The Joys of Motherhood* is that African women cannot simply choose between the two constructs. Instead, they must find ways to adapt to the new hybrid culture.

The Joys of Motherhood is a novel that is often read by critics as an indictment of Igbo traditions in relation to women. What these critics fail to mention, is that Emecheta is actually speaking out against colonialism and the distortions it causes in traditional culture for women. Many writers have shown the relationship between colonialism and worsened conditions for African women. Unfortunately, in reading *The Joys of Motherhood*, many critics have forgotten that these connections between colonialism and sexism are at work in the novel. When Emecheta is decrying sexism as it is practiced against African women in her own country, she is usually showing the sexism that has been imported or at least worsened by colonialism.

Colonialism's distortions of the traditional culture are clearly marked for us by Emecheta, who has created a novel in which the two forces, colonialism and tradition, are housed in two different cities, Ibuza and Lagos. Ibuza, the traditional village, represents the separation of gender and sex that gives women in a traditional culture space and power, often as manifested in the valuing of children and the support of communal mothering (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 24). In Lagos, the colonial gender roles, coupled with economic oppression, lead to a loss of traditional status for women (Fishburn, 1995: 113), and a shortage of space, health, and money, which lead to the stoppage of positive traditions.

Emecheta has two motives in her writing: one, she is writing back to the "center," or to the colonizer; two, she is writing back to patriarchy and men (Arndt, 1996: 46). She is exposing the "oppressive relationships that are sanctioned by myths and customs" (Umeh, 1996: xxvi) of traditional patriarchy,

and she is also protesting the loss of status for women brought about by colonialism (Christian, 1985: 216). While Western feminists assume that African women are oppressed and marginalized by their tradition, and "Anti-Westerners" assume that all problems stem from colonialism (Lewis, 1980: 35-36), Emecheta has found the balance. She knows that simple-minded generalizations should not be made about either institution. Instead, *The Joys of Motherhood* forces us to look at the problems inherent in both institutions (with colonialism being the worse of the two evils), in order to find an appropriate solution. The truth is, women can be protected by traditional patriarchal practices, but not when tradition has been replaced by British colonialism.

 A close look at the characters and settings of the novel will demonstrate Emecheta's balance in locating the dangers of both patriarchy and colonialism, in other words, her African feminism. The characters I will focus on: Ona, Nnu Ego's mother who lives within the traditional realm; Agunwa, Nnu Ego's father's senior wife; Adankwu, a co-wife of Nnu Ego who chooses to remain in Ibuza; Adaku, another co-wife who finds ways to adapt to life in Lagos; and Nnu Ego herself, demonstrate Emecheta's double purpose.

Ona's position in Ibuza is that of male daughter. Because her father never had a male child, she symbolically takes on the rights and responsibilities of the first born son. This means that she has much more freedom to maneuver than most of her female counterparts. She is permitted to take lovers, and her beauty and arrogance particularly attract the affections of the chief, Agbadi. Ona knows that much of her power over Agbadi is held in her inability to be captured. In fact, women who were "quiet and timid as desirable was something that came after his time, with Christianity and other changes" (Emecheta, 1979: 10). In other words, Ona's individuality and refusal to be tied down made her more desirable.

Ona utilizes and understands the power that tradition accords her (Fishburn, 1995: 110). But tradition does not only afford her power, it also limits her. She is free in her sexuality and in her movement, but she is not permitted to marry. And if she has a male child, its ownership is already claimed by her father.

Essentially, Ona's freedom did not free her to make her own decisions about marriage, where she would live, and how she would raise her child. Instead, she made the best compromises she could in her circumstances. When she becomes pregnant with Agbadi's child, she is forced to choose between the two men:

> "All right," she said in compromise, "my father wants a son and you have many sons. But you do not have a girl yet. Since my father will not accept any bride price from you, if I have a son he will belong to my father, but if a girl, she will be yours. That is the best I can do for you both." (Emecheta, 1979: 25)

When Nnu Ego, a girl child, is born, Ona's father does not permit the baby

to live with Agbadi, thus making Ona's decision of the child's ownership null, for the child cannot live without her mother.

After Ona's father's death, Agbadi convinces her to finally move to his compound. Soon after her second child is born, she and the child both die. Ona's last words to Agbadi are a plea for her daughter's freedom, a freedom that she never truly had:

> Please don't mourn me too long; and see that however much you love our daughter Nnu Ego, you allow her to have a life of her own, a husband *if* she wants one. Allow her to be a woman. (Emecheta, 1979: 28, [emphasis mine])

Ona does not command that her daughter marry, just that she should have the freedom to choose her own fate. Ona will not be around to raise her daughter, but she did what she could to make sure Nnu Ego's future would be secure. One can read Ona's character as a model of freedom (Sengupta, 1996: 228), but the situation is far more complex. In fact, Emecheta herself says in an interview that Ona had to die because she disobeyed tradition by moving to Agbadi's compound (Ogundele, 1996: 453). She utilizes tradition when it helps her, does her best to follow it, but when she fails, she is punished. Her own and Agbadi's refusal to fear and follow the tradition completely brought tragedy upon them both. Still, Ona's confidence and strength are qualities that will help the next generation of women as they all move into a time of transition. Ona's character seems to show Emecheta's ability to write back both to the colonizer (to attack them for what they have taken away) and also to the patriarchy (for men's refusal to allow women to make their own decisions).

Agunwa is barely mentioned in the text, or in criticism on *The Joys of Motherhood*, but her part is an important one. She is Agbadi's senior wife, and she falls ill the same night that she and the entire compound hear Agbadi having sex with his mistress Ona.[2] It is surprising that other critics have not picked up on Agunwa's position as a foil to Ona. While Ona is seen as a "bad woman," one who does not readily please her man (Emecheta, 1979: 21), Agunwa seems to be the epitome of the "good woman." Agbadi tells one of his sons by her, "Your mother is a good woman. So unobtrusive, so quiet. I don't know who else will help me keep an eye on those young wives of mine, and see to the smooth running of my household" (Emecheta, 1979: 22). Her unobtrusiveness and service to her husband brings her neglect during her lifetime, but a grand burial in her husband's compound (possible only for women who have sons) upon her death. As we will see with Nnu Ego, following tradition completely (in Emecheta's view) does not always earn women rewards during their lives. However, in comparison with Nnu Ego, Agunwa's life would have been much easier materially, so tradition still holds benefits over colonial life in Lagos.

The women who really thrive in this novel are those who understand the need for adapting to new circumstances, while holding onto traditional African

feminist values and practices. (And if we recall that adaptability and survival tactics are two of the most important African feminist principles, we can better see how African feminism helps women through the dangers of colonialism.) Adankwo is one such woman. Again, we do not see much of her in the novel, but she is an important counterpart to both Nnu Ego and Adaku. As the senior wife of Nnaife's older brother, she is the oldest wife/mother in the family. Seniority and age carry with them power; older women are the ones with the real power in a traditional context (Ogunyemi, 1996: 89). Adankwo is first mentioned when news of her husband's death reaches Nnaife. While one of her co-wives will be coming to live in Lagos as Nnaife's second wife, Adankwo chooses to stay behind to finish nursing her young child (Emecheta, 1979: 117). Instead of joining Nnaife's family in Lagos as is expected, she ends up staying in her husband's family's compound in Ibuza. As we will see later with Nnu Ego, raising children in Ibuza is an easier task, for women share the work (Ogunyemi, 1996: 78). She is welcome there, has respect, her children, and plenty to eat. Adankwo's great lesson is to appreciate the traditional culture that supports her, and she is able to thrive in it.

When Nnu Ego returns to Ibuza to see her dying father, then stays for seven months, it is Adankwo who gives advice to Nnu Ego about her husband and new co-wife. Intuitively, Nnu Ego knows that leaving Ibuza will mean more work, less companionship, and less food. But Adankwo reminds her of her duty to her husband, not just because she is concerned about duty, but because she knows that Adaku (her former co-wife) is ambitious and would not mind taking over Nnu Ego's place (Emecheta, 1979: 159). She first appeals to Nnu Ego's sense of tradition, and then realistically tells her the pitfalls of staying. She also shows her adaptability to change by telling Nnu Ego that her son Oshia's education in Lagos is extremely important:

> ...there is something new coming to our land. Have you noticed it? We as a family don't all have to live and be brought up in the same place. Let him be trained in Lagos where he was born. He will be able to bring that culture back here to enrich our own. In a few years, he will be able to start looking after you materially.... (Emecheta, 1979: 159)

Adankwo has made correct decisions for her own life, and gives advice in her friend's best interest, thereby showing the important strategies of networking and adaptability to new circumstances. In staying true to tradition, she is the model of a successful Igbo woman.

Adaku, Nnu Ego's co-wife, shines as the most materially successful woman in this novel. Of course, wealth is measured in kin, not money, but Adaku makes hard decisions that allow her freedom and education for her daughters. She can be read as a "Mammy Waater," the beautiful but rebellious woman who refuses to allow motherhood, the mothering of sons in particular,

to be her only defining trait (Ogunyemi, 1996: 34). Adaku can also be read as Nnu Ego's foil (Ezeigbo, 1996: 19). Either way, she shows that adaptability to a new situation may be the only answer for women in the double jeopardy of colonialism and patriarchy, and she uses traditional values to adapt to her new circumstances.

When we first see Adaku, she is trying to use tradition to her advantage. Being well-trained in Ibuza, she knows her place in Nnaife's home and humbly offers to serve Nnu Ego even though she herself is exhausted from her journey (Emecheta, 1979: 118). She knows that Nnu Ego resents her presence, but she has a singleness of purpose that allows her to persevere: " ... all she wanted was a home for her daughter and her future children ... it was worth some humiliation to keep her children together in the same family" (Emecheta, 1979: 120). While Adaku is young, beautiful, and clearly interested in winning Nnaife's affections in order to secure her place in this new family (thereby providing security for herself and her children), she is also accustomed to sharing a husband, and earnestly hopes to make it as pleasant as possible for Nnu Ego: "Adaku laughed, the first real laughter she had let herself indulge in since arriving that morning. It was a very eloquent sound, telling Nnu Ego that they were going to be sisters in this business of sharing a husband" (Emecheta, 1979: 123).

She encourages Nnu Ego to join her in a food strike against Nnaife when reasoning with him about food money doesn't work (Emecheta, 1979: 134). Clearly, Adaku is prepared to fight for her rights through striking (a tradition that she knows and uses to her advantage) while helping her senior wife in this marriage.

When Adaku is left on her own in Lagos, she makes good use of the market to secure for herself and her daughters a better livelihood. She has all but been deserted by both her husband (to the war) and her co-wife (to Ibuza), and uses her space and time to build her market business. She has been industrious and a wise investor. Seeing the changes around her—husbands who are not permitted to provide for their families, families who are not really united, and opportunities for business growth—she takes advantage of the benefits of her situation in preparing for a life in which she has to survive on her own. And Adaku chooses to do more than simply survive.

Adaku finally decides to leave the family that has not provided her with the minimum of support or friendship, especially when Nnu Ego and her children return to Lagos. She spends most of her time at the market with her daughters anyway, and can see no good reason to stay in the cramped space with people who do not welcome her presence.

> Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit

them in the future ... Nnaife is not going to send them away to any
husband before they are ready. I will see to that! I'm leaving this stuffy
room tomorrow, senior wife. (Emecheta, 1979: 168)

She is striking out as a single mother, ready to give her daughters the best
education and home life she can afford, and she will do that without a husband.
She is truly an innovator, telling Nnu Ego before she leaves, " ... we women set
impossible standards for ourselves. That we make life more intolerable for one
another. I cannot live up to your standards, senior wife. So I have to set my own"
(Emecheta, 1979: 169). And creating her own standards is exactly what she
does. She combines her traditional attributes of ambition and industriousness
with the adaptability that she needs in the colonial context of Lagos. Adaku is
able to strike out on her own and make herself, her sexuality, and her daughters
free. She does this at the price of being snubbed (she is referred to as a
prostitute), but even traditional Nnu Ego wonders if she has done better than
herself.

Adaku's greatest skill is in adapting to her new situation (Ezeigbo, 1996:
19; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 45). Adaku is rewarded for staying true to Igbo ideals
of networking and market independence, but she is considered a fallen woman.
Emecheta seems to show in her character that modern Nigerian women have
few traditional choices left for them due to the distortion of colonialism, and
that survival tactics of adaptability are key. But in Adaku's character she does
not show that tradition has no place. In reality, Adaku's character is quite
traditional. Her children are always of the utmost importance to her, and she
cares for them through traditional venues open to African women, even if she
has to adapt tradition to her own role.

Nnu Ego, as the protagonist, is the most complex of all of the female
characters in *The Joys of Motherhood*. While the others can be somewhat easily
placed in boxes, Nnu Ego defies an easy explanation. As such, she is Emecheta's
masterpiece in this work. It is through her life and body that the battle between
tradition and colonialism, subjectivity and motherhood, is played out. Nnu
Ego's own traditionalism while she lives in Lagos is representative of the war
between Igbo and Western culture (Fishburn, 1995: 114). Nnu Ego's tragedy
can then be read as an elegy for the loss of tradition, but not only that. Because
tradition cannot be easily returned to, and because Emecheta provides us with
examples of women who adapt tradition to new circumstances, we can see that
while it is right to mourn for this loss of tradition, it is also individually
detrimental to refuse to change. Nnu Ego is representative of Emecheta's
warning that clinging to tradition in light of the distortions of colonialism is
foolish, in that it does not allow for survival tactics (and eventual success) that
can help individual women, and eventually, the community.

Because Ona dies so early in her daughter's life, Nnu Ego is left without
Ona's model of strength and self-confidence. Instead of being raised to fend
for herself (as she will need to do in Lagos), she is raised in her father's

household as a princess who never wants for anything. Tradition, as it works in her father's household and in Ibuza generally, works for Nnu Ego while she is growing up. Agbadi raises her to be a suitable wife (Christian, 1985: 233), and everyone assumes that her role as wife and mother will follow successfully. But the switch in roles from the all-powerful daughter to the powerless wife (Egejuru, 1997: 15) proves to be a difficult transition for her.

The marriage starts well, but when she does not become pregnant (the purpose of marriage in an Igbo world view) the marriage begins to deteriorate. She blames herself fully, telling her husband, "I am sure the fault is on my side. You do everything right" (Emecheta, 1979: 31). Because Nnu Ego (and her culture) places a premium on motherhood, and because she lacks the natural confidence of her mother, she is easily destroyed by her inability to get pregnant.

Her father permits her to rest in his home until he can "sense the restless ripeness" in his daughter (Emecheta, 1979: 36). She eventually leaves Ibuza for Lagos to marry Nnaife, her husband throughout the rest of the novel. She is described upon her arrival as a "Mammy Waater" (Emecheta, 1979: 43), and Nnaife is congratulated for his good luck. While she has problems adjusting to her husband's position as a laundry man for a white couple, she is eventually pleased in her position with him, as she is pregnant.

When her four-week old child dies in his sleep, she is thrust again into despair. Her suicide attempt, followed by a three-month depression, is indicative of her inability to deal with the harsh realities of life, and this time her father cannot rescue her. Four months later, she is pregnant again. This time her son lives, and he is followed in fairly quick succession by seven other children, one a stillborn female child. This succession of children, and her traditional equation of children with wealth vs. the realities of Lagos, depict painfully the struggle between traditional and colonial values.

Most of the remainder of the novel is about Nnu Ego's struggle to raise her seven living children with the meager allowance Nnaife provides, and sometimes market work.

Lagos is a much more difficult place to be a wife and mother. Because Nnaife is at the white man's mercy (rather than owning his own farm, taking titles in his village, etc.), Nnu Ego sees him as a slave. His slavery puts her in double jeopardy; for as a victim at work, at home he becomes the victimizer (Ogunyemi,1996: 255). Cordelia echoes this belief when she says, "They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it out on us. The only difference is that they are given some pay for their work … just enough for us to rent an old room like this" (Emecheta, 1979: 51). Nnaife loses his "family allegiances" in the city, the responsibilities that would be expected of him in Ibuza (Fishburn, 1995: 112). In Ibuza, Nnaife would never be permitted to let his children and wife be malnourished while he goes out most nights, spending his money on drinking and music (Emecheta, 1979: 133-134). Nnaife has clearly lost sight of his traditional responsibilities in his colonial environment,

but Nnu Ego still clings to tradition, hoping it will save her.

Instead of utilizing networking with her co-wife and other female friends, she allows her children to shape her identity (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 37) so much that she isolates herself. Without a readily available community, mothering (especially the mothering of so many young children) is much more difficult than it would be in Ibuza (Ogunyemi,1996 78). Ezeigbo says that Nnu Ego's biggest mistake is in not returning to Ibuza for good (Emecheta, 1979: 17). I would argue that while this may be true, her other mistake is in not building a network of female helpers in Lagos and instead relying upon her sons to take care of her in her old age (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 49). She has banked all of her material wealth in her sons, and she realizes much too late that this is not enough. When her son Oshia does not get a scholarship for studies and blames his mother for his shortcomings,[3] she finally sees the truth about how her sons will treat her:

> Oshia, her son, blaming her as well…. All the poor boy had ever seen of her was a nagging and worrying woman. Oh, God, please kill her with these babies she was carrying, rather than let the children she had hoped for so much pour sand into her eyes. (Emecheta, 1979: 185-186)

It is only at this point that she begins to question son preference and her own choices (Emecheta, 1979: 186-187). But the changing times and the city do not allow for tradition.

In her old age (a far too early old age brought about by her hard life), she returns to Ibuza to her natal family (Emecheta, 1979: 223). Her two oldest sons are educated in North America, and never spend time or money on her. Her daughters stay in Lagos with their husbands. Alone, Nnu Ego wanders the village, telling anyone who will listen about the success of her sons. One night, as she descends further into sadness, she dies alone:

> … Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother. (Emecheta, 1979: 224)

It is only in death that Nnu Ego is finally paid the respect she deserves by her sons. All of her children return to Ibuza for the funeral, "They were all sorry she had died before they were in a position to give their mother a good life. She had the noisiest and most costly second burial Ibuza had ever seen… " (Emecheta, 1979: 224). As part of Nnu Ego's funeral, her children build a shrine to her, allowing for her grandchildren to "appeal to her should they be barren" (224). It is only in her death that she finally has a voice. She never answers women's prayers for children. No one understands her position, "for

what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial?" (Emecheta, 1979: 224). Nnu Ego clearly wanted and deserved more, and in not answering prayers, she is finally an active agent, showing her subversion through silence (Daymond, 1996: 286) to the tradition (and distortion of it) that ruled her life.

Nnu Ego does everything in her power to be a "good woman." She relies on tradition, but does not realize until much too late that tradition does not help her in Lagos. She is unwilling or unable to adhere to traditional Igbo values of networking, ambition (which comes from strength and self-confidence), and survival tactics—namely adaptability—that allowed her counterpart Adaku to succeed. One can only imagine that in Adankwo's position, Nnu Ego's life would have been much happier. Emecheta, through the many voices of her female characters, is showing us that tradition does indeed need to be questioned. Son preference and the absolute necessity of motherhood to give a woman identity are both practices that hurt Nnu Ego. However, alone, this is much too simple a reading that allows readers to indict traditional Igbo culture as always harmful to women. By also showing us images of women who survive and thrive utilizing tradition and African feminist values, Emecheta is clearly showing us that tradition has its place, but that women must now adapt in order to survive the distortions of tradition by colonialism.

[1]Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) actually believes that African writers are *creating* theory in their works. In other words, they are writing in a way that is forcing critics to re-think their theories.

[2]"Having sex" is not really accurate to describe the encounter between Agbadi and Ona on this particular night. It is ambiguously described as both a rape scene and a scene in which Ona desires Agbadi, but is left unsatisfied. This is just another point that shows Ona's freedom, even her sexual freedom, is still somewhat defined by men.

[3]It is traditionally the woman's responsibility to take care of school fees.

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Lena Ampadu

Motherhood—A Joy?

The Status of Mothers of African Descent in the Literature and Lore of Africa and the African Diaspora

"Yo mama don' wear no drawers," chants a young male character in "Big Boy Leaves Home," (Wright, 1972: 548). This chanting, part of an African American folk tradition called the dozens, can be traced directly to an African value system in which the mother is so venerated that, ironically, the winner of this verbal game of wits is the one who delivers the greatest insult to someone's mother. "Mother and Wife," a calypso song popularized by Trinidadian singer Lord Kitchener in the 1950s, poses a dilemma to men: "If your mother and your wife are drownin', I want to know which one you would be savin'?" The persona in the song gives his answer, "I'm holdin' on to my mother, and my wife she will have to excuse[me]." His rationale resonates clearly when he concludes, "I can always get another wife, but I can never get another mother in my life."

In the folklore and culture of African and the diaspora, the highly esteemed status of mother is often revealed through songs like Kitchener's, language games, such as the dozens played by Wright's characters, and tales and proverbs transmitted orally from generation to generation. This paper will consider whether motherhood still holds a hallowed place in today's society influenced by modernity. In addition, it will examine contemporary influences on the status of mothers of African descent, the physical and mental effects of motherhood on these women, and their roles in shaping the future of their families and communities.

Finally, it will consider women's own attitudes towards motherhood centered on the question of the joys of motherhood that Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta most directly confronts in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. This paper will examine these issues relevant to mothers of African descent by looking at how Emecheta and other women writers from Africa and the diaspora have presented them in their fictional works and by drawing from the

rich oral tradition of Africans and those in the diaspora. In addition to those in Emecheta's novel, it will primarily draw its analyses from the roles of and attitudes towards mothers in these novels: *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (Marshall, 1981), *Changes* (Aidoo, 1991), *So Long a Letter* (Ba, 1981), *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1997), and *Zenzele, A Letter for My Daughter* (Maraire, 1996), most of which are by African women writers. Since there is greater accord among the core issues of this paper discussed in the works by African women, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is the only one of the books included in the study that was written by an African American writer, although Paule Marshall is sometimes labeled as a Caribbean writer.

Influences on the status of mothers of African descent

Motherhood in many African societies represents the stage of fruition for a marriage, the seal that binds the marriage. Thus, in many instances, it is only when wives become mothers that they become fully accepted into their husband's clan. Mbiti observes that "Marriage is not fully recognized or consummated until the wife has given birth" (1970: 143).

If mothers are special, then those who bear male offspring are even more important. It has been noted that women's very essence or "sense of fulfillment as a human being is measured by the number of children (especially males) she bears" is what has been noted (Achebe, 1981: 7). Emecheta illustrates this attitude towards mothers who have borne male children in *The Joys of Motherhood* when Nnu Ego's father Agbadi explains the reason for this preference in his short admonition to Nnu Ego: "What greater honor is there for a woman to be a mother, and now you are a mother—not of daughters who will marry and go, but of good-looking healthy sons, and they are the first sons of your husband, and you are his first and senior wife" (Emecheta, 1994: 119).

Emecheta's character Andankwo also praises Nnu Ego and reminds her of her favored status among her husband's people because she, not her co-wife Adaku, is the mother of his sons: "You are the mother of the men children that made him into a man. If Adaku dies today, her people, not her husband's will come for her body. It is not so with you" (Emecheta, 1994: 159).

Since male children stood to inherit their mothers, women who had only daughters were considered worthless as reflected in the following quote: "Though Ibuza men admired a hard-working and rich woman, her life was nothing if she left no male children behind when she had gone to inherit the wealth, children who were her own flesh and blood" (1994: 166).

Hence, Adaku, Nnu Ego's co-wife, who had become rich through hard work, is considered worthless because she has only a daughter, and Esi of *Changes* is insulted by her in-laws who label her a "semi-barren witch" (Aidoo, 1991: 70) because she has only a daughter and no sons.

If having one daughter caused problems and heartache for mothers, then having two certainly intensified the stress. Emecheta looks at how Nnaife, Nnu Ego's husband, reacted insensitively to the news that his wife has just delivered

twin girls. Laughing loudly, Nnaife exclaims to Nnu Ego: "Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep, eh? What will they eat?" (Emecheta, 1994: 127).

Nnaife makes Nnu Ego feel as if it is her fault that she has had girls, never taking responsibility for his part in creating the newborn girls. His sadness at having become the father of two girls is short lived as within a few weeks, his second wife, Adaku delivers a boy. However, because the boy dies soon after birth, Adaku becomes mentally depressed and "almost impossible to live with" (Emecheta, 1994: 127).

Traces of this biased attitude towards male children can be found in the literature of the African diaspora, as well. Perhaps in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* Silla's and Deighton's marital relationship is strained partly because of the death of their son, leaving them with two daughters. And, Silla seems to think that pregnancy with a male child is less difficult as she recounts how carrying her son was much easier than her daughter. (Marshall, 1981: 30)

For traditional African women who suffered either temporarily or permanently from childlessness or barreness, their lives were impeded by cultural and traditional beliefs that continue to highly value fertility. Barren women bore the brunt of derogatory societal attitudes and insults from their husbands' families. Several African proverbs reveal these negative attitudes: If a woman who has been barren a long time gets a child, people congratulate the couple saying,"God has taken you from between the teeth of scorners," or "God has removed your shame" (Mbiti, 1970: 85).

No one knows the scar of shame placed upon such a woman more than Nnu Ego, Emecheta's heroine, who has tried unsuccessfully to bear a child for her first husband Amatokwu. As a new wife having become obsessed with becoming pregnant, she lamented her failure not only for her husband, but for the villagers as well. It seems that: "Nnu Ego and her new husband Amatokwu were very happy; yet Nnu Ego was surprised that, as the months passed, she was failing everybody. There was no child" (Emecheta, 1994: 31)

Adding to her frustration over her barreness is the fact that Nnu Ego is unable to confide in her husband about what has become her problem. She maintains the belief according to tradition that the problem of infertility is "her problem and hers alone" (Emecheta, 1994: 31). When she confronts Amatokwu about the blame for her infertility being placed on her, he responds bluntly: "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile, I have to raise children for my line" (Emecheta, 1994: 32). He further insults her by calling her "dry and jumpy," (32) one who is " all bones" (32). The barren woman then becomes associated with dryness, which one might liken to a dried seed, or to the dryness associated with menopausal women who are no longer able to bear children. Amatokwu's use of bones conjures up skeletal images that imply that Nnu Ego is fit for the grave because in her barren state she is useless as a woman.

Traditionally, people of African descent had large families, considering

them a blessing. One African proverb, "May god give you fruit," reminiscent of the Biblical, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen.1: 28), illustrates one of the communal blessings pronounced upon childless couples. But, some cultural groups in the African diaspora have become alienated from this traditional viewpoint where children are regarded as the measure of marital success. Marshall demonstrates this changed attitude in the kitchen conversation among the West Indian women, in which Silla speaks out against having large families and the oppressive role that men play in the impregnation of women when she tells the very pregnant Virgie Farnum:

> This ain home where you got to be breeding like a sow. Go to some
> doctor and get something 'cause these Bajan men will wear you out
> making children and the blasted children ain nothing but a keepback.
> You don see the white people having no lot. (Marshall, 1981: 30)

Marshall uses animal imagery to refer to women's bearing children in order to emphasize the undesirability of having large families. By telling Virgie that a string of pregnancies would have been acceptable at home in Barbados, Silla attributes this rejection of traditional values to their move to the city where they aspire to Western values and ideals.

In some instances, it appears that the number of children one has does not elevate one's status in the eyes of that person's family members. In *So Long A Letter,* the newly widowed Ramatoulaye, for example, felt a sense of outrage towards her sisters-in-law, when at the funeral festivities, they gave equal weight to the years of marriage and number of children that she had had in comparison to those of Binetou, her younger rival and co-wife. Her outcry in antithetical phrases follows: "Our sisters-in-law give equal consideration to thirty years and five years of married life. With the same ease and the same words, they celebrate twelve maternities and three" (Ba, 1981: 4).

If silence registers consent, then judging by the silence of the other members of this community, one can infer that they concurred with Ramatoulaye's in-laws assessment of her status. Given the collective consciousness of African communities, no one spoke up or protested vehemently this unfair, exploitative treatment of Ramatoulaye.

Effects of motherhood on women of African descent

Motherhood has varying effects on women, sometimes strengthening bonds between mother and daughter. Other times, it has devastating physical and mental consequences on women. Emecheta contrasts the physical appearance of Nnaife with that of his wife Nnu Ego, who had become "so haggard, so rough, so worn" (1994: 118) after birthing children. "Nnaife looked younger than his age, while she was looking and feeling old after the birth of only three children" (1994: 119).

Traditional African women recognize that a woman loses part of her

mental and physical self when she becomes a mother. Thus, Aanaa, Esi's grandmother, speaks up about the devastating consequences of childbearing. Having children, she recites, represents a kind of death. She confides to her granddaughter Esi that:

> I have had four children, and I know that each time a baby came out of me, I died a little. Somehow, my sister, there is a most miniscule fraction of time when the baby is tumbling out of her womb when the woman in labour dies. (Ba, 1981: 110)

Once faced with the daunting task of motherhood, however, women perform admirably and sometimes selflessly. After many years of sacrifice and love, these women feel abandoned when their children leave to pursue their own lofty ambitions and lead their own lives. A woman who has given her entire life to rearing her five children, Nnu Ego, feels a failure as a mother, since her son Oshia has gone to America, not even bothering to write, and another Adim goes to Canada and marries a white woman.

Like Nnu Ego, Silla feels unappreciated and abandoned by her children after she has struggled to give them a comfortable life. Her older daughter Ina has revealed plans to marry and leave home, while Silla plans to travel to Barbados. Silla voices her frustration with Selina's announcement that she is leaving home by asking "Gone, is this what you does get for the nine months and the pain and the long years putting bread in their mouths?" (Marshall, 1981: 306).

Silla, who is regarded by her daughter Selina as simply "the mother," is painted as a cold, hardened woman. She is a woman who becomes enraged when Selina travels across town alone at night to meet her at work. Instead of embracing Selina with hugs and kisses, she hurls harsh words and threats at her. Upon leaving the factory where she works, Silla tells Selina angrily, "Patrolling the streets this time of night. Taking trolley out to this hell-hole making my heart turn over thinking something happen. I tell yuh, I wun dare strike yuh now 'cause I'd forget my strength and kill you" (Marshall, 1981: 102).

As a woman who knows that the world is a difficult place where one has to work hard to survive, Silla, therefore, advises Selina, "I tell yuh, to make your way in this world, you got to dirty more than your hands sometime" (Marshall, 1981: 102-103).

Ba presents Ramatoulaye as one who is very concerned for her children's well-being. Feeling that perhaps she has been too permissive with her children when she learns that they have been smoking and wearing western trousers, she agonizes over how she could have prevented these behaviors. Conscious of her role as nurturer, Ramatoulaye fights off her initial response to abandon Aissatou, whom she has learned is pregnant out of wedlock. Instead, she acknowledges a closeness with her child and reasons it best to put aside her pride. Her relationship with Aissatou takes on new meaning as revealed

through images of rebirth:

> The umbilical cord took on new life, the indestructible bond beneath the avalanche of storms and the duration of time. I saw her once more sprung from me, kicking about, her tongue pink, her tiny face creased under her silky hair. I could not abandon her, as pride would have me do. (Ba, 1981: 83)

In handling this crisis, Ramatoulaye was forced to examine her attitudes and roles as a mother. A conquering, forgiving spirit triumphs as she recites a litany of motherly duties and responsibilities:

> One is a mother in order to understand the inexplicable. One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightning streaks the night, when thunder shakes the earth, when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end. (Ba, 1981: 82-83)

Educating a nation

When Dr. Kwaggir Aggrey stated, "If you educate a woman, you educate a nation, but if you educate a man you educate an individual" (Gyamfuaa-Fofie, 1997: 43), he embodied the communal spirit of African-centered philosophy. He perhaps lays out one of the most useful roles for women from Africa and the diaspora. The job of educating a nation, however, for African mothers has been rife with difficulties since, as Aidoo points out, African mothers have had a long history of suffering, which they have endured since they and their children were kidnapped into slavery, raped, forced to labor on plantations, and drafted into imperial armies (Aidoo, 1997: 123). In spite of these ordeals that African mothers have endured, her children do not truly appreciate her and add to her suffering by returning with grandchildren with whom she cannot communicate, those who speak only "English, French, Portuguese, etc. and she doesn't?" (Aidoo, 1997: 123).

And sometimes, the African mother loses not only her grandchildren but her children who become educated in the Western sense and return home with cultural amnesia as did Mukoma Byron in *Zenzele*. After ten years of study in Britain to become a doctor, he returned unrecognizable to his own people, with an Anglicized name, a white wife who refused to call the country by its new name of Zimbabwe, and a refusal to speak Shona, his first language. When he encounters his mother for the first time after his long absence, embarrassed by the person whom he has become, she curses him: "You left here as my son and return a stranger... I taught you Shona. Do not try that nonsense with me! You are a disgrace! Go! Leave me in peace" (Maraire, 1996: 61).

Aidoo calls for something other than the solution where they (sons) build mothers a house (1997: 123). For, what good is a house if the continuity of the

family unit is destroyed? There are ways that one can more greatly appease the mother: The solution lies not in material goods, but in honoring the traditions of the ancestors, by keeping the culture intact, using one's talents for the betterment of the nation, making certain that one's family is reared within the culture, and honoring one's cultural roots. Mothers can assist this cultural integration largely through educating the family, the cornerstone of the nation. Thus, nation building or rebuilding of cultural mainstays is what Aidoo seems to believe is the best solution for building a strong, healthy people (1997: 122). Mothers as the foundation of the family can help it thrive in the same way that an African nation should, that is, by drawing upon the strengths of African culture, allowing for its individuality or its unique character to remain peculiarly African.

Ba does an excellent job of exemplifying this kind of nation building through her character Tante (Aunty) Nabou, who successfully educated and "mothered" a young Nabou through oral tradition, teaching her cultural values through folktales. The results of this education, according to Ba, allowed "the virtue and greatness of a race to take root in this child" (1981: 47).

Similarly, Amai Zenzele, mother of Zenzele, the young woman about to leave to study abroad in America, provides the same kinds of virtuous lessons when she imparts to her daughter her wisdom consisting of a healthy respect for the cultural values and traditions of her people in Zimbabwe. Her mother best sums up the worldview that she wants her daughter to have when she states:

> How could I allow you to grow up reading Greek classics, Homer's Iliad? the voyages of Agamemnon, and watch you devour The Merchant of Venice and Romeo and Juliet yet be ignorant of the lyrical, the romantic, and the tragic that have shaped us as Africans? (Maraire, 1996: 8)

Her mother continues to explain the reasons that they take their annual sojourns to their village is so that she can understand and know the cultural traditions of her people.

Perhaps, if Silla had given Selina these kinds of cultural lessons, instead of becoming obsessed with assimilation into American society and the trappings of a material society, Selina would not have had to go back and fetch her roots in Barbados, in order to place some order into her chaotic world. Mary Helen Washington, in her critical essay of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, observes that the Bajan community's participation in Gatha Steed daughter's wedding signified their full imitation of white American social mores and a rejection of traditional Bajan community life (Washington, 1981: 316).

Motherhood—a joy?

Emecheta's (1994) novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* ironically looks at the African mother and the joys of being a mother. Nnu Ego, the central woman

character, who is initially joyless because she remains childless, during her first marriage, finds that even after birthing children, the end result is that she is joyless. After a life of selfless devotion to her children, Nnu Ego finds herself abandoned by her children. Therefore, if Nnu Ego were asked to respond to the question of whether motherhood is a joy, I suppose that her answer would fluctuate between "yes" and "no", for at various times in her life, motherhood did in fact have some positive qualities. Ultimately, though, she would probably answer a resounding "no."

The women writers from Africa and the diaspora whose works were discussed in this paper provide us with a spectrum of images of mothers who would probably give varied answers to this question. In many cases, the answer could not be a simple "yes" or "no." To understand the plethora of answers, one has to understand the many faces of the African mother: She is the selfless Nnu Ego, who placed the welfare of her children above her own. She is Aidoo's (1991) independent, career-minded Esi, whose daughter was cared for primarily by her father and his people, her daughter visiting her only periodically. She is Ba's (1981) open-minded, permissive Ramatoulaye who placed few restrictions on her daughter, allowed them to wear western trousers, and encouraged them to develop healthy, uninhibited feelings towards their own sexuality.

She is Marshall's (1981) resilient, hard-working Silla who showers little affection on her daughters. And, she is Maraire's (1996) self-confident, articulate Amai Zenzele, who loves her daughter so much that she pens a long letter to her so that she finds strength in her African culture to sustain herself during her travels abroad to be educated.

Nnu Ego feels that she has been a failure as a mother since her children abandoned her once they became educated abroad. Esi seems indifferent to motherhood, seldom mentioning her daughter Ogyaanowa. Ramatoulaye questions her childrearing practices and wonders if her children would have turned out differently had she been less permissive: one becomes pregnant before marriage, while two experiment with smoking. Like Nnu Ego, Silla feels that she has failed as a mother because both her children abandon her to pursue their own dreams and ambitions. Yet, Amai Zenzele seems to feel so self-assured as a mother that she passes on to her daughter a rich legacy of words by which to live.

As one can see from the various descriptions of the mothers of African descent, she has changed from the stereotypical mother who accepts her culturally and socially prescribed role as mother unquestionably. Though in many instances, she is proud and happy as mother, she has other facets of life to pursue.

Ramatoulaye wonderfully exemplifies the spirit of the joys of motherhood. A university-educated woman, she realizes that her role as mother does not dictate the totality of her being. It does not determine who she is, nor does it act as the sole determinant of her happiness. For at the conclusion of the book she actively vows to reconstruct a new life for herself by going out and searching

for happiness (Ba, 1981: 89).

    Likewise, Amai Zenzele offers hope to her daughter by viewing herself as a "link between the past and the future" (Maraire, 1996: 192). She concludes that one of her major contributions to the world was the hand that she had in bringing her daughter into the world. As a result, her "conscience rests joyously with this knowledge" (193). By equipping her daughter with cultural knowledge and values expedient for her own patriarchal liberation, Amai Zenzele is able to transcend the confining circumstances in her life to carve a new identity for herself. Clearly, the joys of motherhood for many of these women are the richness of experiences that they have undergone as they have struggled to forge lives for themselves and their children, in spite of the many pitfalls and obstacles that they have managed to overcome.

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Venetria K. Patton

Policing Our Daughters' Bodies

Mothering in African Literature

In *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, bell hooks acknowledges the dearth of material addressing the experience of black girls. She opens her memoir by recounting the powerful effect of reading Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye*, "I was still in my teens when I read this book. It shook me to the very roots of my being. There in this fictional narrative were fragments of my story—my girlhood" (hooks, 1996: xii). The novel had such a profound effect because Morrison portrayed girls confronting issues of race, class, and identity. hooks observes that although many feminists are thinking and writing about girlhood, they do not understand how race and class effect girlhood. She notes, "White girls of all classes are often encouraged to be silent. But to see the opposite in different ethnic groups as a sign of female empowerment is to miss the reality that the cultural codes of that group may dictate a quite different standard by which female self-esteem is measured" (xiii). In order to understand the complexity of black girlhood and the relationships of black girls and their mothers, more research and analysis is needed.

Frequently when issues of mothering and socialization are discussed, it is based on the experience of whites and these experiences are then extrapolated as the norm for everyone. However, if one turns to the writing of many women of the African Diaspora, one will often find embedded in the literature an analysis of black mothering. The following paper provides a sampling of texts from African American, Nigerian, and Haitian writers who address mothers' attempts to control their daughters' sexuality. hooks' memoir, *Bone Black* (1996), set in the southern region of the United States, describes her developing awareness of the different treatment of boys and girls and the limitations placed on girls, who are socialized to be given away in marriage. Flora Nwapa's short story, "This is Lagos" (1971), set in Nigeria, illustrates the way in which girls

are taught to be wary of men in order to protect their virginity and to maintain familial customs. Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), set in Haiti and New York City, depicts the devastating effects of testing practices used to monitor the chastity of girls. These are very different texts with different locations, time periods, and genres; however, each resonates with regards to female sexuality. In both the nonfiction and fiction, we see mothers actively participating in what appear to be oppressive and coercive systems of gender control, and thus seem to not only internalize their own oppression but also to legitimate it by sanctioning these practices with reference to their own daughters.

Although mothering takes on different forms and is performed in varied contexts, concern regarding their daughters' sexuality is a frequent issue for mothers, as reflected in texts across the African Diaspora. Mothers are frequently depicted as very concerned about their daughters' sexuality and often express this concern by seeking to preserve their daughters' virginity. In the texts, chastity is commonly viewed as a beneficial trait to instill in young girls that will allow them to marry well and maintain an honorable reputation. The high value placed on chastity often leads mothers to police their daughters' bodies with tactics ranging from monitoring to inspections. When taken to the extreme, these practices can become oppressive; however, it is important to understand the motivation behind the course of action.

Policing is not only about control, but also about protection. In fact, this should be the foremost aspect of policing. The mothers to be discussed are not primarily seeking to control their daughters but to protect them from the realities of unwanted pregnancies. In fact, one might argue that it is the unequal weight of unplanned pregnancies that falls upon females which is behind the different attitudes toward male and female sexuality found in some cultures. But even if this is the case, the differential attitude actually intensifies the problem by encouraging boys to express their sexuality, while punishing girls for doing the same. This makes the restrictions placed on girls seem more coercive than protective, which in turn may foster negative attitudes in young girls about their sexuality. Thus, the mother's desire to protect her daughter appears coercive and ultimately damages the daughter she sought to protect.

African American mothers are often shown policing their daughters' bodies to protect them from sexual trespassers. The desire to preserve their daughters' virtue is seen as early as the slave narratives. For example, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs describes her grandmother's disappointment that she became a mistress to a white man, "O Linda! Has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you now are. You are a disgrace to your dead mother" (1987: 56). The narrator also anguishes over her fall in virtue, but she sees it as her best hope to avoid the advances of her master who has a reputation for impregnating his slaves and selling their babies. Despite the lack of control within the slave system, many female slaves were concerned about their chastity and sought to preserve their virtue. This issue is

also quite prevalent in late nineteenth-century novels by African American women who sought to overturn the negative stereotypes about black women that developed as a response to the frequent rape of female slaves. Thus writers like Frances Harper (1988) and Pauline Hopkins (1988) directly address this issue in their novels. In *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted*, Harper creates a chaste heroine that maintains her virginity despite the attempts of several slave owners to corrupt her virtue, while Hopkins argues in *Contending Forces* that black women's virtue should not be diminished as a result of their forcible rape. The concern expressed in African American women's literature regarding black women's virtue has become a less central issue as we become more removed from our slave past and less impacted by the negative stereotypes that developed from it; however, we have not fully escaped this negative stigma, which is readily reflected in the sexualization of black women in contemporary media.

With this history in mind, readers should not be surprised to see concerns regarding the avoidance of sexual promiscuity and the maintenance of virginity in contemporary African American texts. Thus although hooks' memoir traces many aspects of her childhood, sexuality is a prominent feature of her memories. hooks' mother is quite vigilant in monitoring hooks' sexuality. For example, hooks' recalls her mother's response to finding her soiled panties:

> When mama finally asks me if it is me that has the panties with the discharge, with the sometimes funny smell, I do not ask her how she knows—she finds out everything. Yet she is mostly gentle when she comes across a secret that may hurt in the telling. I tell her I suppose they are mine. She wants to know have I been doing anything with boys. I do not know what this anything is. When I say no, she asks again and again. I always answer no. When I become tired of answering this same old question I ask her a question. I ask her What is this anything that one can do with boys. I am so angry at boys—the ones I do not know, who are capable of this anything that makes me be questioned in a way that feels like I have done something wrong, like I'm on trial. She does not want to tell me what the anything is. She believes me. (1996: 94-95)

This interview with her mother is then followed by a trip to the doctor, who confirms that girls may get infections and that they are not caused "by the anything that can be done with boys" (1996: 95). At home, her mother attempts to give her a vinegar and water douche, but she struggles so much that her sister is brought in to help her mother:

> My oldest sister enters the bathroom with a smirk on her face that tells me right away that she sees that I am naked, afraid, ashamed; that she enjoys witnessing this humiliation. Together they struggle to perform the task. Mama asks angrily What are you going to do when some boy

sticks his thing up you?; I am shocked that she could think that I would ever be naked with a boy, that I would ever let anyone touch my body, or let them stick things in me. When I say this will never happen to me they stop their tasks to laugh, long and loud. I weep at their refusal to believe I can protect myself from further humiliation. (1996: 96)

The anguish surrounding this movement reveals hooks' resistance to the way in which girls are deemed victims within the sexual arena. Her mother and sister accept this positioning of females, but hooks' is shocked that they expect her to accept such degradation. She has not been completely socialized to play the role of female sexual victim; she still believes that she will have control over her body and sexuality. Anything less is shameful in her eyes.

Throughout hooks' memoir, we see the shame that is instilled in her regarding her body: "they have always made us ashamed of the body, made us tuck it away under our pillows like some missing tooth for which the fairy will reward. They reward our silences about the body" (1996: 95). While shame of the body seems to be something equally instilled in girls and boys, gender does effect the way in which this shame is instilled. There is a point in which boys come into their manhood and are expected to be conscious of their bodies in a way in which girls are not:

Masturbation is something she has never heard anyone talk about girls doing. Like so many spaces of fun and privilege in their world, it is reserved for the boy child—the one whose growing passion for sexuality can be celebrated, talked about with smiles of triumph and pleasure. A boy coming into awareness of his sexuality is on his way to manhood—it is an important moment. (1996: 112)

Thus it is clear that boys are expected to be sexual in a manner that girls are not. In fact, girls are depicted as victims of their sexuality, "Sexuality is something that will be done to them, something they have to fear. It can bring unwanted pregnancy. It can turn one into a whore. It is a curse" (1996: 112). hooks is aware of this difference between girls and boys and thus keeps her masturbation a secret and views it as a source of shame. In order to combat her sense of shame, hooks separates the act of masturbation from the sexual realm: "She denies to herself that she is being sexual. She refuses to think about it. Males are not the object of her lust. She does not touch herself thinking about their penises moving inside of her, the wetness of their ejaculations. It is her own wetness that the fingers seek" (1996: 113). Thus her sexuality is denied and repressed.

hooks learns early in life that a woman's sexuality is not her own, but her husband's. She recalls identifying with a woman in her favorite book, *Passion Pit*. The woman is sexually aroused and then told by her partner to beg for sex. hooks "can understand the intensity of the woman's longing, her willingness to

ask, possibly even to beg. She knows this affirmation of the woman's sexual hunger is exactly what would be denied her in real life" (1996: 117). This has been ingrained through "Tom Thumb Weddings," witnessing her mother's lack of power in her own marriage, and through warnings about what boys and men will do to her.

hooks describes the Tom Thumb wedding as adult entertainment; it is not fun for the children. She is supposed to be happy that she is chosen as a bridesmaid, but she would rather be playing outside than be in a make-believe wedding. The mature hooks reflects on this event, "We [were] practicing to be brides, to be girls who will grow up to be given away" (1996: 9). The phrase, "given away" has particular significance, as we reflect on hooks' socialization. She informs us that she learned "early that it is important for a woman to marry" (1996: 22). However, the pretend Tom Thumb wedding from first grade makes hooks suspicious about marriage, for it had not been enjoyable. At sixteen her mother continually tells her the importance of cooking and cleaning in order to be a good wife, but hooks vows never to marry, "Whenever she thought of marriage she thought of it for someone else, someone who would make a beautiful bride, a good wife. From her perspective the problem with marriage was not the good wife, but the lack of the good husband" (1996: 97). Although her mother attempts to mold hooks for her later role of wife and mother, hooks resists. In hooks' eyes, her mother appears to consent to her own oppression, but hooks refuses to concede. She refuses to see marriage as an ideal objective because she cannot overlook her mother's loss of identity within her marriage.

Despite all that she has been told about marriage, hooks has seen the contradictions in her own mother's marriage. She tries to explain to her mother why she does not wish to marry,

> Seems like, she says, stammering, marriage is for men, that women get
> nothing out of it, men get everything.... She did not want the mother
> to know that it was precisely her marriage that made it seem like a trap,
> a door closing in a room without air. (1996: 98)

hooks has witnessed the negative effects of marriage for her mother. When her father left, her mother "became energetic, noisy, silly, funny, fussy, strong, capable, tender, everything that she was not when he was around. When he was around she became silent" (1996: 98). In other words, she sees the life sapped out of her mother as a direct result of her marriage. Yet, in spite of what seems to be a difficult marriage, hooks' mother seeks to prepare her to be a "good wife." She continues in her mission to socialize her daughter for a role that calls for continual subjugation. It is as if she is unaware of her own victimization and thus blindly guides her daughter to a similar fate.

hooks' memoir, *Bone Black* (1996) speaks to the truth behind depictions of mother-daughter relationships found throughout literature of the African Diaspora. Her mother's concern regarding her daughter's sexuality is replicated

in numerous texts.[1] For example, in Flora Nwapa's "This is Lagos," both Soha's mother and aunt warn her of the dangers of Lagos men. As Soha leaves for her aunt's home in Lagos, her mother warns her, "They say Lagos men do not just chase women, they snatch them" (Nwapa, 1994: 42). She is then instructed to be careful. However, her mother was comforted by the thought that her sister would take care of Soha. It is clear in the story that men are seen as sexual predators from whom mothers and mother figures must protect their daughters. However, the fear is not so much that the daughters will be snatched, but that they will be irreparably ruined.

Soha is aware of the danger of Lagos men, but she seems to think she is equal to the challenge. Early in the story, she is described as "full of life. She pretended that she knew her mind, and showed a confidence rare in a girl who had all her education in a village" (1994: 42). Although Soha is not worldly in her dealings with men she does employ some feminine wiles. For instance, when her suitor, Mr. Ibikunle, first comes to her aunt's home, she makes him wait: "Her mother had told her she should never show a man that she was anxious about him. She should rather keep him waiting as long as she wished" (1994: 44). When she does come down she banters with him about a wife that he claims he does not have. Upon hearing his denial, Soha laughs long and loud and responds, "Who are you deceiving? Please go to your wife and don't bother me. Lagos men, I know Lagos men" (1994: 45). This comment suggests that she does indeed perceive the threat of Nigerian men and Lagos men in particular, but at the same time she seems to think she can handle the risk.

Soha's aunt, Mama Eze, however, does not think Soha can protect herself from Lagos men. Upon Soha's arrival, Mama Eze takes a maternal interest in her sister's daughter. Soha also acknowledges this protective mother-daughter like relationship, but does not take Mama Eze into her confidence. Although Mama Eze did not know about the young man's visit, her suspicions are raised: "it was obvious to her that Soha had secrets. It was easy for a mother of five children who had watched so many girls growing up in the 'yard' to know when they were involved with men" (1994: 46). She does not, however, ask Soha directly about her suspicions; instead, she warns her: "This is Lagos. Lagos is different from home. Lagos is big. You must be careful here. You are a mere child. Lagos men are too deep for you. Don't think you are clever. You are not. You can never be clever than a Lagos man. I am older than you are, so take my advice" (1994: 46). In her role as surrogate mother, Mama Eze seeks to protect Soha from the dangers of Lagos men. Her warnings reflect the concerns of her sister, Soha's mother, and reveal her desire to act like a mother towards her niece.

Despite Mama Eze's good intentions, Soha does not pay any attention to her words of wisdom. In fact, shortly afterwards she announces her intention to move to a hostel. This announcement creates a great deal of consternation for Mama Eze because her sister expected her to watch over Soha. Upon discussing this turn of events with her neighbor, Mama Bisi, Mama Eze learns

more about the nature of the hostel. Mama Bisi tells her, "Soha is not a better girl. Do you know the kind of girls who live in that hostel at Ajagba street? Rotten girls who will never marry. No man will bring them into his home and call them wives.... Soha will be lost if she goes there" (1994: 48). This then is the danger of Lagos men; they threaten a girl's goodness. Thus at this point, Mama Eze and Mama Bisi are concerned that Soha will endanger her reputation as a "good girl." Living in the hostel will allow for too close of an association with Lagos men, which in turn will make Soha rotten and no longer marriageable.

However, in Soha's case she does marry, but because it was not done properly it is as if they were not married. After moving out of her aunt's home, Soha returns with Mr. Ibikunle to announce their marriage. They have in fact been married for a month. Mama Eze is outraged that Soha would marry without telling anyone, "It is a slight and nothing else," she says (1994: 50). But it is Mama Bisi that guesses the reason for the secrecy—Soha is pregnant. The young people are then scolded for ignoring tradition:

"You hear, Mr Ibikunle, we don't marry like that in my home," Mama Eze said. "Home people will not regard you as married. This is unheard of. And you tell me this is what the white people do. So when white people wish to marry, they don't seek the consent of their parents, they don't even inform them. My sister's daughter," she turned to Soha, "you have not done well. You have rewarded me with evil." (1994: 50)

Mama Eze cannot understand why Soha did not take her into her confidence. However, her husband, Papa Eze, cannot understand the women's commotion, "you woman talk too much. Mr Ibikunle has acted like a gentleman. What if he had run away after pregnating Soha? What would you do?" (1994: 50). Mama Eze responds, "Aren't you a man. Aren't all men the same?" (1994: 50). Papa Eze is addressing Mr. Ibikunle's honorable response to the pregnancy, but this is not the only source of the women's anger. Their anger also seems to be a response to the colonialist infringement upon traditional customs—the young couple has married like white people, not Nigerians. It is clear that the older women are seeking to uphold a tradition that is not as important to the men or the younger woman.

Mama Eze urges the young couple to get ready to go home to Soha's parents, but after a year "Mr Ibikunle did not have the courage, or was it the money, to travel to Soha's home to present himself to Soha's parents as their son-in-law" (1994: 50). What is behind this flouting of tradition? And why is it so important to the older women? Soha has been trained to be a "better girl," yet she ignores her aunt and mother's warnings about Lagos men. One might be tempted to say that Soha resents and resists the commodification of marriage and like bell hooks does not wish to be given away. But I suspect that this would be a western reading of the situation and not necessarily the interpretation of an Nigerian audience. Soha's actions are clearly a reflection of her concept of gender norms, but they are also complicated by issues of

tradition and the colonialist presence.

What is clear though is that society expects mothers and mother figures to be vigilant in their preservation of their daughter's chastity. The description of the girls living at the hostel on Ajagba Street illustrates the value placed upon female virginity. However, Nwapa appears to be questioning societal mores that demand such policing of female bodies. Soha has not been a "better girl," yet she is married. Marriage is described by Mama Eze as "the prayer of every woman," (1994: 50) yet this is supposed to be achieved through chastity and the adherence to tradition. But whose interests does this tradition serve? Does it protect women or oppress them? Are men expected to have the same regard for tradition?

The issue of tradition is also explored in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). In the novel, Martine regularly tests her daughter Sophie's virginity, as her own mother had tested her. The process of testing is presented as a tradition. Martine tells Sophie, "When I was a girl, my mother used to test us to see if we were virgins. She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside. Your Tante Atie hated it. She used to scream like a pig in a slaughterhouse. The way my mother was raised, a mother is supposed to do that to her daughter until the daughter is married. It is her responsibility to keep her pure" (Danticat, 1994: 60-61). However, the concern about purity has devastating effects on those tested. Martine is haunted by both the testing and the rape that brings an end to the testing, while Sophie chooses to tear her own hymen as a means of escaping the testing. It is only by failing the test that the women escape the horrors of the testing process.

Sophie is first tested after coming home at 3:00 am and not being able to explain her whereabouts. Although she assured her mother that she had not done anything wrong, Martine proceeds to test her. This testing is her means of assuring herself that Sophie is indeed a "good girl." Afterwards, her mother warns Sophie that "[t]here are secrets you cannot keep" (1994: 85). Martine continues to test Sophie weekly "to make sure that [she is] still whole" (1994: 86). Sophie is tested by her mother as were her mother and aunt before her. Testing is not only a family tradition, but, a cultural tradition. When Sophie returns to Haiti, she learns from her grandmother that this practice continues: "The mother, she will drag her inside the hut, take her last small finger and put it inside her to see if it goes in. You said the other night that your mother tested you. That is what is now happening to Ti Alice" (1994: 154). The practice is so pervasive that Sophie hears "it compared to a virginity cult" (1994: 154).

In an attempt to understand the practice, Sophie questions her grand-mother about the motivation for the testing. She is told, "If a child dies, you do not die. But if your child is disgraced, you are disgraced" (1994: 156). Thus a girl's virginity becomes a source of honor for her mother. Her grandmother explains, "From the time a girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring

her back to me" (156). Testing is used to ensure that girls live up to the expectation that they will remain chaste until marriage. Tante Atie explains that *"Haitian men, they insist that their women are virgins and have their ten fingers.* According to Tante Atie, each finger had a purpose. It was the way she had been taught to prepare herself to become a woman. Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing" (1994: 151). However, following these precepts does not guarantee the ultimate reward of marriage. Tante Atie remains bitter about never having married: "They train you to find a husband,' she said. 'They poke at your panties in the middle of the night, to see if you are still whole. They listen when you pee, to find out if you're peeing too loud. If you pee loud, it means you've got big spaces between your legs. They make you burn your fingers learning to cook. Then still you have nothing" (1994: 137). Tante Atie suffered through testing and was properly trained to be a wife and mother, but the expected husband never materialized. She did all that was required of her but it was all for naught—she has no husband.

Perhaps Tante Atie would not be so bitter, if she did not also feel like she lost part of herself in the process of being trained for wifehood. As she reflects on the meaning of the ten fingers, she notes that "Her fingers had been named for her even before she was born. Sometimes, she even wished she had six fingers on each hand so she could have two left for herself" (1994: 151). It is as if all of her individuality was pushed out of her in order to make room for the training to be an ideal woman. Her bitterness is further reflected in her comments about the limitations placed on women. Tante Atie observes, "Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body" (1994: 20). This point is reinforced by Martine's reflections on their youth as well. She tells Sophie, "You should have seen us when we were young. We always dreamt of becoming important women. We were going to be the first women doctors from my mother's village. We would not stop at being doctors either. We were going to be engineers too. Imagine our surprise when we found out we had limits" (1994: 43). The limits experienced by Martine and Tante Atie were a result of gender expectations and the place of women within their community. Women were expected to wives and mothers, not doctors and engineers. These dreams were pushed aside to make room for the more practical duties of cooking and cleaning.

These unrealized dreams are reflected in Tante Atie's bitterness and her heavy drinking. When Sophie asks about her drinking, Tante Atie responds, "I drink a little to forget my troubles,' 'It's no more a vice than the old woman and her tobacco" (1994: 143). The grandmother frequently admonishes Tante Atie about her drinking and how it might affect Sophie's respect for her. But this scolding has little impact on her. Tante Atie responds, "Sophie is not a child anymore, old woman. I do not have to be a saint for her" (1994: 111). This suggests that she took up drinking after Sophie went to live with her mother. I suspect that this is in part because until that time Tante Atie was able to make

use of some of her training to be a surrogate mother for Sophie. But after Sophie returns to her mother, Tante Atie has no outlet for the training she received. Without a child to mother or a husband to care for, Tante Atie is left with nothing—she has neither family nor career.

This training and testing also has negative effects on Tante Atie's sister, Martine. The nightmares Martine has had most of her life are a response to both the testing and her rape. While explaining to Sophie why she tested her, she acknowledges "that the two greatest pains of [her] life are very much related. The one good thing about ... being raped was that it made the testing stop. The testing and the rape. I live both every day" (1994: 170). This realization though comes only after she has tested her own daughter "because [her] mother had done it to [her]" (1994: 170). Thus despite the pain caused generation after generation, the practice was continued without question.

Although the practice is not directly questioned until Sophie has the courage to do so, there are several points of indirect critique of testing and the related subjugation of women. Sophie remembers the story of a rich man who married a poor black girl because she was a virgin:

> For the wedding night, he bought her the whitest sheets and night-gowns he could possibly find. For himself, he bought a can of thick goat milk in which he planned to sprinkle a drop of her hymen blood to drink.
>
> Then came their wedding night. The girl did not bleed. The man had his honor and reputation to defend. He could not face the town if he did not have a blood-spotted sheet to hang in his courtyard the next morning. He did the best he could to make her bleed, but no matter how hard he tried, the girl did not bleed. So he took a knife and cut her between her legs to get some blood to show. He got enough blood for her wedding gown and sheets, an unusual amount to impress the neighbors. The blood kept flowing like water out of the girl. It flowed so much it wouldn't stop. Finally, drained of all her blood, the girl died.
>
> Later during her funeral procession, her blood-soaked sheets were paraded by her husband to show that she had been a virgin on her wedding night. At the grave site, her husband drank his blood-spotted goat milk and cried like a child. (1994: 154-55)

This story is clearly an indictment of the virginity cult. Concern about virginity should not lead to murder, nor should it lead to the painful tearing Sophie chooses in order to bring an end to the testing. She takes her mother's pestle to bed with her and rips into her flesh: "It was gone, the veil that always held my mother's finger back every time she *tested* me" (1994: 88). It is with great relief that she fails her final test. She could not, however, later explain to her husband why she had hurt herself like that. She "could not explain to him

that it was like breaking manacles, an act of freedom" (1994: 130). Sophie could have had intercourse with Joseph, her future husband, and thus brought an end to the testing, but this might be seen as reinforcing the need for such testing. However, her willingness to rip her own flesh rather than endure further testing impresses upon the reader the degree of pain and humiliation that the testing caused.

The testing, however, is merely a reflection of women's low position within Haitian culture. The disparate treatment of females and males begins at birth. Sophie's grandmother explains to Sophie how one can tell if a baby is a girl or a boy by the lantern of the midwife. Initially the lantern goes back and forth between the shack and the yard as the midwife goes between the mother and her pot of boiling water. If the child is a boy, the lantern will eventually be left outside the hut and if there is a man, he will stay with the baby. But if it is a girl, the mother will be left in darkness with the child (1994: 146). This inauspicious beginning is further limited by the roles that are available to women. Their identity is based on the needs and wants of men. This is particularly evident in stories that depict men killing their wives without penalty. This is true of the story related earlier about the rich man and of a song Sophie hears men singing as they work in the cane. They sing of "a woman who flew without her skin at night, and when she came back home, she found her skin peppered and could not put it back on. Her husband had done it to teach her a lesson. He ended up killing her" (1994: 150). This seems like an indication of the low status of women within the community.

While *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is clearly the most egregious example, "This is Lagos" and *Bone Black* also comment on the negative side effects of the recurring concern with female chastity and the mother's role in maintaining this patriarchal dictum. I find it striking that such very different texts, both in narrative form and Diasporic location, address such common concerns. The mothers and mother figures are in the position of policing their daughter's bodies in order to ensure that they fulfill the expectations of men. They are essentially engaged in a power struggle for control over the daughters' bodies and by extension their minds and souls. While inter-generational conflict is not unusual, what remains unclear is why mothers continue to socialize their daughters according to the dictates of men. One might argue that in "This is Lagos" the mother and mother figures have not been harmed by patriarchal dictates and perhaps even benefit through their marriages, but what about the mothers in the other texts who are clearly harmed by patriarchal expectations? How will the chain be broken? When will mothers no longer be in a position of training their daughters to submit to the same subjugation that they experience? Neither of these writers provides the answers to these questions, but they do inspire us to ask the questions and to begin to pursue the answers.

[1]While I believe that finding this concern with premarital sex in such disparate texts is indicative of the far reaching nature of this concern, we should not expect to find this within every region of the African Diaspora. For example, Denis Paulme (1963) notes that despite regional differences among African females most enjoyed a tremendous amount of premarital sexual freedom. This observation is reinforced in Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974) and John W. Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1979). So while we may find similarities within the African Diaspora, we must not use one setting to speak for all and thus disregard important regional differences.

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Binding the Narrative Thread

Storytelling and the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory

As women writers, does language become our mother? We create
ourselves through language, so it would seem.
—Michelle Cliff (*Ms Magazine*)

"We are all mothers,/and we have that fire within us,/of powerful
women/whose spirits are so angry/we can laugh beauty into life and
still make you taste/the salt tears of our knowledge...
—Abena P.A. Busia, from "Liberation," *Testimonies of Exile* (1990)

Edwidge Danticat's first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), a bildungsroman
set in Haiti and the United States, is a searing and beautifully told story of the
impact of unspeakable violence on the mother-daughter relationship. In its
interrogation of the legacy of rape and violation, the text explores the ways in
which patriarchal violence is internalized and perpetuated by women from one
generation to the next. The novel reveals the transformative potential of
narrative and storytelling among four generations of Haitian women—artists
and storytellers who carry and shape cultural traditions.

The novel is narrated in the first-person voice of Sophie Caco, a daughter,
mother, and artist.[1] Sophie ruptures the Freudian paradigm of the mother as
silent and self-effacing, and embodies the figure of the mother-artist.[2] Psycho-
analytic theory teaches us that to tell a story is not only to remember it but to
imagine it differently, creating the possibility for the writing of new scripts. In
telling her story, Sophie learns to define the boundaries between herself and her
mother, Martine—boundaries which have blurred as Sophie internalizes
Martine's fear and self-hatred, the twin legacies of her mother's rape. The
mother-daughter enmeshment is symbolized by the figure of the *Marassas*, the

twins of *vodou*, whom Martine invokes to describe their relationship.

Sophie's creativity is represented on several textual levels. She is the speaking subject who claims her place among "the brave women of Haiti, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, daughters, and friends," to whom the novel is dedicated, a dedication which establishes a multi-generational community of Haitian women that transcends biological ties. Her voice shapes the text; she embodies "the doubled female voice of woman-poet-author and woman-speaking subject."[3] Her Mother's Day verse to her Tante Atie announces her as a poet: "My mother is a daffodil, limber and strong as one. My mother is a daffodil,/but in the wind, iron strong" (29). This poem, while clearly the hand of a child, evokes Sophie's gift for metaphor.

Sophie's text frames interpolated stories told by the other Caco women. This framing technique signifies the continuing role of the oral tradition in literary texts of the African diaspora. As a polyphonic text, the narrative gathers the voices of a scattered people and emblematizes a thematics of community and collectivity. The stories themselves, which are told by Martine, Grandma Ife, and Tante Atie, mirror the themes of sexual violence, violation, familial obligation, and the search for autonomy that resonate in the larger first-person narrative. As Myriam Chancy observes, in cultures where the oral tradition is the primary locus of collective consciousness, stories told from one generation to the next not only transfer wisdom but are a mechanism of survival: "Language, song, and stories have been the means by which enslaved peoples have maintained a sense of culture as they have been denied access to their roots" (74). Storytelling thus performs both cultural and maternal functions, recreating ties to Africa, the lost motherland, and strengthening the bond between mothers and daughters.

Sophie is a mother-artist whose text nurtures storytelling. Through the framing device, she situates herself at the critical juncture of both the literary and oral traditions. My reading of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* examines how Sophie gradually comes to understand the intertextualities between the framed tales and her own story, and how the narrative art of telling a story empowers her to rewrite the script of the mother-daughter relationship. In so doing, she transforms it from a relationship dominated by recrimination, loss, and violation to one marked by reconciliation, hope, and freedom.

Two of the embedded stories in the text are told by Sophie and inscribe the themes of sexual violence and violation that emanate from her mother's rape. As her mother's daughter, Sophie inherits this legacy. Martine, who was raped at the age of sixteen by a *Macoute*, one of Duvalier's secret police, suffers a breakdown after Sophie's birth and flees to the United States, leaving Sophie in the care of Atie, Martine's older sister. When Sophie is 12, Martine asks Atie to send Sophie to New York to join her. As Sophie approaches womanhood, Martine, who continues to suffer from trauma, renews a detested ritual from her own girlhood: she begins to "test" Sophie by inserting her finger inside her daughter to determine whether she has had sexual intercourse. Ostensibly,

Martine might have discontinued the practice, since she despised it. However, Sophie's developing womanhood triggers a post-traumatic stress response, and she finds herself doing to her daughter what was done to her.

The first interpolated story told by Sophie is a tale which simultaneously encodes the psychic pain she experiences from the testing and her anguish at being the daughter of her mother's rape. The story is about a woman who could not stop bleeding and who bled all the time—from her arms, her face, her chest—so much that her clothing was soaked in blood. Tired of the constant bleeding, she consults the *vodou* goddess Erzulie, who asks the woman what life form she would like to become. The woman wishes to be a butterfly. Erzulie transforms the woman into a butterfly, and she never bleeds again (8). Sophie recites this story as she reaches for her mother's pestle, with which she ruptures her own hymen in order to put an end to the hated testing.[4] On the one hand, Sophie is the woman who could not stop bleeding, since she nearly bleeds to death after she jams the pestle inside her. At the same time, the story is also about Martine, since Martine is also the woman who cannot stop bleeding, who still suffers from the rape with nightmares, self-loathing, and fear. The story reveals the extent to which Sophie is psychologically enmeshed with Martine. In wounding herself with the pestle, Sophie punishes Martine. She enacts a kind of self-rape so that Martine cannot continue to test her; just as Martine's testing was ended by the rape.

The other interpolated story told by Sophie is also a story of female bloodying thematically related to the ritual testing. Shortly after the incident with the pestle, Sophie marries her lover, Joseph. Their union results in the birth of a baby, Brigitte. A few months later, Sophie takes her baby and flees to Haiti, a flight that mirrors, in reverse, Martine's flight to the U.S. following Sophie's birth. The embedded tale she tells is about a rich man who marries a poor black girl. For their wedding night, he buys the whitest sheets he can find but the girl does not bleed from their coupling. So the man takes a knife and cuts the girl between the legs so that he can defend his honor and hang a bloody sheet in the courtyard the next day. The young bride does not stop bleeding from her wound, and she dies (155).[5]

This story enacts Sophie's outrage and sorrow at the testing she has experienced at the hand of her mother. While Sophie values Haitian culture and tradition, she is highly critical of the ritual of testing, which she sees as a tool of the patriarchy. According to custom, a man is not required to remain married if he discovers his wife has had intercourse prior to marriage; he may return the bride to her parents like a piece of damaged goods. "If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me," Grandma Ife says to Sophie in an attempt to justify the testing (156). But Sophie rejects the testing, which she experiences as a physical and psychological violation.

With the story of the bloody sheets, Sophie reshapes the patriarchal text. When she tells this story, she is neither active participant nor passive witness.

Rather, she establishes a critical distance by giving the story a conclusion that ends in a young woman's death, an ending which says that the sacrificial costs of verifying female purity are too high. She reinforces this theme in a conversation with her grandmother, saying, "I hated the tests.... It is the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. When my husband is with me now, it gives me such nightmares that I have to bite my tongue to do it again" (156). Sophie's cautionary tale about the bloody sheets is juxtaposed against her refusal to die like the young girl in the story. Like the *cacos* whose name she bears, she is a survivor and a rebel (the *cacos* were slaves who resisted the French during Haiti's struggle for independence).

The longest interpolated story in the text is told by Sophie's Grandma Ife. Ife is the ancestor, venerated and powerful. Through her name, she is connected to Africa and the "motherline" of culture.[6] Ife, a town in southwestern Nigeria, was the first Yoruba state. According to Yoruba legend, Ife is the site of humankind's genesis, the place at which land was created from the flooding waters. Grandma Ife, therefore, is the mother of mother-artists, the origin of creativity. She is described as a wise woman, a seer, and a healer. Ife's authority emanates from the oral tradition; she is unable to read.[7] She has access to power through her gifted storytelling. The villagers call her "tale master" and are mesmerized by her performances. Ife's role as storyteller also establishes a powerful connection to Sophie, since as narrator, Sophie is also a storyteller and tale master.

The embedded story told by Ife appears approximately halfway through the text, bisecting the narrative. It is a tale about a lark that gives a young girl gifts of pomegranates. One day, the lark says to the girl that he would like to take her to a beautiful kingdom, far, far away. When the little girl refuses, the lark looks so sad that the girl relents and gets on his back. The lark then tells her that he is going to take her to a king who must have a little girl's heart or he will die. The girl replies that she left her heart at home and must go back to get it. So the bird takes her home and she runs away to her village, while the lark waits forever for her return (124-25).

This story, like the larger narrative which frames it, encodes the conflict between female autonomy and filial obligation and thematizes the dangers of heterosexuality, the rupture to home and family caused by marriage, and the narrowness of choices for women. The only paths available to the young girl are marriage to a man who will eat her heart out or sanctuary at home. The lark, as well as the king, embody the threat of sexual enthrallment; the pomegranate is a symbol of erotic enticement. The girl's ruse is successful—she outwits the king and the bird who would assist in her deflowering—but at tremendous cost—she has lost her freedom, since now she is imprisoned in her home. The story inscribes the parental desire for the daughter to remain in the familial home. Ife has lost one daughter, Martine, to exile in the vast, unknown territories of the U.S.; that daughter's daughter, Sophie, has flown the nest, as well. The story expresses Ife's yearning for the reunion of her scattered flock.

Ironically, Ife is ambivalent about Atie's return home after Martine sends for Sophie. As surrogate mother to Sophie, Atie had won a measure of status and independence. The maternal status given to Atie enables her to move away from Ife and La Nouvelle Dame Marie to the village of Croix-des-Rosets, in order for Sophie to attend school. While most of the villagers in Croix-des-Rosets live in one-room huts or shacks, Sophie and Atie live in a house with a living room *and* a bedroom (11). They are able to afford such luxuries thanks to the money sent home by Martine, who works two jobs in New York. Martine's desire to be reunited with her daughter ruptures the bond between Atie and Sophie and Atie's status as mother.

When Sophie leaves Haiti, Atie returns to Ife and La Nouvelle Dame Marie. As an unmarried woman, she can no longer justify an independent existence. When her social role as mother is no longer available, she reclaims the role of dutiful daughter. Atie belongs to a generation of women who have known themselves only in relation to caring for others:

> According to Tante Atie, each finger had a purpose. It was the way she had been taught to prepare herself to become a woman. Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing. It wasn't her fault, she said. Her ten fingers had been named for her even before she was born. Sometimes, she even wished she had six fingers on each hand so she could have two left for herself. (151)

Although Atie understands the necessity for the mother-daughter reunion while the young Sophie does not, she mourns their impending separation, calling Sophie "my child" (31).

Atie's resumption of life with Ife offers many challenges. In Croix-des-Rosets, Atie would visit with M. Augustin, who once proposed to her. Although M. Augustin married another woman, he and Atie retain warm feelings for each other. When M. Augustin hears the news about Sophie's departure, he takes Atie's hand and presses his cheek to hers. At night, Atie stands at the window and gazes at the Augustins' house long after darkness has fallen. In La Nouvelle Dame Marie, Atie and Ife do not get along. Ife has become accustomed to living alone; she is exasperated by Atie's friendship with Louise, a neighbor. When Sophie returns to Haiti with Brigitte, her infant daughter, after a lapse of seven years, Ife says:

> I don't *like* the way your Tante Atie has been since she came back from Croix-des-Rosets. Ever since she has come back, she and I, we are like milk and lemon, oil and water. She grieves; she drinks *tafia* [rum].... Why did she come back? If she had married there, would she not have stayed? ... I looked after myself all the years she was in Croix-des-Rosets. I look after myself now. (118-19)

While Ife struggles to accept Atie's return home, her reference to marriage implies that she cannot accept Atie's failure to marry. For her part, Atie is lonely and resentful. When Sophie asks her if she misses Croix-des-Rosets, she replies:

> Croix-des-Rosets was painful. Here there is nothing. Nothing at all.... I know old people, they have great knowledge. I have been taught never to contradict our elders. I am the oldest child. My place is here. I am supposed to march at the head of the old woman's coffin. I am supposed to lead her funeral procession. But even if lightning should strike me now, I will say this: I am tired. (136)

In addition to feeling ashamed of having an unmarried daughter, Ife disapproves of Atie's friendship with Louise. Louise is teaching Atie to read; she also encourages Atie to register her name in the city archives so that there will be a permanent record that she has lived in the valley. Ife is unconvinced and unimpressed: "if a woman is worth remembering, there is no need to have her name carved in letters," she says (128). Ife's suspiciousness of the registry stems from her strong ties to the oral tradition. She is, after all, the *griot*, the tale master who speaks in "commanding tones." But what she resents even more than Atie's drive toward literacy is the strong erotic tie between the two women. Following the violent murder of a local merchant by the *Macoutes*, Louise and Atie comfort each other in an embrace, their "faces so close that their lips could meet" (138). Ife vents her disapproval and anger on a pig Louise has given Atie as a gift: "That Louise causes trouble.... Everything from her shadow to that pig is trouble," she complains (137). But there is even more cause for Ife's jealousy: not only is Louise Atie's teacher and possibly her lover, she is also her creative mentor and muse. Atie reads Sophie a poem from her notebook that Louise has helped her paraphrase from a book of French poetry, causing Sophie to exclaim, "you're a poet, too" (135). Sophie can now claim artistic kinship to Atie through writing and literature, creating a potential threat to Ife's connection to Sophie through the oral tradition.

The many ruptures in the text—Martine's flight from Haiti to the United States, Sophie's departure to the U.S. to be reunited with her mother, Atie's return to Ife and La Nouvelle Dame Marie, Sophie's return to Haiti after seven years in the States—are set in motion by the original rupture, the rape of Martine. The violation of Martine creates a dispersal of the Caco family, a dispersion that mirrors the original diaspora from Africa. Storytelling among the women not only recreates the original connection to Africa but also binds together the members of a scattered family. Sophie acknowledges the "motherline" of culture when she observes, "... it was neither my mother nor my Tante Atie who had given all the mother-and-daughter motifs to all the stories they told.... It was something that was essentially Haitian. Somehow, early on, our song makers and tale weaves had decided that we were all

daughters of this land" (230).

Nurturing and storytelling, two quintessentially maternal activities, are embodied in Atie. When Sophie tells Brigitte a bedtime story, she remembers the bedtime stories Atie once told her:

> When I was a little girl, Tante Atie had always seen to it that I heard a story, especially when I could not sleep at night.... There was magic in the images that she had made out of the night. She would rock my body on her lap as she told me of fishermen and mermaids bravely falling in love.... (110)

Although Atie does not command the same public authority through her storytelling as does Ife, she provides a strong maternal presence for Sophie. Through her own narrative, Sophie can claim both Ife's authority and Atie's nurturance.

Storytelling both establishes and reproduces the maternal bond. Telling a tale binds mother to daughter and creates cross-generational connections. Telling a child a story is a maternal gesture that provides comfort, security, and emotional sustenance. In addition, the content of a story, particularly a fairy tale, which invokes magic and suspension of disbelief, can help establish trust between mother and child, thereby fostering a child's self-esteem and sense of autonomy. Atie tells magical tales about Sophie's birth in order to protect her from the brutal truth: "One time I asked her how it was that I was born with a mother and no father. She told me the story of a little girl who was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream, and a chunk of the sky. That little girl, she said was me" (47). Atie's stories focus on stability and attachment and provide Sophie with comfort, security, and strength.

These fanciful tales stand in marked contrast to Martine's story of rape. The psychological damage caused by the rape is inscribed in Martine's tale of the *Marassas*, which Martine tells Sophie as she "tests" her:

> The *Marassas* were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two. They looked the same, talked the same, walked the same.... When you love someone, you want them to be closer to you than your *Marassa*. Closer than your shadow.... You and I we could be like *Marassas*. (85)

Martine's invocation of the *Marassas*, the twins of *vodou*, signifies her inability to distinguish the boundaries between herself and Sophie and inscribes her fear that Sophie will abandon her for Joseph: "The love between a mother and a daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man [Joseph is about the same age as Martine] who you didn't know the year before" (85). While the trope of the *Marassas* has been analyzed by Veve Clark to describe a way of reading that reaches beyond the master/slave binary, in

Breath, Eyes, Memory, the *Marassas* signify a psychic merging of mother and daughter (see Clark, 1991).

Because Martine does not experience herself as separate from Sophie, she dissociates herself from the pain and humiliation she inflicts during the testing. Although Martine later acknowledges that she hated the testing, she is unable to prevent herself from punishing Sophie for the rape. For Martine, the rape and testing are inseparable. In an effort to apologize to Sophie, she says: "I did it [the testing] because my mother had done it to me. I have no greater excuse. I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related.... The testing and the rape. I live both every day" (170).

Just as the *Marassas* serve as mirror images, as doubles, the trope of doubling also emblematizes the psychic merging that takes place between mother and daughter. While Nancy Chodorow has documented the difficulties surrounding separation in the mother-daughter relationship, Jessica Benjamin notes, "The mother cannot (and should not) be a mirror; she must not merely reflect back what the child asserts; she must embody something of the not-me; she must be an independent other who responds in her different way" (24). Benjamin's theory imagines a mother whose independent center exists outside her child. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the novel, since. Martine cannot distinguish the difference between her self and her daughter. Sophie internalizes the self-hatred Martine projects onto her and wonders whether she and Martine are indeed *Marassas*, twins:

> Some nights I woke up in a cold sweat wondering if my mother's anxiety was somehow hereditary or if it was something that I had "caught" from living with her. Her nightmares had somehow become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we hadn't both spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl. (193)

Sophie's internalization of her mother's self-hatred creates a painful sense of isolation and fragmentation. As a coping mechanism, she learns to "double," to split off from herself. Alice Miller describes this splitting defense as the child's attempt to escape annihilation. When she makes love with her husband, Joseph, Sophie doubles: "I was lying there on that bed and my clothes were being peeled off my body, but really I was somewhere else.... I was lying in bed with my mother. I was holding her and fighting off that man, keeping those images out of her head" (200). Sophie becomes mother to Martine, consoling her mother for her pain.

While the rape is the pivotal event of the novel, it has occurred some 12 years prior to the time the plot begins. Although the rape is not represented directly, it shapes the consciousness of the Caco women. The story of the rape is told and retold in varying detail. Atie tells it to Sophie as a fairy tale, the *conte* of the little girl born from rose petals and a chunk of sky. Martine fills in some

of the horrifying particulars shortly after she and Sophie are reunited in New York: "The details are too much.... But it happened like this. A man grabbed me from the side of the road, and pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body. I was still a young girl then, just barely older than you... I did not know this man. I never saw his face. He had it covered when he did this to me" (61). Ultimately, Sophie completes the retelling:

> My father might have been a *Macoute*. He was a stranger who, when my mother was sixteen years old, grabbed her on her way back from school. He dragged her into the cane fields, and pinned her down on the ground. He had a black bandanna over his face so she never saw anything but his hair, which was the color of eggplants. He kept pounding her until she was too stunned to make a sound. When it was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threatening to shoot her if she looked up. For months she was afraid that he would creep out of the night and kill her in her sleep. She was terrified that he would come and tear out the child growing inside her. At night, she tore her sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares. (139)

The narration of this story functions in various ways. In telling the truth of what happened to her mother, Sophie claims the rape as her heritage and names it in ways that her mother cannot. At the same time, she acknowledges the tremendous pain her mother has suffered. In so doing, she can begin the slow, difficult process of separating as her mother's *Marassa*; of recognizing that not she, but a nameless, faceless man, was the cause of Martine's suffering. Unlike Sophie, Martine cannot free herself from the story of the rape. When Martine discovers that she has become pregnant, this time by Marc, a man she knows and cares for, the memory of the rape becomes overwhelming and in a blind terror she stabs herself in the belly. She is the woman who cannot stop bleeding, the woman whom Erzulie transforms into a butterfly. Martine can be free only in death.

Sophie's liberation is negotiated through narrative, through the first-person telling of her journey, and through her understanding of the ways in which it frames the interpolated tales. She is not alone on her quest for healing and freedom. In a gesture of apology for the testing, Ife gives Sophie a statue of Erzulie, saying, "My heart, it weeps like a river for the pain we have caused you" (157). Sophie joins a sexual phobia support group, in which women from other countries, such as Mexico and Ethiopia, share their experiences of violation, rape, and genital mutilation. Ultimately, Sophie learns to recognize that not only is she not responsible for Martine's suffering, but that she cannot save her mother. When Sophie takes Martine's body to Haiti to be buried, she recognizes that, at last, her mother is at peace. Sophie is finally free from the burdens of the past, free to write a new story for herself. Ife's final words to

Sophie are: "There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question, '*Ou libere?*' Are you free, my daughter? . . . Now you know how to answer" (234).

Telling the story creates a space for the writing of another script, one marked by hope for a better future. Sophie vows that she will never test Brigitte, that her daughter will not suffer as she did. Although Sophie's coming-of-age involves a rejection of the role of *Marassa,* she does not reject Martine. On the contrary, she claims her place as her mother's daughter and as a daughter of Haiti:

> I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place where you carry your past like the hair on your head... My mother was as brave as stars at dawn. She too was from this place. My mother was like that woman who could never bleed and then could never stop bleeding, the one who gave in to her pain, to live as a butterfly. Yes, my mother was like me. (234)

Sophie's growth into womanhood involves compassion for her mother as well as forgiveness as she comes to know the ways in which they are alike, yet separate.[8]

As storyteller and mother-artist, Sophie binds the threads of the interpolated stories into the fabric of the larger narrative. This technique establishes her connection to her family, to the brave women of Haiti, and to the oral tradition she has inherited. Sophie is the lark who has flown away and the girl who returns home, but unlike the girl of Ife's embedded story, Sophie is not a prisoner of the past. She understands that she draws strength from her connection Haiti and the traditions that nourished her. A mother and daughter of the land, she will tell a different story to her daughter so that Brigitte will truly know what it is to be free.

[1]For a fuller analysis of the mother as artist, see Gerber (1999).

[2]Freud was unable to imagine the mother as anything other than self-effacing and self-sacrificing. In *The Bonds of Love* (1989), psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin revises Freud's position on mothering and grants the mother an active role in the infant's psychological development. In her theory of intersubjectivity, motherhood is constructed as a position of mutuality, in which the infant actively engages the mother's interest and attention, implying that the mother is more than a receptacle for the infant's needs and demands.

[3]Davies and Fido note, in their introduction to *Out of the Kumbla ,* that the autobiographical mode of narration, which predominates in novels by Caribbean women, is particularly suited to the woman's introspective journey (1990: 5).

⁴In reading this scene, it is difficult not to think of Audre Lorde's autobiography, *Zami* (1982), in which Lorde uses her mother's pestle and mortar as erotic instruments. While she grinds spices in the bowl, she thinks of her mother, which produces an array of erotic sensations. While the scenes in the two texts differ—in one the pestle produces pleasure, in the other, pain—they both employ the pestle as a symbol of connection to the mother.

⁵This story provides echoes with a short story by Isak Dinesen, "The Blank Page." In the story, a group of nuns produce a linen so fine it is used for the bridal sheets of royalty. After the wedding night, it is displayed to attest to the virginity of the princess and returned to the convent, where a piece of the stained sheet is framed above a nameplate and hung in a gallery. Gubar says that Dinesen's story illustrates the model of the pen-as-penis writing on the virgin page, a paradigm which inscribes the male as author-subject, the female as text-object (1981: 295).

⁶Wall (1989) uses the term "motherline of culture" to designate a tradition of black women's art. She also cites Susan Willis's coinage of the term motherline.

⁷For the different relation of Afro-American women to literacy and literary production in the United States, see Bassard, 1992.

⁸O'Reilly describes a similar process in Toni Morrison's *Jazz:* "'Violet is able, at last, to understand, know, and name her mother's pain because she has lived it. This realization marks a vital mother-daughter connection.... With identification comes understanding, and from this forgiveness" (1996: 371).

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Jennifer Harris

Reading Mobility, Motherhood and Domesticity in Four African American Women's Texts

In the chapter titled "Mobility, Embodiment and Resistance: Black Women's writing in the U.S." in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* Carole Boyce Davies considers questions of Black women, maternity, mobility and literature. Arguing that the contemporary tendency to read geographical movement as a masculine trope and interior movement as "feminine" is artificial and unsatisfactory, Davies instead attempts to create a space for reading "movement" as complicated, and *always* present in a variety of overlapping configurations. She writes:

> The question of journeying in Black women's writing in the United
> States offers a variety of possible understandings of internal migra-
> tions, historical displacement, captivity and agency. The specific
> conditions of U.S. slavery and the (im)possibility of escape, including
> the mythical meanings of the North and freedom, embedded move-
> ment in the consciousness of a variety of narratives and cultural
> products. (1994: 130)

Intrinsic to any understanding of the possibilities of women's movement is motherhood. Continues Davies: "Since one of the impediments to women having the ability to travel is their children and/or societal constructions of motherhood, then it is important to examine how some of these conventions are either supported or rejected in [these] texts" (1994: 135). While Davies is interested in reading contemporary "re-memberings" of slavery for how mobility and motherhood are represented—notably Morrison's *Beloved* and Williams' *Dessa Rose*—I would like to utilize her observations as a "jumping off" point for the examination of four period texts which examine how the "cult of true

womanhood" had at different historical moments both liberating and limiting consequences for those African American women able to access it and the social mobility it promised. Maternity is, of course, central to the secular but spiritualized domestic realm and the elevated role ascribed to African American mothers via both the ideology of true womanhood and the doctrine of racial uplift. Through reading two texts from the early 1890s and two published in the late Harlem Renaissance for their representation of mobility and maternity, as well as the domestic/familial realm and women's relation to labour within that realm, I hope to begin to map how African American female novelists represented the bourgeois domestic world over a 50-year period.

The earliest genre in which Black women published in any significant number was the slave narrative, where their status under slavery as laboring objects was exposed. Within their narratives many women emphasized the debilitating and often crippling drudgery they often endured, including Sojourner Truth and Mary Prince.[1] Narrators like Harriet Jacobs were well aware of how much the status of their white "mistresses" as "ladies" was dependent upon the labour performed by Black slaves. Harriet Beecher Stowe parodied this dependency in her novel of Black revolution, *Dred,* when discussing John Cripps:

> He was the son of a small farmer of North Carolina. His father having been so unfortunate as to obtain possession of a few negroes the whole family became ever after inspired with an intense disgust for all kinds of labor; and John, the oldest son, adopted for himself the ancient and honorable profession of a loafer. (1999: 130)

"Labour" was therefore "raced" as well as "classed" in American culture. "Ladies" did not labour, or if they did, were not to appear to have laboured, according to the domestic ideology of the "cult of true womanhood" which defined (white) women as domestic angels, and mothers of superior moral quality. Narrators like Jacobs, Prince, Truth and others undermined this image of white women as angelic beings through their recounting of temperamental outbursts, petty jealousies, and outrageous cruelties. Furthermore, slave mistresses' maternal instincts were revealed as racially limited in scope. (When Ellen Craft had to leave her sick infant alone to wait upon her mistress's dinner party, her child died.[2]) Nevertheless most female narrators often—though not always—attributed these instances and deficiencies to the institution of slavery, which, they argued perverted all with whom it came into contact. In turn, the narrators attempted to argue for their own worthiness for inclusion in the cult of true womanhood, and to claim its benefits and protections for themselves and their children. However, the inclusion of formerly enslaved women was problematic. Harriet Jacobs' argument for her inclusion accounts for the impossibility of meeting many of the criteria of "true womanhood" under slavery.[3] However compelling—and correct—her argument might be, it points

to a central deficiency in nineteenth-century white American discourse: the categories of "lady" and "slave" were understood to be mutually exclusive. Women "marked" as slaves—in any number of ways—could not easily shed this status, or reconcile their legal servitude with "ladyhood."

This is perhaps why, in her 1891 novel, *Iola Leroy*, Frances Harper creates a character who is only briefly enslaved, and altogether unaware of her mixed race background during her formative years. Iola is the daughter of a white slave owner, and a light-skinned former slave, whom he has educated, freed, and married. Educated in the North, Iola and her siblings only learn of their maternal heritage when their father dies and his unscrupulous cousin has his marriage declared invalid, and Iola, her mother and siblings declared property. Kidnapped from the North by men who continually remark on her gracious manner and ladylike posture—usually in conjunction with an estimation of her dollar value (1992: 77-8)—Iola is sold to a series of men who try unsuccessfully to make her their concubine. Saved quite literally from being whipped (and therefore being irrevocably marked as "property") by the outbreak of the Civil War and the intervention of a Union general, Iola becomes a nurse in a Union Hospital. There her racial status is concealed[5] and a white Northern doctor falls in love with her and proposes marriage. Iola refuses his offer and instead sets out to reunite her family, eventually marrying a light skinned doctor and establishing a family, which she presides over as a vision of ladylike virtue. Legally "enslaved" Iola nevertheless avoids being marked as such due to her complexion, education and history. It is therefore possible according to the conventions of the day for Iola to be a conventional literary heroine—a lady— according to the "cult of true womanhood."

In contrast, *Megda* by Emma Dunham Kelley is set in post-Reconstruction America. Megda and her family inhabit a racially exclusive middle-class community. The novel follows her high school graduation class as one by one they commit to the church, and eventually to marriage and motherhood. Troubled Megda is reserved about religious conversion and the limits to her independence that it inevitably poses. Her conversion, when it does happen, is met with joy by her friends and a sense of relief on Megda's part. Her marriage to a Reverend is followed by two children and the adoption of a wayward friend's child, and the novel closes with Megda, who once dreamed of being an elocutionist, instead presiding over an idyllic domestic sphere. Throughout the novel Megda is not confronted with any challenges to her status as "lady"; she is not only post-slavery, but her world also lacks the presence of whites who might impose racial stereotypes or indignities on her as a Black woman. Even a train trip to the resort Cottage City (a thinly disguised Oak Bluffs) is free from inter-racial interaction, or the mention of Jim Crow segregation.

Both *Iola Leroy* and *Megda* have been criticized for their fair-skinned heroines and privileging of genteel manners. Later authors and critics have dismissed them as bourgeois, but it is that bourgeois impulse that provides the most interesting point of entry, as their engagement of the "cult of true

womanhood" has potentially liberating consequences for these heroines, particularly in relation to earlier images of black woman as dehumanized labouring bodies. In *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* Claudia Tate suggests that the Black novels of "genteel domestic fiction" that blossomed in the 1890s reflect the viewpoint that full citizenship would come as much or more from adopting the "genteel standard of Victorian sexual conduct" as protesting racial injustice (1992: 4). She furthermore identifies the "idealized domesticity in these novels as a fundamental cultural symbol of the Victorian era, for representing civil ambition and prosperity as a nineteenth century metonym for proper social order" (1992: 5). Therefore, according to Tate's reading, the domestic is an allegory for the national, whose house needs order restored through the progress of committed Christianity and devotion on the part of its inhabitants, a fitting solution to the fracturing of slavery and the Civil War. As Abraham Lincoln noted, "A house divided cannot stand." Tate's reading is astute, explaining the unrealistic plots and romanticized tone of these novels, and locating their value in the ways in which they accessed assumptions about racial advancement and the family, crafting collective fantasies which African Americans could share (1992: 7).⁶ These idealized narratives speak more to the role of African American women than African American men, however, and can therefore be read as allegories primarily in relation to the former's lives. They open up a space in which to discuss the subjectivity of Black women's lives *not* in relation to the physicality by which white America most often defined them, but rather in relation to family, motherhood, and domestic space, a space radically different and potentially more liberating than the public sphere. However temporary this liberation may be.

The nineteenth century move to industrialization marked the severance of the home and family from the realm of economic production and had definite consequences for the understanding of family, motherhood, and the individual, particularly for the middle and upper classes. (While this was obviously not as pronounced in the pre-Emancipation South, or other rural areas, they were not immune to the ideological implications, particularly post-Emancipation.) According to Gillian Brown, *in Domestic Individualism: Imaging Self in Nineteenth Century America*, the rise of domestic ideology means that the "self is defined as an entity distinct from economic activity, articulated through the organizations of private life. Furthermore, "within these organizations—home, the family, religion, sexuality, health—selfhood depends upon its severance from the world of work, a severance reflected in the individual's difference from her body" (1990: 63). Self is therefore defined entirely through the private realm, which provides a safe haven from "the market exchanges which depersonalize and dehumanize bodies" (1990: 64). Brown's explanation of domestic ideology as physically alienating and "private" renders transparent its appeal to the heroines of *Iola Leroy, Megda,* and others, as African American women have been historically too often defined solely in relation to their bodies, their labour, and their perceived or actual lack of privacy. "Privacy" of course,

also includes the private territory of the body, which cannot be interpreted as a commodity if it is removed from the public sphere to the domestic realm.

For Iola and Megda then, the process of creating and maintaining their own private space is fundamental to establishing their own subjectivity and interiority. However, that Iola and Megda are able to successfully "move" from the public realm into the private is a result of the financial security that both cement through their marriages. They also embody the movement of racial uplift in their establishment of prosperous African American homes and families where children can be nurtured by their mothers, and succeed accordingly. Alienation from their physical labour is not a concern, as nineteenth-century literature is full of heroines whose fingers dance while arranging their hair, who whip up new dresses with great ease, or create a meal from "nothing" with tremendous energy and grace. What is notable in African American women's literature, in the 1890s, is that it is Black women doing these things in their *own* homes and kitchens. The transition from slavery to freedom is the transition from the disorganized and laboured kitchen run by Aunt Dinah in Stowe's (1981) *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to Megda's own ordered household.[7]

Ordering the domestic is crucial to both books, but more so to *Iola Leroy*, where the title character's mission is to re-order her family, which has been separated by slavery. As a freed black woman Iola has great mobility which she employs in her search, but it is always apparent that her end goal is establishing a secure domestic world. Crucial to establishing this domestic order is the process of reuniting mothers with children—not only is Iola reunited with her mother, but her grandmother is also restored to the family. Maternity is what binds African American families the text argues, as characters refuse inheritances if it means denying their mother's race (Harper, 1992: 179, 198), condemn slavery for the cruelty it inflicts upon mothers (1992: 148), and articulate their commitment to Blacks in America through the figures of Black mothers (1992: 152). It is therefore not surprising that the "move" to the domestic that Iola makes, is most particularly a move to Black mothering, and the private domestic realm of the Black family. Iola is constantly misrepresented by others, as a free white child, as a slave, as a white Southern woman (in the Civil War hospital where she works), in Northern stores, and is asked by the white Northern doctor to misrepresent herself for the purposes of marriage. The Black family and its domestic realm, however, are the only safe spaces where she can represent herself "naturally" without fear of betrayal. Betrayed already by one white family, she cannot enter another, as maternity and its possibility of birthing a child who showed colour might reveal her as one who "laboured" to be white. For Iola, to "pass" for white—this time consciously—invites a second exposure and expulsion, and the denial of family, factors which for Iola outweigh any privileges she might accrue.[8] Instead Iola devotes herself to her maternal race, and commits herself to racial uplift activities directly concerned with practices of "good" mothering. Racial uplift ideologies in fact marry nicely with the discourses of domesticity and true

womanhood, defining Black women's role as "domestic educator, Christianizer, and civilizer of the home" as a means of doing "lasting service for the race" (Tate, 1992: 98). External activities, therefore, always reflect back to the establishment of a private domestic realm where children are in turn nurtured and prepared to succeed, and then establish their own safe familial realm in which the process will repeat itself, spreading exponentially according to the rhetoric of racial uplift. To this end, Iola presents a paper on "The Education of Mothers" and praises her future sister-in-law's establishment of a school to train future wives and mothers. These are, of course, remarkably class-based activities, and these two women, both of whom are "ladies" but neither of whom are "mothers" are uniquely suited to their role of teaching other women to perform their duties decorously and gracefully without the appearance of coarseness or effort. The ability to do so will enable women to raise their class status, and "move forward" to matrimony and child rearing, their logical progression towards self-fulfillment, according to contemporary discourses.

Megda also "moves forward" in the novel towards marriage and motherhood, but it is notable that where Iola works to reunite her family, Megda's family—minus a deceased father—is intact. Instead Megda's quest or journey is spiritual in nature, though she is initially unaware of it, wanting to marry a wealthy husband and perform as an elocutionist. But the text demonstrates that she has to relinquish her dreams of the public in order to attain a successful private life and be the perfect lady—and by extension mother and wife—that she aspires to be (Kelley, 1988: 135). In the process, she must sever herself from her body and her physical impulses. Kelley provides us with a middle-class African American conversion narrative, however *Megda* differs from its predecessors in that it portrays the conversion of a young middle-class respectable girl. She does not face the difficulties of a Truth, Jarena Lee or Maria Stewart.[9] Nor does she have to overcome the prejudices that Iola does, inhabiting an apparently racially homogenous world, though both heroines are equally invested in the rhetorics of motherhood and racial uplift. Rather Megda has to overcome herself, not unlike Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.[10] However, unlike Jo, Megda does not struggle with domestic tasks or femininity. Her "white" hands, often remarked on as a signifier of racial ambiguity in the text, also signify her uncompromising femininity. This evangelical heroine must nevertheless be converted to see the superiority of the domestic realm. Megda must learn to privilege her soul over her body, which responds rapturously to music, and is enchanted by dancing. (It is notable that the character who most successfully does this is rewarded with the ultimate separation of the soul from the body—death.) That Megda is able to subjugate her body is represented as the spiritual triumph of the novel, and she vows to never again leave the tight geographic domestic circle of family and school friends. That she does temporarily leave her community towards the end of the novel only serves to demonstrate the rightness of her decision. She answers the death bed request of a school acquaintance who has lived a "life of social pleasure

and excitement" (Kelley, 1988: 301, 367) and is now reaping the "reward." The coarseness and dissipation of the dying woman is contrasted with the "fair" Megda who, despite her modest life and maternity, retains her graceful charm and figure. Domesticity triumphs, and Megda's life as we witness it demonstrates her worthy progression towards motherhood.

Both *Iola Leroy* and *Megda* close with the idealized and valorized portraits of motherhood and domesticity common to African American women's literature in the late nineteenth century, offering both hope and escape to their readers in the face of a post-Reconstruction backlash. By the early twentieth century, however, African American literature was not as hopeful, and was significantly less idyllic. Langston Hughes captured this questioning age in his poignant question "What happens to a dream deferred?" (1987: 268). The self-sacrifice that women were encouraged to practice had in fact *not* been unilaterally liberating. As a result, literary representations of the domestic realm and women's roles as wives and mothers are not portrayed so uncritically. In Jessie Fauset's (1969) *Comedy American Style* and Dorothy West's (1982) *The Living is Easy* the domestic realm, one of the limited outlets available to its female inhabitants, is represented as claustrophobic and stifling.

The Living is Easy is the tale of Cleo, who journeys North, as a domestic in the Great Migration, in order to secure greater opportunity for herself. She marries into middle-class Boston, and manipulates and schemes to secure greater social opportunity and security for her daughter, Judy. Her outward appearance is that of a woman engaged in racial uplift through the domestic realm; she has most definitely "risen." And yet this proscribed path proves unsatisfactory to Cleo. Her domestic realm is represented as a prison, and she continually journeys inward to her childhood and sisters in the South, whom she has left behind. Central to her remembering is her mother, from whom this journey upward (both in geography and class) has alienated her. Cleo plots and reunites her sisters and their children—minus husbands—in her Northern home, as a means of re-living her childhood. The children become insurance for Cleo—they are expected to memorialize and testify to her success. Yet Cleo has destroyed their homes, and the children are not appropriately grateful for the opportunities proffered. These opportunities are not achieved without great labour on Cleo's part, and this is where West's novel differs from the two others discussed previously. Unlike Megda and Iola, Cleo obviously labours to achieve her goals, and perceives of it as such. This dismissal of the domestic as a magical realm where tasks are performed effortlessly is a radical departure from the world of earlier romanticized African American heroines.

Likewise, Jessie Fauset's (1969) *Comedy American Style* also breaks with romanticized heroines, some of whom populated Fauset's earlier fiction. Olivia Blanchard Cary also exerts great efforts to control and define her domestic realm. The light-skinned Olivia marries a light-skinned doctor as a means of "raising" her unborn children—all the way to white. Her household becomes a place where she attempts to teach her children the value of "living white."

Betrayed by her own body into bearing a child who "shows colour," Olivia passes Oliver off as the Mexican butler to her unsuspecting white friends. Eventually Oliver commits suicide when the truth becomes apparent to him, and her husband suffers a breakdown. Olivia separates another daughter from the man she loves, marrying her to a white man in France, severing familial ties due to the deception. Her remaining son and his wife take in Olivia and her husband, as Dr. Cary's breakdown financially ruins him. Olivia's efforts to transform her "black" domestic realm into a white one fail, and at the close of the novel she is exiled from the familial altogether, isolated in France. Her efforts to enact a perverse form of racial uplift fail, but moreover her desires testify to the failure of racial uplift to facilitate equality between the races, and the vulnerability of the domestic realm to pressures of the outside world.

That the domestic *is* vulnerable is key to reading these two later texts. Megda valorized the domestic as a projection of the wife and mother's interior life, and therefore demanded that the mother not be "of the world" as she might in fact "contaminate" her family and home. However, both Fauset and West's texts uphold the same tenant, while arguing that as the mother *can't help* but be of the world, the domestic is necessarily not a secure and contained place. Furthermore, the domestic has the possibility to reflect the mother's dissatisfaction, and in fact, the way in which the mother's role is categorized within is a possible cause of that same dissatisfaction. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way the women's work is both valourized and devalued by the cult of true womanhood, which views women's roles as "natural" and therefore "effortless" and lacking in labour. But it is obvious that the more dissatisfied these characters are, the more their efforts are represented as laborious. That both Cleo and Olivia are depicted as labouring mothers—whether labouring on behalf of good or evil—is in fact an explicit revision of the fiction of the 1890s. Furthermore, the laboured efforts of these women to also deny their bodies (which evolves into Olivia's denial of her son) calls into question the value of this practice. Devalued as occupiers of the domestic realm, but limited in their options for acceptable forms of escape, Cleo and Olivia desire an unarticulated "more." As their desires exceed what the domestic realm can offer, the domestic itself becomes uncontainable, "acting out" in unacceptable ways: Oliver's suicide at home, Dr. Cary's breakdown, Cleo's loss of control of her extended family, the attempted lynching of her brother-in-law, and the need to take in boarders to support the family she has manipulated into joining her in the North.

Ironically, the promise at the end of each novel comes from a female character who attempts to balance both the domestic and the external world of wage earning. Their identities and self-esteem are represented as dependent upon this recognition of their value not only outside of the home, but also for what they can contribute to its maintenance as wage earners. The outside world is not without temptation, as *Comedy American Style* suggests when its female wage earner nearly succumbs to a sexual affair, but the secure domestic realm

is a source of strength and sustenance which lends its heroine the ability to resist. Likewise, in *The Living is Easy*, the outside world has the potential to reduce workers to their occupation, but they have the potential to choose to derive pride from their status as wage-earners which gives them power within the domestic realm.

These later novels do not romanticize the home and maternal in the same way as *Megda* or *Iola Leroy*, but nor do they romanticize the marketplace which select characters enter. If journeying is to be read as a complicated trope in African American women's literature—complicated by the reality of maternity and the demands of the domestic among other factors—then we need to pay close attention to the worlds this literature gives us, and how characters negotiate their roles within their worlds. In addition, we must consider how the domestic is not isolated from the operations of the outside world, but in fact highly invested in and reflective of those operations, both historical and contemporary. Only then can we begin to unpack these historically rich texts for what they have to tell us.

[1]Both authors are careful to link their physical problems to the physical abuse endured under slavery.

[2]While this piece of information was absent from the Crafts' narrative itself, it was public knowledge, suggesting that the Crafts may have shared it while touring on the Abolitionist circuit as speakers.

[3]When discussing her sexual history and illegitimate children conceived with one white man in order to attain his "protection" and avoid the advances of her owner, Jacobs writes "Pity me and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave." It is this knowledge, I would argue, that marks Jacobs ideologically as slave and keeps the category of "lady" out of her grasp, even after achieving freedom.

[4]It should be noted that it is not Iola who conceals her status, but the hospital commander, Col. Robinson (45).

[5]At the same time that *Iola Leroy* and *Megda* were published, Ida B. Wells produced her documentary critique of the practice of lynching. Wells work reads as a counter-narrative to the idealized domestic novel, disrupting the fantasy of a safe contained familial realm, and deserves to be read more closely in tandem with the domestic fiction of the era. Nevertheless, Wells' text certainly emphasizes the appeal of a form of fiction that provides its readers with escapist fantasies, no matter how temporary or transparent they are.

[6]In *Iola Leroy* Aunt Linda, freed by the Civil War sustains herself as an entrepreneur caterer, allowing her to produce effortless elaborate meals for her surrogate children. For more information on Aunt Dinah's kitchen as a metaphor for slavery, see Brown (13-38) and Wardley.

[7]Passing and the tragic mulatta heroine have a long history in African American fiction and literature. The heroine light enough to pass for white was used in

Abolitionist writings to evoke the sympathy of white women through the process of identification. In later fiction, passing often functioned to signal the arbitrariness of racial distinctions and to disrupt notions of essentialized racial differences. By demonstrating the fluidity of racial boundaries, passing also calls into question the legal attempts to contain and regulate racial difference. However in much of African American fiction passing is represented as exacting a psychological price from those who engage in it long term, as demonstrated in the classic *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson and *Passing* by Nella Larsen. For more on the phenomena on passing, see *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg.

[8]For a more extensive discussion of racial uplift ideology, see Gaines (1996: 19-46).

[9]Jarena Lee and Maria Stewart were both African American authors of spiritual narratives in the nineteenth century, and contemporaries of the better-known Sojourner Truth (Peterson 1995: 56-87)

[10]Recent readings of Little Women draw on the uncovered gothic tales of Alcott and find reason to read Jo's reformation as, in fact, a veiled gothic tale. This is not my suggestion in comparing the text to *Megda*. However, Harper was no doubt familiar with the text, and alludes to it as next door to Megda, called "Meg" throughout the text, lives an eventually orphaned "Laurie" who marries into Megda's family.

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Brigitte H. Bechtold

Mothers in the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston

Sociologists and feminist scholars portraying the black mother are faced with a number of stereotypes, on the one hand, and images of motherhood in the twentieth century shaped by predominantly white women's studies scholars, on the other. While black feminist scholars and post World War II literary authors like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have gone a long way to dismiss such stereotypes, their work was itself influenced by earlier writing, in particular that of Zora Neale Hurston, the premier black female literary author, alternately described as ethnographer,[1] anthropologist and *griot*,[2] who emerged during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Hurston's work, especially her three major novels and a few of her short stories, contain many examples of the black mother in the first, second and third generations following the end of the Civil War. Although the novels and short stories were published as fiction, the characters, locations and settings were generally taken from Hurston's own experiences, and her writing is invaluable in forming an understanding of experiences faced by blacks, including the black mother, during the first half of the twentieth century.

Following a brief description of common stereotypes and misconceptions of black mothers in the U.S. popular media, this paper turns to the character-istics of the black mother identified by black feminist scholars, such as Patricia Hill Collins (1991; 1999). The following section analyzes the importance of Hurston's work in understanding and describing black mothers in the period after emancipation. The particular roles of bloodmothers and othermothers in her fiction, and the similarities in the plight of mothers and childless women are also outlined, and a conclusion is proposed in which the importance of literary authors like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and others is emphasized as a source of information for sociologists and feminist/

womanist scholars aiming to understand the struggles that black mothers, black women in general, and their white counterparts face in a society that retains strong elements of both patriarchy and racism.

Black mothers: common myths and images of social control

A commonplace image of black mothers held by the white majority is that of the welfare-receiving single parent. When asked to describe the origin of the high incidence of single-parent black households, this same majority tends to engage in vague backwards projection linking today's family patterns with a perceived origin during the times of slavery and emancipation. Further prodding might bring to light conceptions about disruptions of family life during slavery, giving rise to matriarchal households, a pattern retained after emancipation (Kain, 1998: 318-9). However, Gutman (1976) documented that, contrary to popular belief, matriarchal households were not commonplace during the last decade of slavery and the first generation of emancipation when nine tenths of black households either had both parents present or contained a father living with his children.

How and why did myths such as the matriarchal family emerge? Patricia Hill Collins (1999: 142-148) explains that the image of the black matriarch, together with that of the mammy, and the welfare mother, is part of an elite white male ideological portrayal of black women's sexuality, which serves to maintain race and gender oppression. Indeed, the black mammy is invariably portrayed as very dark and heavy set, supposedly not sexually appealing to the white male who covets the slender Barbie image. She is, however, the ideal domestic servant, available 24 hours per day and never demanding a rise in pay. The matriarch and the welfare mother also portray a negative view of the black mother: that of the woman who does not control her sexuality and number of offspring and who is both an "emasculator" of men and a financial liability to responsible hardworking mainstream society. Even scholars who did not consider themselves racists bought into the matriarch viewpoint, with devastating political consequences. Thus, Patrick Moynihan's[3] report of 1965 on the *Negro Family* fostered the idea that the matriarchal black family structure, rather than outright racism lay at the foundation of economic problems faced by African Americans. This negative image of black mothers is further augmented by views that they insufficiently discipline their children, defeminize their daughters and generally discourage their children's academic achievement (Wade-Gayles, 1997: Chapter 3). The dominant white public is thus conveniently left with the hardworking non-complaining domestic servant image as the primary positive portrayal of the black mother, in short, a happy slave. Black men have tended to paint a positive image, which is also biased, namely that of the black mother who has insurmountable strength and genius (Collins, 1991: 117).

To form a more realistic image of the black mother, and her changing role from slavery times through emancipation and into the twentieth century,

requires familiarization with and appreciation of black culture, and development of an understanding of how the interplay of racism, sexism and poverty affect women's treatment of themselves and their children. Let us take a look at black feminist views of the various facets that make up black mothers and then, turn to illustrations of these facets in the characters of Hurston's short stories and novels.

Motherhood in black feminist thought

The negative image of black mothers has increasingly come under attack by sociologists and other scholars of the black family, especially since the 1970s. Reaction to well-intentioned books, like Moynihan's, and examination of the women's movement's achievements also brought to light a subtext of white racism in the scholarship resulting from the movement. As bell hooks put it (1981: 124), feminists must seek to understand "woman's relationship to society, to race and to the American culture as it is and not as we would ideally have it be," and Patricia Hill Collins (1991: 115) added the charge that black feminists need to "honor our mothers' sacrifice by developing an Afrocentric feminist analysis of Black motherhood."

The institution of black motherhood can be seen as a dynamic set of relationships with several enduring characteristics at their core. First, motherhood consists of the role played by bloodmothers and that of supportive so-called othermothers in the extended family,[4] who can be siblings, grandmothers, or neighbors (Collins, 1991: 119). Second, mothers socialize their children to survive in a world fraught with racism, patriarchy and the uneven distribution of wealth (126). Third, black mothers foster creativity and strength in their children, i.e., they are mothers to the minds as well as to the bodies of their children, and they themselves are endowed with strength and social status. Fourth, beyond the immediate family, community othermothers may play an important role in social activism (130-2).

These characteristics of black motherhood are apparent in the work of Dill (1979), Wade-Gayles (1997) and others. They are also present in the work of feminist and womanist literary authors, and Zora Neale Hurston's work provides early illustrations, many of which are taken from her real life surroundings.

Motherhood in Hurston's fiction

With Hurston's renewed popularity and the reappearance of her work since the 1970s,[5] came many essays and books analyzing her life and work. Notable among these are Wall (1974), Walker (1979), Hill (1996), Cronin (1999),[6] and Meisenhelder (1999). Most scholars of black fiction who have viewed Hurston's work with a feminist lens have, however, focused on women who have liberated themselves, primarily from patriarchal oppression. This means that the majority of scholars have focused their attention on various aspects of the character of Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.[7]

However, Janie was not a mother (her first husband was too old, and by the time she met Teacake, she herself was probably beyond her childbearing years), and this fact made her liberation easier than it would have been had she borne children.

It is relevant to examine Hurston's fiction in relation to motherhood, for several interrelated reasons. First, Zora Hurston reached adulthood in the second generation after the Civil War ended. This was a time when black mothers could emotionally afford and needed to nurture and love their children in an environment that was relatively safe from forced separation of parents and children effected by slave owners. Thus one could reasonably expect to observe their children reach adulthood. Second, Zora herself may have been a mother in her younger and not well documented adult years. While she does not mention this in her autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road*, published in 1942, this book is so characterized by posturing and self- concealment,[8] that the probability of her own motherhood cannot be dismissed. Third, the figure of the child sometimes appears as a metaphor in Hurston's work. As a case in point, Ray, the deformed and retarded child of Arvay in *Seraph on the Suwanee* is a stand-in for the obstacles caused by and to be overcome in Avray's quest for freedom from objectification and ridicule by her seemingly perfect husband, Jim Meserve. Children and men, especially husbands, are something to grow beyond if women are to obtain emancipation in Hurston's books. In a further metaphor, Zora Hurston herself can be viewed as the Renaissance Mother to a generation of great feminist black artists, including Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, who have themselves vividly described socio-economic difficulties faced by black mothers in their own well known books. Finally, Hurston's fictional and autobiographical descriptions of mothers form a set of examples of changing historical patterns of black womanhood that illustrate several, if not all of the characteristics outlined by Patricia Hill Collins (1991; 1999), Gloria Wade-Gayles (1997), and other black feminist scholars.

Motherhood in the Short Stories

Hurston's depictions of women as mothers in her short stories (see the collection *Spunk: the Selected Stories of Zora Neale Hurston*, 1985) are incidental and fragmentary. Violence against and economic exploitation of women is the rule in these stories, some of which are set in the rural black community of Eatonville, Florida, while others take place in Harlem during the Renaissance. Motherhood is mentioned only in passing in the popular stories. In *Spunk*, the protagonist Lena Kanty is told by Spunk (1985: 3) that "A woman knows her boss an' she answers when he calls," and in *Sweat*, Delia Jones's husband squanders his earnings on other women while Delia provides for his and her own support by picking up laundry from white families on Saturdays, laundering all week and delivering it back to them the next Saturday, in an endless cycle. On top of this, her husband plots to kill her so he can have the house to share with another woman. Motherhood is touched upon briefly in some of the other

stories. In *Isis*, the protagonist seems to have a non-present father, but nothing is mentioned of her bloodmother. Isis herself is being raised by Grandma Potts, a typical othermother. In the short story *The Gilded Six-Bits*, motherhood is also mentioned, but only in passing: When Missie May becomes pregnant (she is "making feet for shoes" in Zora Hurston's colorful language), the main question explored is whether she is carrying the child of her husband Joe or of the overweight ("puzzle-gutted") Otis Slemmons, whom she let share her bed because she coveted his gold coins (which turned out to be gilded quarters). The baby turns out to be the "spittin' image" of Joe (1985: 67), and the relationship between husband and wife is mended. There is brief mention of Joe's mother and several older women who take care both of the house and of Missie May while she is recovering from childbirth. In fact, Joe's mother helps reinforce the idea in his mind that the baby does indeed look like him, in spite of the fact that she "never thought well of you marryin' Missie May cause her ma used tuh fan her foot 'round right smart and Ah been mighty skeered that Missay May wuz gointer git misput on her road" (1985: 67).

Motherhood in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and other Hurston novels

The only book to prominently feature black motherhood is *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, published in 1934 as Zora Hurston's first novel. While it is not the most popular of her work, it is important in that it is to some extent autobiographical. The setting of the town is a collage of various towns near Eatonville, Florida. John Pearson is modeled after her philandering charismatic preacher father, while his child-wife Lucy even has the same name as Zora's own mother. John's character combines an African tradition, which blurs the distinction between body and spirit, with a Puritan outlook and a vivid white-evangelical preaching style.[9] There are several mothers in the story in addition to the central character Lucy.

John's mother, Amy Crittenden, is a sharecropper's wife who well remembers slavery conditions. While it is not called *rape* in the story, it is made clear that John was fathered by the white plantation owner, a fact that is used among many others to incite violence on the part of Amy's husband, Ned. Hence, he is called the "yaller child by Ned, "uh 'nother man's youngun (Hurston, 1971: 14). Since Amy was 12 when Lee surrendered (1971: 15), she was still a child when she became pregnant. Despite Ned's repeated violence against her: "you needs uh good head stompin'"(1971: 10), Amy stands up for her son against her husband's violence, saying, "Ned Crittenden, you raise dat wood at mah boy, and you gointer make uh bad nigga outa me" (1971: 12). She also tries to instill in her husband the need to love children in these new post-slavery times (1971: 16): "Us chillun is ourn. Ah doan know, mebbe hit'll take some of us generations, but us got tu 'gin tu practice on treasurin' our younguns. Ah loves dese heah already uh whole heap. Ah don't want 'em knocked and 'buked." Here, Zora Hurston is pointing out a critical aspect of emotional adjustment made by black mothers in the first generation after emancipation.

Lucy Potts is also a child about to become a mother. John meets her almost immediately after leaving "over Big Creek" with the support of Amy, who knows that this is the only way she can keep protecting him against his stepfather's violence. Lucy is almost too perfect: she is smart and perfect at spelling (1971: 54), sings beautifully in church (1971: 56) and is calm and self-assured, although she is not yet twelve years old. Yet, she considers herself ready to become a woman as soon as she "finds a hair on her body, and notices tiny horizontal ridges had shifted her bust a step away from childhood" (p. 116). In fact, when they get married, John declares (1971: 131) "Ahm gointer be uh father and uh mother tuh you. You jes' look tuh me girl chile. Jes' you put yo' 'pendence in me. Ah means tuh prop you up on ev'y leaning' side."

Lucy was still growing, up to the time when her third son was born (1971: 138), and weighed a slight 95 lbs. after having delivered her child. Throughout Lucy's childbirth experiences, with her husband turning more and more into the philanderer, an othermother assists with the births and the housework. She is Pheemy, a woman raised on the same plantation where Emmeline hailed from. When she meets John after he leaves his family, she declares "Ahm yo' 'granny!" (1971: 160) and she is by Lucy's side on numerous occasions.

While the character of Lucy Potts-Pearson is almost too perfect and can be criticized for being too much like the biased image painted by black men of the mentally and physically strong black mother, Lucy is much more than that. She embodies several of the overlapping characteristics of black motherhood pointed out by Collins (1991) and others. Like John's mother Emmeline had done before her, Lucy protects her children and provides them with a spiritual and creative boost into their own future. In a manner similar to Zora Hurston's own mother Lucy, the fictional Lucy tells her daughter Isis (1971: 206): "...'member tuh git all de education you kin. Dat's de onliest way you kin keep out from under people's feet. You always strain tuh be de bell cow, never be de tail uh nothin' ". Yet Lucy also readies her children for the prejudiced exploitative world they are going to have to live in. Above all, they must learn to fend for themselves (1971: 207): "You got de spunk, but mah po' li'l' sandy-haired chile goin' suffer uh lot 'fo' she git tuh de place she kin 'fend fuh herself."

Not to be ignored in the discussion of motherhood in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is John's third wife, Sally Lovelace, who seems to him a reincarnation of his beloved Lucy.[10] In several ways, Sally functions as an othermother to John's neglected children. She not only rescues the fallen John financially and emotionally, explaining (1971: 298) "[w]ho else Ahm goin' tuh spend it [my money] on? Ah ain't got uh chick nor uh chile 'ceptin' you," but she also provides for Lucy's seven children in the end. After John gets killed by the train, a perhaps fitting end that may also have been the result of a voodoo spell, Sally decides (1971: 310) that the substantial sum of $7,000 which the railroad has paid to compensate her for John's death, will be given to John and Lucy's children.

It is possible to draw parallels between several of the protagonist heroines

of Zora Hurston's three basic novels, although only Lucy Potts and Amy Crittenden of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* were black bloodmothers. The other two women heroines, Janie Crawford and Arvay Meserve, share with these black bloodmothers a quest for liberation in a patriarchal society that exploits people according to gender, sex and race. The three children of Arvay in *Seraph on the Suwanee* can be likened to the three husbands of Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Moreover, all of these women had to leave before they could attain a form of feminist liberation: Lucy left in death, Arvay left Jim Meserve to reflect on the fact that she could attain her own liberation without having to change her selfish irresponsible husband, and Janie Crawford left one husband, and buried two others, and returns to town a strong and vindicated woman, albeit one who may herself be dying of rabies after having been bitten by Teacake. The similarities between all of these women, regardless of their race and motherhood status, is not central to the subject of the present paper, however, and they will not be entered into further detail here.

Conclusion

Black mothers in Zora Neale Hurston's fiction portray several, but not all, of the characteristics described above as central to the institution of black motherhood. Clearly present is the relation between bloodmothers and othermothers. Furthermore, both bloodmothers and othermothers socialize children to learn to function in a world where patriarchy, economic exploitation and racism are the rule. Mothers also help their children to visualize being the "bell cow" despite obstacles they have to face when leaving the family fold. What we do not find in Hurston's fiction is the characteristic of the *community* othermother who is central to feminist and race activism. This is not surprising, because Zora Hurston herself never engaged in activism designed to force whites to integrate with the black community. Hurston believed and showed through her writing that African American culture is wonderful. In the long run, the realization on the part of whites of the importance, the dignity, the history, and the beauty of black culture will make whites *want* to integrate. Not surprisingly, Zora Hurston strongly opposed the *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. As Bob Callahan states in the foreword to *Spunk*, "[Zora] generally grew so self-reliant in her politics, so singularly determined in her belief in the dignity and independence of Afro-American culture, that she came to vigorously and publically oppose the famous Supreme Court ruling..." (1985: xi). In her view, blacks cannot gain self respect knowing that others are associating with them because of a court order rather than because they want to. Zora Hurston's writing contributes to instilling a desire to *want* to associate with the people she describes, and her portrayal of motherhood is part of this achievement.

When placed in its historical context of the first few generations after the end of slavery, and taken together with the work of other black feminist literary authors, notably Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou, the stuff

of Zora Neale Hurston's literary fiction becomes an important source of information guiding sociologists, cultural anthropologists and feminist scholars in general who aim to increase their understanding of the institution of black motherhood in American society over the last century.

[1]See, for example, Hill 1996: ix and xxiii. The headstone message for Zora Neale Hurston's presumed grave site, written by Alice Walker, describes her as " 'A Genius of the South': Novelist, Folklorist, Anthropologist" (1979: 307).
[2]The term *griot* refers to the African storyteller, who transmits cultural history and folklore in the form of a combination of one-person theater and storyteller, with a format that retains strong traditional elements (e.g., prescribed ways of beginning or ending the story that is being told).
[3]See Moynihan (1966). Also see Ginsburg (1989) for an analysis of the enduring influence of this report.
[4]The role of othermothers has traditionally been important in West African culture.
[5]Hurston's most popular novel remains *Their Eyes were Watching God*, first published in 1937. Her other two major novels were *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). She began publishing short stories in 1921.
[6]A collection of recent critical essays on the work of Zora Hurston, including those by Pinckney, Story, Strong and St. Clair.
[7]The entire book is included in the collection of Hurston's work edited by Cheryl Wall (1974). Examples of literary analyses focusing on the emergence of Janie Crawford's consciousness are provided in the essays of Missy Dehn Kubitschek (1983), Sally Ann Ferguson (1987), Erik Curren (1995), and Meisenhelder (1999).
[8]See Mary Helen Washington's commentary in the introduction to *I Love Myself When I'm Laughing* (Walker 1979: 7-25).
[9]See Larry Neal's introduction to *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1971: 6).
[10]Now that he is freed from the voodoo spells exerted on him by Hattie, he recognizes how he has wronged his dear wife Lucy, with whom he spent 22 years of marriage.

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Joyce MacIntyre

Spirit Wisdom

Grandmother
Your spirit touches us
Grant us the wisdom
to embrace our weaknesses
to revel in our strengths
for we are universal mothers
caring for all our children

Grandmother
Grant us the wisdom to overcome
our diversities
to reach beyond ourselves
to empower our children
releasing us from our guilt

Grandmother
you touch us with your spirit
allow us to be one with you

Dolana Mogadime

Black Girls/ Black Women-
Centered Texts and Black Teachers
as Othermothers

"I feel we should all know about black history. We don't learn it in
school and nobody cares about it...but I care so I want to know...."
(Marie-Jolie Rgwigema Didas is 12 years old. The Black Girls, 1995:
25)

"I want to add that while it's hard to be black, it's hell to be a black
woman. You get double the pressure. If we do get to learn black
history, we're probably going to learn about the men first. I want to
come closer to home, to learn about black women's history, I can relate
to a black woman because my mom is one." (Tovah Leihas Dixon is
15 years old. The Black Girls, 1995: 26)

"We fought for a year to get a black history course put into the
curriculum...Then we found out it wasn't a black history course, but
a regular English course that would sometimes use books by black
authors." (Jillian M. Dixon is 19 years old. The Black Girls, 1995: 27)

**Hearing their voices demanding the inclusion of black
women's history**
   While researchers concerned with redressing gender inequities in the
curriculum of public schools increasingly caution practising educators to
acknowledge that "gender is only one of girls" identities (Bourne, McCoy,
Novogradsky, 1997) and that race and ethnicity are also of central importance,
black girls in Ontario schools are still having to speak loudly and insistently in
opposition to a curriculum which excludes black women's lives and realities. In
the excerpts above from *Black Girl Talk*, Tovah, Jillian, and Marie-Jolie (The

Black Girls, 1995) powerfully represent resistant voices of black girls in schools today who explicitly challenge the absence of black women centered studies in classroom texts.

In this paper, I focus on examining the counter hegemonic process by which a group of grade eight black girls from Highgate School (located in Southern Ontario) and their South African/Canadian teacher called upon and connected with black women centered texts. Their engaged readings of texts authored by writers of the African Diaspora, were part of an emancipatory process which they actively claimed while working toward confronting gendered racial exclusion in their experiences of the official school curriculum. In the process of rendering important the selection of black women centered texts they re-interpret and challenge their silenced realities on two sides of the Canadian educational experience as black students and teachers.

The present paper is informed by a series of in-depth conversational interviews (Holguin and Uttal, 1999) I had with my mother, Goodie Tshabalala Mogadime, which detailed her community othermothering/ black feminist work in education (Mogadime, 1997) teaching a lunch time and after school drama program to adolescent black girls who were not her regular classroom students).[1] I use the term "community othermothering"[2] to signify ethics of caring which black women teachers[3] impart to black children as a part of their "commitment to the survival and wholeness of the communities" children (Henry, 1998). At the same time, Goodie's struggle for the transformative education of black girls also intersects with black feminists agenda for the education and social transformation of black women from gendered racial oppression (Omolade, 1987).

At the time when this research was conducted in 1996 (from June–October), Goodie taught a grade six class in a suburban, middle class, multiracial school setting. The school had a high ratio of first generation students of Caribbean and South Asia descent. Goodie's unofficial work outside the "normalised" curriculum of the school with "the Black Adolescent Drama Group" or BAG, led to a student production of the play "When the Rattle Snake Sounds" by African American playwright Alice Childress (1986) and demonstrated the productive roles black women educators play, when they incorporate othermothering and black feminist subject positions into their teaching. The ways in which these subject positions inform student teacher relations speaks to the transformational possibilities black educators offer to black students in terms of changing their experiences of marginality.

BAG's access to black women's literature and their narratives of resistance and struggle presents the opening up of oral genres "within the homeplace" that are critical for black female adolescent socialization toward self-definition, critical voice and community activism (hooks, 1990). Black feminists have argued that the development of these identified skills are vital for young girls full participation in furthering their own social, political and economic empowerment, as well as that of other black women and the communities of which they

are a part (Radford-Hill, 1986). However othermothering black children of the Diaspora occurred for both teacher and students under conditions in the school which were layered with racial tensions. As the only black teacher in a staff of white teachers whose pedagogy paradoxically embraced "multicultural" education, on the one hand, while omitting black studies with the other, Goodie's work involved "teaching against the grain" of a token "inclusive" education. Othermothering and student resistance to selective inclusion provided the link between self and social empowerment. Students and teacher were positioned in a struggle to gain voice in determining what is "legitimate knowledge" (Perry and Fraser, 1993) for them to learn within the school. In the process they claimed an active role in defining for themselves "what narratives are important" to learn in relation to their own lives.

A textual analysis of "when the rattlesnake sounds'

The play selected and performed by the Black Adolescent Girls Drama Group entitled "When the Rattlesnake Sounds" by African American playwright Alice Childress can be singled out as part of Diaspora maternal revisionist history. In an essay entitled, "A Woman Playwright Speaks Her Mind," (qtd. in Barlow, 1994: 469) Childress addresses her commitment to working toward revising the denigrated image of black women and mothers as the nameless and voiceless. In her role as "black literary mother," Childress envisions liberatory ends for the young black audience she directs her work to. Similar to other black women writers who envision their task as writing the literature they wished they could have read as young girls (Walker qtd. in Collins, 1991: 13; Shange qtd. in Lester, 1995: 28, Morrison qtd. in Birch, 1994: 149), Childress documents the significant role black women have played in history. Childress's characterization of black women in her plays attempts to: "... better tell her story, with the full knowledge and appreciation of her constant, unrelenting struggle against racism and for human rights" (Childress qtd. in Barlow, 1994: 49).

The characters in the play, "When the Rattle Snake Sounds," represent black women dynamically positioned as actors in history, working in opposition to racial and gender dominance, particularly in the lives of children held in the bondage of slavery. The setting of the play is Cape May, New Jersey, close to the abolition of slavery. This play highlights the involvement of freed black slaves in the abolition movement. More specifically, it reflects black women's activist role in the emancipation of themselves (Shadd, 1994), and their commitment to "the upliftment of the race" (Bristow, 1994b: 69). Hence the underlying theme of the play is black women's demonstration of leadership and resistance amid larger structural forces which contribute to their personal experiences of gendered racial oppression.

Two women, Lennie mature (in age) and Celia (a youth), join Harriet Tubman at a hotel in Cape May to work as washerwomen. The extremity of the physical hard labour is heightened by their objective to use their payment to

contribute toward the underground railway—an underground network designed to support run-away slaves (including young children) escape to freedom. The women's individual reaction to the demands of the work contradicts the notion of black women as a homogeneous group under the rubric of "strong" women. At the opening of the play, Celia, the youngest of the three women, loses sight of the purpose behind the work, and is about to give up "the good fight," as a result of becoming too "bone-weary" from the physical demands of cleaning "four bundles of wash" a day (Childress, 1986: 57).

The scene deals with at least two interrelated concepts which are historically relevant to black women's maternal consciousness; first, the need to articulate racially located experiences of oppression through the female bonding genre of storytelling within the homeplace is raised; second, the revelation of storytelling as a visionary tool for teaching revolutionary maternal critical consciousness, for both the liberation of oneself and the community's children, is highlighted. The main character, Harriet Tubman, narrates her own personal struggle against racism and sexism in a story form. She does this in order to nurture a critical oppositional standpoint in the life of the two women (characters) who are listening.

Harriet draws from black women's cultural understanding of leadership, and a critical oppositional consciousness, in order to become an agent of change in her community. The notion of community othermother and cultural worker operate as interlocking subject positions for both self and community empowerment. Harriet underscores a cultural understanding of black women's leadership in her storytelling dialogue with Celia. Her aim is to renew Celia's waning commitment to work toward the freeing of other blacks held in the oppression of slavery:

"Give me your hand Celia. Look, see the skin broken across the knuckles. Counta you some man or woman gonna have warm socks and boots to help em get to freedom. See the cuts the lye soap put in your skin. Counta you some little baby is gonna be born on free soil. It won't matter to him that you was afraid, won't matter that he did not know your name. Won't nothin count ceptin he's free. A livin monument to Celia's work" (Childress, 1986: 74).

In this excerpt, we gain an inside view into black women theorizing their political activities in ways that signal a self-identity which merges the lines between self and one's role in relation to a larger community in struggle (Collins, 1991). This scene is a reminder of what Radford-Hill tells us "... since our earliest recorded history, black women have collectively structured roles within self-identity that assured the survival of our race" (168).

In this narrative, Harriet uses the genre of storytelling, black women's traditional role for the teaching of young, as a visionary tool to strengthen the young Celia in her political convictions for the survival and the continuity of the race. Once more, she authors her own stories of her "collectively structured self-identity role" (Radford-Hill, 1986), as an othermother and community leader, in order to influence the women listeners to envision them-

selves in the same way.

Tubman also retells the story of how her own revolutionary actions, leading hundreds to freedom from the "slaver," became acclaimed even among men in the abolitionist movement. Harriet narrates her own autobiography with the intention to guide and initiate the young Celia into social activism. As such, she uses her power to influence Celia, by becoming an othermother to the young girl, rather than coercing her into compliance, as does the second mature female character.

In this play, Childress demonstrates how the oral genre of storytelling has been shared by black women in intimate safe spaces with one another, as mother and daughter, and sister to sister, as more than a continuity of indigenous practices. Storytelling in the homeplace also plays an important role in teaching critical [maternal] consciousness and is central for "renewing our political commitment" (hooks, 1990) during the process of continuing the motherline into the next generation.

The dialogue between Harriet and the young Celia, confirms the necessity for teaching a black women's maternal knowledge to young black girls. In their attempts to grope for structures of meaning and self-definition (hooks, 1990: 48), this knowledge furthers their own growth as young women. The textual analysis of the play "When the Rattle Snake Sounds" which I have presented, demonstrates the ways in which black women's literature opens up counter narratives "within the homeplace" and exposes the young reader to these. That is, this literature provides knowledge of black women's maternal knowledge and the development of critical oppositional consciousness, all of which is crucial for black female adolescents developing notion of an empowered self definition.

Finding their power through black women's literature

In this section I discuss how Goodie's students experienced the critical storytelling genre as a source for self and community empowerment. I am basing my discussion here on Goodie's observations of her students experiences of self transformations which she believes grew out of their exposure to black women's literature (Goodie qtd. in Mogadime, 1997):

> *The idea that black women showed strength and challenged racism in the face of oppression and brutality made them to want to know more. It gave them the vision and the strength to want to claim the savvy they came to know as theirs too.*

In the excerpt above Goodie discusses the BAG Drama Group's engagement with the Childress play and how it assisted them in locating their own struggle for voice as young black females. The desire to write resistance scripts amid discourses that subjugate black women's lives marks the intergenerational struggle of black females, therefore, seeing themselves in relation to this

historical struggle of black women held transformative possibilities for these adolescent learners.

The exposure to black women's history of activism allowed them the opportunity to claim the tradition of black women's assertion of critical voice and community leadership as their own. This comes through in Goodie's observations of the group: "They wanted to be unafraid and powerful like those women and it really showed through in their desire to take on leadership roles in the school." Goodie suggested that providing black female students with the access to knowledge about black women in history characterised as "bold and brave," gave her students "the power to take on an issue without being afraid and run with it" (qtd. in Mogadime, 1997). She conveyed the view that "as these girls presented the play they took over the women's lives." That is, they enacted a mode of consciousness where they felt they were empowered, to bring out their own talents and abilities.

Knowledge of black women's leadership became a bridge to self-discovery in the way black literary mothers envision for their black female readers (Lester, 1995: 29). In this way, Goodie's observations (see Mogadime 1997) connect with black women writers vision of their work for young black female audiences. Their vision and hope (as literary mothers) for young girls is that their work will assist them toward a self-discovery that includes building their confidence about themselves and their possibilities as self-reliant black females (29). A pedagogy of hope, rising out of the maternal literary lessons for young black girls, has also produced a literature which aims to assist them in discovering a greater self-knowledge (Childress, 1986; Shange, 1975). Black women-centered literature not only aims to assist girls in the development of a critical awareness of their racial and gender location, it also attempts to assist them in cultivating an inner self-definition which they can use in their own lives in order to resist domination. In other words, these counter narratives provide a pedagogy of hope, which envisions transformative possibilities for their female reading audience.

Goodie recounted the way in which yhe BAG Drama Group's participation in the play influenced areas of their learning outside the context of the play in positive ways. For instance, the girls involved with the performance were among those selected to present public speeches for senior school competition. They were also chosen to introduce their classes during their graduation ceremony. In Goodie's view, the memorization of an enormous amount of lines for performance had also offered them the opportunity to develop in the area of public speaking. They had further learned that they could project their voices and articulate with confidence in public settings. Goodie:

> Black students really need drama, they need to develop that self-concept, they need to go up on stage and really let go, and find themselves, it's an incredible way of developing self concept, drama and theatre. When I went to the Bahamas I discovered that the

Bahamian schools are very much into drama, and that they are promoting it in their schools. In fact we read several Bahamian plays together before the [BAG] Drama Group decided on the Childress play about Harriet Tubman.

They preferred it because it involved an almost all female cast and, since they were basically a group of friends wanting to put on a play, it suited their purposes best. In the play a group of women are having a conversation about their years in slavery, and how they felt about it, they talk about it and sing about it. Singing is a way of healing. They were healing themselves, it was a way of survival, it was a way of saying that in spite of all this we know that we can do it. And the students, just got right into that.

They chose gospel songs from the churches where they come from. And they are blacks from different areas, some are Guyana…One girl was from Somalia, she brought in drum music. We all talked about how we might incorporate this piece of music into the play.

Really this project was grounded in their own personal experiences, so that was very exciting for them…. The project was theirs. They decided what props they would use and what kind of attire they would wear in order to suit the time period of the play. They really showed an incredible amount of initiative in deciding to do this project and orchestrating it. (Goodie qtd. in Mogadime, 1997).

A new sense of confidence grew out of the girl's participation and performance of the play. The BAG Drama Group responded to invitations to perform, "When The Rattle Snake Sounds," in various public venues. Within this capacity, they experienced the process of dynamically reaching out into the community as leaders among their peers. As an outcome of their participation they were provided with the opportunity to begin to envision their own ability to engage in the much needed work of raising community awareness about black women's history and contributions. The BAG Drama Group's participation in the play and the resulting community activism meant that they were provided with experiences in their youth of coalition building with and for black females. These kinds of early experiences might inspire young black females toward participation in community development, in the black Diaspora, as adults (Radford-Hill,1986; Collins,1991).

In her work with young black girls in the Diaspora, Goodie envisions the future of young black girls as leaders of their communities. Similarly, the vision to create leaders who are committed to changing the position of black women and their communities is also a central concern of black feminist pedagogy (Radford-Hill, 1986). What the story of the BAG drama Group does is to help illuminate the ways educators might begin to explore the links between self and social empowerment(Giroux, 1988: 134) for black female students, as it is made possible through the provision of black women-centered materials. Black

women centered material provided the members from BAG with a context for an empowered black female socialization because the thought and action arising from black women's day to day grounded experiences are documented into stories written by black women authors.

Today's schools can become more responsive as democratic institutions in relation to the black community, by providing black female students with a black women-centered curriculum. Seeing women as actors in history becomes a bridge for black girls own self discovery by assisting black females to locate themselves, their hopes, and their possibilities as actors in the world. In this way, their voice, desire and interest connect to the larger minority community struggle for democracy, equality and social justice.

The notion that "teachers are human beings who bring their cultural perspectives, values, hopes and dreams to the classroom" (Banks, 1991: 139) does not necessarily mean that a teacher has to be black and a feminist in order to deliver a curriculum which assists black female youth in their development of empowered self-definitions and leadership. It does however mean that white educators, as the majority of teachers who teach black female students, need to arrive at the point where they can openly learn and accept a knowledge basis which is informed by black women's location and their role as othermother in their relations with black students. As Henry (1993) points out in, "Missing Black Self-Representations in Canadian Educational Research," restructuring the curriculum" to include black women's voices and issues does call for "new paradigms" and "new frameworks for understanding teaching and learning in multiracial urban contexts" (207).

[1]The interviews draw from a larger oral history project in which I document my mother's life and work as a change agent in educational institutions both in South Africa (the place she will always call home) and Canada (the country we emigrated to in 1970) (see Mogadime 1997).

[2]In traditional African societies, community othermothers accept a culturally based maternal responsibility which extends beyond one's own children to other children from the community. According to African American (Collins, 1991; Gikes, 1989) and African Canadian researchers (Henry, 1992a, 1992b), the manifestation of community othermother in Americas is a recreation of traditional African women-centered social networks and community based child care (Henry, 1992a: 30). These researchers apply the term community othermother in order to explain the cultural dimension expressed through black women's community activism. The sense of cultural accountability inspires black women to become community leaders, "in response to the need of their own children and of those in their communities" (Gikes qtd. in Collins, 1991: 131). Community othermothers model a value system in leadership, which is based on connectedness with others and ethics of caring and personal accountability that are intended to move communities forward.

[3]Attempts to redress the gaps in research about teachers which omit the contributions of black women educators in Canadian history, has inspired a recent African Canadian "revisionist" scholarship Bristow, 1994; Cooper, 1991, 1994; Henry, 1992a, 1993, 1996, 1998; Shadd, 1994). The first aim of this specialized academic research community is to open up inquires into the otherwise hidden lives of black women educators. Afua Cooper (1994), in her research on Mary Bibb, one of the most influential black women educators in the nineteenth century Canada West, and Peggy Bristow (1994b), in her study of black women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65, identify the historical ideological commitment of black educators as aimed toward the improvement of their race or "race upliftment" (Bristow, 1994b: 115). The collective ideology of the black educated middle class of which teachers were a part was to commit themselves to elevating the social, economic and physical conditions of the poor.

The studies in this research community are significant in that they demonstrate how Canadian black educators" work with black children is historically informed by a larger politic, which is to better the position of black people and children in particular. These aims, as they have been raised by researchers, reaffirm (Perkin's 1983) comparative analysis of how black women teachers in the Americas aspired to a different agenda than white teachers. While white women's "professional model" in the early nineteenth century was articulated through the "cult of true womanhood," black women were encouraged to become educated for the "upliftment" of the race (Bristow, 1994). According to Henry, black women educators continue to do race uplift work by envisioning education as a means to liberate black children from racial, social and economic imbalances in society.

Henry shows how black children in the Canadian school system are subjected to processes of reproduction which position them in society. For instance, she points out that: "... [A] low percentage of African Canadian youth enter university and a great percentage of black youth experience unemployment" (1992a: 3). These implications arise out of black students experiences of exceedingly "high drop-out rates, low self-esteem, an over representation in low academic streams, and lower academic achievement than other racial/ethnic groups" (Toronto Board of Education qtd. in Henry, 1992a: 2). In her doctoral research, Henry studies the life history and teaching practices of five black women teachers. She focuses on examining how their daily lives are: "...[C]ontemporary examples of a tradition of black women teachers as cultural workers [othermothers] and activists both in their mainstream professions and in alternative community sites. Their steadfast political work has contributed significantly to black cultural survival and social transformations" (4). The social transformations which Henry theorizes on, are rooted in the committed work of black women teachers. Henry advances the idea that the teachers she interviewed live varied sites of consciousness as black mothers, teachers of black children, and community othermothers (88) which help them to reshape the

curriculum to meet the need of [black] children (8). Henry identifies their task as black educators as that of "taking back" control of black children's education from the hegemony of Eurocentric educational institutions. These teachers, like my mother, are politically committed to working toward changing the marginalized experiences of black students in the Canadian educational school system.

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Book Reviews

The Joys of Motherhood

Buchi Emecheta
Oxford: Heinemann (African Writers Series), 1979

Reviewed by Merryl Hammond

This book, somewhat ironically titled *The Joys of Motherhood*, tells the difficult life-story of a strong-minded but very traditional Nigerian woman, Nnu Ego. Born in a rural village, Nnu Ego is married off to a man she has never met, who lives in Lagos, a rapidly changing urban centre.

We follow her story through frequent pregnancies, the deaths of two children and grinding poverty. She copes alone, while her husband is a soldier in World War II, adjusts to being the "senior wife," when her husband takes other wives, and manages the stresses of living under colonialism, where new values clash with the old.

The story describes as arranged marriages, bride prices, polygamy, naming ceremonies, tribal prejudices, family violence, medicine men, racism, and sexism. A girl is, quite literally, the property first of her father and then her husband. ("Nnaife is the head of our family. He owns me, just like God in the sky owns us.") Initially, schooling for girls is unheard of. A wife is expected merely to "bear children, keep his [husband's] room clean and wash his clothes." (If she were "beautiful and quiet he calculated [that] as an added bonus.") Giving birth to a girl-child is considered a waste of time and energy. A girl's only use is to help her mother and bring a good bride price in an arranged marriage. Only by birthing a son does woman become "a real woman." Motherhood is the only legitimate aspiration for women. A woman who works outside the home for a meagre income (hawking firewood, for example) is often judged to be neglecting her children.

The author uses aptly poetic language: "His tongue was biting like the edge of a circumcision blade", "those breasts, two beautiful firm mounds on her chest looking like calabashes turned upside-down", "her love and duty for her children were like her chain of slavery."

Many mothers will identify with Nnu Ego's wry observations: "When the children were good they belonged to the father; when they were bad, they belonged to the mother", "If you don't have children the longing for them will kill you, and if you do, the worrying over them will kill you", "Some fathers... can reject a bad son, a master can reject his evil servant, a wife can even leave a bad husband, but a mother can never, never reject her son. If he is damned, she is damned with him", and about a woman staying in a loveless marriage, "We tolerate each other for the children, just for the children."

Woven throughout the story are the author's own reflections on traditional African society's view of women as second-class citizens. Her feminism is clear in the thoughts she ascribes to Nnu Ego: "I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband—and now I have to include my sons. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build."

"When We Chose Canada": A Mother and Daughter Share Stories That Shaped Their Lives In Their New Homeland.

Sherry Ramrattan Smith and Rose Bickram Ramrattan
Waterloo: Pandora Press 1999.

Reviewed by Laura Thomas

In 1969 the Ramrattan family – mother, father, daughter, and son – left politically unstable Trinidad to find a better home in Canada. In this self-published excerpt from her Master's thesis, Sherry Ramrattan Smith shares her story and her mother Rose's story about adjusting to life in Canada as immigrant women of colour. In the tradition of feminist collaborative research, Ramrattan Smith analyzes how daughter and mother adapted to and con-structed meaning in a hegemonic, white society by juxtaposing and including simultaneously a "daughter's take" and a "mother's snapshot" of their experi-ences. Through this exploratory, qualitative, approach she is able to tease out of these personal narratives issues such as perceptions of freedom, acceptance and identity, emotional trauma, "Canadian-ness," and skin hue in relation to citizenship.

Along with the personal desire to live and express agency, voice and empowerment, a major purpose of this work is to help educators understand the special needs, particularly self-esteem issues, of immigrant students of colour and their parents. The author does this by including a thought-provoking

section that discusses the pedagogical implications of the personal narratives. She also provides her own reflection notes and questions for further discussion. Like the issues she is trying to expose in this work, the entire research process is deliberately transparent and accessible. *When We Chose Canada* is a conceptual springboard into the following social phenomena: patriarchy and the role of the patriarch in immigration, racism and immigration, acceptance into Canadian society, roles of women in the family, and independence and empowerment for immigrant women.

Indeed, to make this book an even more valuable tool for educators and female immigrant students, it would have been helpful to situate its discussion in the history of Canadian immigration, from 1969 to the present and the rise of "multi-race" anti-racist pedagogy, both in the academy and at the community level. Primary and secondary sources relating to the evolution of these broader themes during the last 30 years, would have helped situate Smith Ramrattan's excellent work in a larger political context. The contrived timelessness of the personal narratives (stories and/or memories) weakens her argument because it brings into question the external reliability of these narratives; the reader is not given evidence to back up the women's stories. While the stories are excellent examples of how the personal is political, "creating an inclusive educational system where each person is valued and accepted for their [sic] contributions" (70) cannot be done by the sharing of personal stories alone, these stories must be contextualized in time, space, and place.

This book makes an important contribution to maternal scholarship because it includes both mother's and daughter's voices and the experiences of an immigrant mother and mother of colour in Canada. It is also a helpful example of co-authorship and intergenerational communication between mothers and daughters, and highlights the importance of family stories as a site of knowledge and identity (re)production.

Immigrant Mothers: Narratives of Race and Maternity 1890-1925

Katrina Irving
Urbana IL: Univeristy of Illinois Press, 2000.

Reviewed by Jennifer Harris

The title *Immigrant Mothers: Narratives of Race and Maternity 1890-1925* might be slightly misleading: Katrina Irving's study has little to do with the lives of actual immigrant women. Instead, Irving takes as her subject turn-of-the-century cultural representations of immigrant women and men as imagined,

represented, or deployed by social scientists, in their representation and discussion of contemporary America. Exploring the various popular discursive positions as manifested in six key literary texts, Irving demonstrates how general cultural anxieties about consumerism, urbanization, industrialism, increased immigration, and the future of America are played out through the image of the racialized immigrant woman.

This deployment of the figure of the immigrant woman, according to Irving, is central to understanding the construction of various discourses around race, ethnicity, and nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Irving draws particularly on the novels of Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Harold Frederic, and Frank Norris, as well as the documentary photographs and accompanying text by activist Jacob Riis, to demonstrate the degree to which culturally current discourses and anxieties about immigration insinuated themselves into popular culture forms. Her analysis of Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* illustrates that despite Frederic's sympathy towards Irish immigrants and the "civilizing" influence their rich cultural heritage might have on American culture, in his work he nevertheless reproduces the nativist argument that a declining Anglo-Saxon American population is endangered by the "feminizing" and "weakening" influence of immigrants. Likewise, Frank Norris's classic *McTeague* and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* suggest that the American-born daughters of non-Anglo immigrants are only superficially "civilized" and/or "Americanized," and, in fact, pose a lurking danger to the racial purity of the nation, given their inevitable regression to type. That in each instance, it is the immigrant woman, not the immigrant man, who serves as an agent of racial degeneration, emphasizes her very gendered construction as the principle threat to American civilization. Nowhere is this more evident, Irving postulates, than in the construction of the overly fecund immigrant mother and her concomitant potential for mongrelization, miscegenation, and race suicide.

While the image of the immigrant mother is not as central to Irving's project as the title of the book suggests, she nevertheless explores it as an important contested site in the arguments of nativists, Americanizers, and cultural pluralists alike. Furthermore, just as the discourses of these different groups impacted literary imaginings of immigrant women, so too did these rhetorical constructions affect the actual physical realm, in the enacting of particular kinds of social reform directed towards immigrant women and mothers.

Immigrant Mothers resonates with both historical insight and contemporary relevance. Irving's discussion of the role of sociologists and policy makers in normalizing and nationalizing discourses of racialized motherhood, as well as public debates about the supposed national threat posed by "foreign" immigration exactly a century ago, echoes contemporary American fears of displacement in the face of new waves of immigration from non-white, non-

Anglo countries. And though an imaginary and highly racialized "welfare queen" continues to be paraded in front of conservative American constituents, the affirmation that the image is neither new nor original in its construction, use, or purposeful deployment, provides little consolation. Lack of consolation aside, Irving's book is a theoretically and historically astute investigation of the gendered and racialized fears of immigrant women, at one particularly charged moment in American history.

Mothering Teens:
Understanding the Adolescent Years

Miriam Kaufman, ed.
Charlottetown, PEI: gynergy, 1997

Reviewed by Ruthe Thompson

Anyone familiar with children aged 10 to 21 will appreciate this collection created "not to tell you how to parent, but to help you understand the process of adolescence" (Kaufman 7). Editor Miriam Kaufman, a pediatrician at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Toronto, gathers a diverse group of women to provide a comprehensive look at shepherding children through the transition to adulthood. As these 21 essays demonstrate, it is no easy task. President of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, Debra Haffner comments in an excellent essay on sexuality that teens can feel "omniscient, omnipotent, and invincible" (82). Kaufman underscores this point in the overview of adolescent development that opens the volume, reminding readers like me, mother to children aged 16 and 13, that "'When you're parenting a teen, every time you think you've got it right, you realize you are an asshole!'" (15).

Constant reassessment of household attitudes, rules, and expectations emerge as key themes in essays like, Cheryl Littleton's piece on adolescent drug and alcohol use, Jacqueline Haessly's discussion of teens and violence, Kathleen McDonnell's article on rites of passage, and Merryl Bear and Kaca Henley's cautionary tale about body image. We remember that adolescents double their body weight while surrounded by media prescriptions of unrealistic physiques. We read that teens need privacy, independence, and freedom to develop decision-making skills. We read about the strictures of gender roles and learn, perhaps contrary to parental fantasy, that "more than 80 percent of North Americans first have intercourse as teenagers," making quality health education vital (Haffner 88). In provocative essays by Gail Winter and Pat Watson we are schooled in the challenges of raising aboriginal teens and on attitudes about

racism. We get solid suggestions from Alison van Nie about teen explorations of spirituality, and an indispensable reminder from Carol Ricker-Wilson that high-schoolers still need parental advocacy.

At times, however, the volume fails to comment on its own contradictions and focuses on the anecdotal, at the expense of larger trends. With the notable exception of Bridget Lynch's moving memoir of a daughter with developmental delays, the collection's autobiography seems limited to scant historical or statistical information. And I was surprised by the strange juxtaposition of Martha Fleming's article on economic class and Tara Cullis's chapter on activist teens two essays later. Cullis, president of the philanthropic David Suzuki Foundation, is married to its founder and discusses her daughter's journey toward activism and documentary television stardom via hard work by mother and daughter, to be sure, but also through familial connection to Suzuki, a scientist and television broadcaster whom Cullis never mentions specifically. Having been thoroughly engaged, a few pages earlier, by Fleming's account of her struggle with her husband to provide opportunities for their children on a working-class income, it is difficult to care about the exploits of a nine-year-old so fortunately connected that a wealthy donor would offer $1000 for her environmental activism trip to Rio during a visit to the Suzuki family foundation (246).

Despite this criticism, *Mothering Teens* fulfills its editor's mission to explain why our children behave as they do, and to help us mother more intelligently. Kaufman "envision[s] this book being passed across back fences, being discussed in line at the bank or being argued about at church potlucks" (10). My volume has already traveled over one back fence into the hands of a colleague with a 13-year-old daughter, and she will pass the book on to a mutual friend. Let the conversations begin.

Weaving Work and Motherhood

Anita Ilta Garey, 1999,
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Leigh M. O'Brien

As its title indicates, this book details the interconnectedness of "working" mothers' professional and personal lives. Garey uses the international metaphor of weaving, as it is both a process and product. She notes that many women have followed a life pattern that is not linear and often have made life changes dictated by others' circumstances (e.g., a husband's job transfer; a child's graduation from school); but she contends nonetheless that women

make conscious, deliberate choices within the framework of their lives. The women she interviewed "are weaving patterns in which employment and mothering are not two independent lines but are overlapping, interwoven, and entangled."

What is **not** clear is that the women Garey refers to in her title are all hospital workers. I feel she ought to have provided a subtitle indicating this focus. Although some general themes are applicable to all mothers working in female-dominated occupation, they are illustrated exclusively with examples from women in one profession. Hence, the examples given may not be readily applicable to other mothers who work outside the home.

Garey interviewed 37 "racially and ethnically diverse" women living in California. The way she presents the stories told and the themes they develop mirrors the weaving metaphor mentioned above. She skillfully weaves the hospital workers' often compelling stories into the framework of each chapter. The book begins with an overview of the history of so-called "working mothers," a descriptor that Garey critiques. She then addresses what she calls "strategies of being" that women use to construct their identities. She devotes four chapters to the various job configurations within which the hospital workers function (e.g., involuntary part-time work), and concludes by analyzing patterns over their life times and drawing implications from her findings.

The points I find to be key follow. First, the mothers interviewed mention, time and again, that they want to "be there" for their children and they do so in a number of ways (for example, by working the night shift). Garey calls this "maternal visibility," which she contends is vitally important for many women. Another important point she makes is that for these women "the issue...is not a dichotomous one of being employed versus not being employed, nor is it an issue of being a worker *or* a mother – the issue is one of how to structure work and family life so these two endeavors can be combined in ways that do not take such a heavy toll." She notes that mothers who are employed full time are virtually "doing it all" usually by giving up sleep. Further, the ability to balance conflicting demands is linked to the degree of support women receive. In Garey's stories, many of the women are trying to "do it all," with very limited support.

This lack of support is addressed in her conclusion, where Garey argues that many work situations could be organized, as is nursing, to allow for more flexibility in career paths/life courses. Many of the women with whom she spoke regret having had to give up time with their children; "these regrets were connected to expectations about what mothers should be doing for young children, such as 'being there'." Garey calls for us to move beyond an individualistic orientation, and suggests that we have to turn individual problems and solutions into societal ones. Again she argues that the metaphor of weaving better represents the actions and intentions of women than the current (U.S.) model. She notes that the way we conceptualize the relationship of employment and motherhood is important because how we think about an issue shapes

what we do about it. At present, without a broad vision and a social program, we are rooted in the status quo.

Other countries have chosen different directions, and those countries provide far more support to parents and children. What we need, Garey charges, are "the kinds of changes that socialize responsibility for the care of children and that build employees' family responsibilities and relationships into the organization of the workplace. As a society, we should expect work and family life to be compatible." However, those of us who are parents living and working in the U.S., know all too well that we are still a long way from this ideal. Garey's book helps clarify the dilemmas of the working mother and outlines possible reforms.

In Defense of Single-Parent Families

Nancy E. Dowd
New York: New York University Press, 1997

Reviewed by Robin Edward Gearing

Slowly, painfully, many of the stigmas of yesterday are exposed and deposed. Nancy Dowd's *In Defense of Single-Parent Families* systematically examines the layers of overt and covert stigmatization faced by single parents. I was anxious to read this book as it openly and candidly analyzes the single parent role, both that of mother and father, in relation to economic status, race, age, law, tradition, and modern convention. Finally, this work opens each barrier to single parenting and boldly offers alternatives to the "normative"family form.

Nancy Dowd, a legal professor and lawyer, introduces her book with simple and powerful words: "I am a single parent." Through her compelling analytical style supported with legal research and personalized with experience, Dowd outlines the realities and perceptions that affect single parents in our society. The "normative" two-parent family structure and the less conventional single-parent family are introduced and analyzed. After all, as Dowd states, "Dysfunctional families come in all shapes and sizes; so do healthy families".

The text is well organized into three main segments: Myths and Realities; Law and Single Parents; and Law Reform. Section one examines the stigmas and quietly entrenched beliefs that negatively impact on the single-parent family. Methodically and with legal precision, the author describes and lists a wide range of stereotypes: that the single family is a problem family, that single mothers are to blame for their questionable mores, that children of single-parents are to be ostracized. Dowd uses research, knowledge, and literature to question the commonly held assumptions that single parents are immoral and cause poverty.

Section two, "Law and Single Parents" considers the legal framework that hinders single parents, notably mothers, from overcoming obstacles that negatively impact on their lives and opportunities for their children. Here, Dowd presents a balanced view of the strengths of the single parent family and the unique resources that single parents can offer to all parents. The laws of the United States (and through inference, other industrialized Western countries) foster the negative stigmatization of all single parent families. Dowd, however, recognizes that single parents can be positive role models for children and society. Utilizing the historical, cultural, and situational realities of black single mothers, she describes alternative family structures, not as deviant but as valuable.

In the section on "Law Reform," Dowd offers alternative policies for single-parent families and legal strategies to challenge the limitations imposed on single-parent families. Here she writes, "Although we have shifted away from this [traditional] model, we have not yet articulated an alternative model. Our notions of equality no longer allow for presumed gender-based assignment of family roles, nor for the limitation of workplace opportunities."

As a family therapist and researcher who examines parental roles, I was hopeful but wary when reading this book. Dowd writes, however, with remarkable precision as she details the realities of the single parent experience. This she does without glamorizing, demonizing, martyring, or vilifying single parents or traditional families. She recognizes that the traditional two-parent family, like society, has changed – it is time we looked at our structures, laws, and attitudes that, through omission or commission, have ignored these changes. *In Defense of Single-Parent Families* is a thoroughly researched work that defends single-parent families. I strongly recommend it.

Mother Nature:
A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy
New York: Pantheon Books, 1999.

Reviewed by Anna Beauchamp

The past few decades have witnessed a long, pointless, and ill-informed debate over whether or not women have "maternal instincts." Given the historical context, the battle lines were understandable. The early literature on the biology of motherhood was built on patriarchal assumptions introduced by earlier generations of moralists. What was essentially wishful thinking on their part was substituted for objective observation. It has taken a long time to correct these errors and revise old biases, to "raise Darwin's consciousness" and widen the evolutionary paradigm to include both sexes. (Blaffer Hrdy, 535)

In *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection*, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy sets out an expansive account of the current state of research in anthropology, psychology, and sociobiology, about why mothers do what they do. Studies in the behaviour and biochemistry of both humans and animals, as well as historical assessments of mothering behaviour in distinctive social and cultural situations, point to a fresh understanding of the state of motherhood. Blaffer Hrdy goes one step further and examines new evidence surrounding the behaviour of infants that suggests that the child actually plays a significant role in molding the mother's actions to suit its needs. In effect, "Babies are geared to making sure that maternal care is forthcoming and ongoing" (536). Importantly, babies appear, in the long run, to be more interested in the quality of the care they receive than they are in who provides it. Blaffer Hrdy writes extensively about the crucial role of "alloparents," individuals other than the child's parents who provide care. In modern human society we call these individuals daycare workers, babysitters, grandparents, and so forth. It is refreshing to see, however, that alloparenting is not an exclusively human phenomenon. She cites primate studies in which data from groups, who practiced infant sharing, are compared with groups who did not. "Babies born to infant-sharers grow at a faster rate, and ... their mothers give birth again after much shorter intervals without compromising their own health or infant survival. Crudely put, mothers with good daycare had the highest fertility rates" (448).

Mother Nature is a dense, academic work which covers a vast array of research in careful, footnoted prose. At the same time, however, Blaffer Hrdy succeeds in presenting a readable text that is comfortably accessible to the layperson, and often highly entertaining. Blaffer Hrdy models capably the feminist academic paradigm of placing the person of the researcher visibly in the work without compromising the scientific validity of the work. Sometimes reading a book will make me want to teach a course in which I could use it as a textbook. Other times reading a book will make me want to rush out and buy more copies so I can give them to friends for their reading enjoyment. *Mother Nature* is the first book that has ever made me want to do both.

Childhood in America

Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason, editors
New York: New York University Press, 2000

Reviewed by Sarah V. Young

The editors of the text, *Childhood in America*, have made a superb contribution to the area of children's history, a field of research which generally has been

neglected. Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason draw upon widely diverse historical, philosophical, legal, and literary sources for this catholic anthology (of 724 pages), and they are to be commended for their ambitious effort. The book is divided into eleven parts: childbirth and infancy; boys and girls; adolescence and youth; discipline; working children; learning; children without parents; the vulnerable child; the child and the state; sexuality; and the child's world.

The authors have chosen to simplify their perspectives rather than dazzle us with jargon and lengthy analyses. Consequently, the text is fun to explore and full of surprises. From one page to the next, we encounter fictional children, narratives by children about their lives, childrearing advice from European and American sages, salient legal and social documents, and excerpts from classic treatises on children and the family. Because of its readability and clarity, the book will be of interest to laypersons as well as to those who teach and study child welfare, family issues, social policy, human growth and development, and social history.

People who yearn for the "good ole days" probably will find many of the excerpts in this text to be unsettling. The authors show that historically children were valued largely for their economic contributions, often subjected to conditions of work and servitude that were appalling. By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, children had become emotional assets to their families. More recently, the authors contend, children provide primary long-term emotional ties for many adults. As noted in the introduction to this text, asking where we have been can help us to know more about where we are going in terms of the scope, meaning, and value of childhood.

As a social work educator, I found the sections on working children; children without parents; the vulnerable child; and the child and the state to be particularly compelling. I would use the selected documents and personal accounts in these sections as source material for further research and also as timely topics for generating class discussions. Finally, the historical perspectives of this text should be required reading for those involved in the development of family and child services. As Mary Ann Mason notes, with the growth of the State's involvement in protecting children, we might even see more progress toward the notion of legal rights for children apart from those of their parents—a move that, for many children, could contribute to a more secure childhood in America.

Wonderful Ways to be a Stepparent

Judy Ford and Anna Chase
Berkeley, California: Conari Press, 1999.

Reviewed by Laurie Kruk

If to parent is to struggle with the need to be everything—teacher, counsellor, nurse/doctor, disciplinarian, chauffeur, handyperson—*stepparenting* creates the opposite challenge, one of "stepping" back, watching and waiting as you develop a unique rapport with your stepchild. I have learned this much as a step-mother. The changing state of our society means that stepfamilies are on the rise, no longer anomalies or oddities but it can still feel pretty weird at times. The experience of being the "other" adult—neither Mom nor Dad, friend nor foe (though maybe feeling like both)—brought into their world by remarriage inspires a hunger to fill the void of experience with the words of those who have "been there."

So I was eager to read this book, and discover *Wonderful Ways to be a Stepparent*. It is one of a series created by Judy Ford, family therapist and the author of *Wonderful Ways to Love a Child* and *Wonderful Ways to be a Family*. Packaged in a hand-size format, this book echoes a "self-help" bestseller, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, in form, philosophy, and depth. The text is divided into three parts: Part I, Relating to Yourself; Part II, Dealing with Your Spouse; and Part III, Interacting with the Kids. Each part comprises 20-24 lessons, no longer than two pages. This structure reminds me of the triangle of interests that a stepfamily represents—the biological parent, the stepparent, and the kids who share their lives—though the symmetry of this book, its evocation of a kind of equilateral triangulation where all sides are even, seems a bit simplistic. The sixty-four points have intriguing titles like "Give up Your Dream of the Perfect Family," "Keep the Kids Out of the Middle," "Fine-Tune Your Sense of Humour," "Talk, Talk, Talk to Your Partner," "Understand You're the Adult," "Do It Their Way When You Can," and "Say Something Positive About the Other Parent." They are bite-sized summaries of advice, which contain useful observations about the challenges of bringing each side of the triangle together, largely drawn from stepmother Anna Chase's experience. The language is upbeat and accessible, and "real life" anecdotes bring the theory to life. As the writers explain in the Introduction, "It is not our intention to sugarcoat the process of creating a blended family. But we do believe strongly that if you acknowledge the realities of the situation to yourself, your spouse, kids, and stepkids, and accentuate the positive, on the day-to-day level, you can have a wonderful relationship with your stepchildren and live in a house full of love and laughter" (xv). I have a bit of trouble with their claim of not "sugarcoating." Though many of the lessons are valuable, the very brevity of each seems to

underplay or deny the combined wisdom of therapist and stepmother. For instance, "Do a Two-Minute Reality Check" introduces a contemporary approach to dealing with those "evil stepmother/father" emotions, where sitting "with what is" becomes a way to the "emotional truth of your situation." For instance, "Oh, I'm hurt at getting no positive reinforcement from my stepchildren despite all I do for them; I'm angry at my wife's ex for not ponying up his share of the child support" (7). These are real issues. However, there is no discussion of how to share your "reality check" with your family—or even how to use it for your self-knowledge. I would have preferred more space devoted to the process of the "reality check"; the decision to create sixty- four brief lessons, instead of expanding some of the book's more fundamental or difficult points, gives the text a slightly superficial feel. Perhaps this point-form method of presentation is designed to appeal to that very feeling of helplessness that the stepparent role can generate, by providing a lengthy checklist of things we can do, or do better. Or perhaps this book is meant to be dipped into, at odd moments, for a bit of inspiration and illumination. There is a spiritual subtext to this work, as we are uged to "Search for the Soul Growth" in the stepparenting role, for "those of us who are stepparents have been given the special opportunity to grow our souls through the experience of interacting with and helping to *care for and guide* someone else's children" (40). It is hard to argue with that— however vaguely "New Age" the advice. I do agree that to find your role as a stepparent, you must recognize and put aside "smallness" on all levels. Despite its compression, this brief book is a first step towards a process of greater understanding of the complex nature of stepparenting in our age's self-conscious, "self-made" family.

Lesbian Step Families: An Ethnography of Love

Janet M. Wright
New York: Harrington Park Press, 1998

Reviewed by Dawn L. Comeau

In *Lesbian Step Families: An Ethnography of Love*, Janet Wright, Assistant Professor and Chair of the Social Work Department at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, draws on personal experience as she explores a previously neglected area of research about lesbian families. Wright's book is based on her research for her dissertation: an ethnography of five lesbian step families.

Wright defines a lesbian step family as "two women who self-define as lesbian, at least one of whom brings a child or children from a former

relationship with her into the present family situation" (3). She is clear to indicate that she uses the words "lesbian" and "step" as adjectives. She rejects the term "step-family" because she believes it implies that step family structure is something "other than family" (3). Her research contributes to scholarship that documents and validates alternatives to traditional patriarchal nuclear families.

Wright addresses three primary areas of interest in her research. She explores how two lesbian women negotiate parenting, when one is the biological mother with legal rights, and the other embodies an undefined social role that resembles the traditional step mother figure. Secondly, she examines how two lesbian women in a step family structure influence and affect their children's perception of male and female, and their understanding of adult unions. Furthermore, she analyses how these families cope with oppression and their marginalized status as lesbian step families, and how this impacts their family identity.

Wright reviews literature on feminist theories about motherhood and family structures, homophobia and heterosexism, and discourses on step-families that neglect to include lesbian perspectives. She continues with a comprehensive outline of her research methods and a description of the families that participated in her study.

The majority of Wright's research focuses on the unique experiences in her participants' lives due to their lesbianism and their step-family configurations. In order to maintain a healthy functioning family, she finds that her participants rely upon a "tolerant community, a significantly open lesbian/gay population, other lesbian families to socialize with, any legal status for lesbian/gay families and people, and a connection with supportive heterosexual friends, family, and acquaintances" (192). This includes presenting themselves as a "normal" family to "create acceptance based on similarity" while concurrently celebrating their lesbian family uniqueness and pride (193).

This uniqueness includes her participants' abilities to create families without male adults. Thus, their family structures lack the presence of male privilege. As a result, children witness women accomplishing both traditional and nontraditional tasks according to desire and time—not gender assignment. Wright also considers the integration of a new parent into a preexisting family. She elaborates on the process of transforming the role of "step-parent" from outsider status to one of inclusion, and determines various methods of integration based on the age of the children in the family, length of the couple's relationship, and their desires regarding familial responsibility and obligations.

Wright's in-depth exploration of lesbian step families is an important contribution to feminist research, social work studies, gay and lesbian studies, and the gay and lesbian community. She accomplishes her goal, which is to disseminate knowledge that will assist in creating healthy, functional, lesbian step families. Her work is invaluable. I highly recommend it.

Our Families, Our Values:
Snapshots of Queer Kinship

Robert E. Goss and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart, Eds.
New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997

Reviewed by Nicole Willey

If only this book were in the library of every so-called "family value" proponent. With 20 articles in sections titled "Procreative Privilege," "Families of Choice," and "Relationships: Trials and Tribulations," this anthology puts homophobic lawmakers and Biblical scholars to shame. The articles, often personal and usually academic (if not in tone, in research), blend experience and scholarship to raise important questions that challenge anyone who has a stake in the types of relationships in which all humans are enmeshed.

The "Lavendar Tribe," here defined as "transgendered, transexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, a person with AIDS or one who loves any of us," and their kinship/friendship/family ties are the basis for this study. The "Tribe" is put forth as a "people" with common interests and bonds, and then deconstructed by questioning of how such a diverse group could possibly share (or would want to share) common values. While this question is interesting, and perhaps unsolvable, as many show (see Nancy Wilson and Victoria Kolakowski as two examples of a direct answer), basic human rights are at issue. To my mind, the more interesting challenge that this collection poses is why would the "Tribe" want "family" as it is currently defined by a patriarchal and heterosexual culture?

The right to and desire for kinship is never a question. Rather, it is the structure and naming of the "family" that many writers in this anthology question. Robert Goss makes an extensive argument for "procreativity" as a right that all people have. He also challenges us not to assimilate the nuclear model of family, but to "queer" the idea of family. Brad Wishon believes that queer relationships and families are teaching the way of liberation to all couples, creating a paradigm that can give liberation to heterosexual couples as well. Mary Hunt questions the very idea of couples, making it clear that until any family of choice is accepted (regardless of number of adults and sexual connections) no one is safe from the tyranny of "normative sexuality." She believes that any partnership including two adults, same-sex or not, can become another version of the heterosexual model, further entrenching patriarchal patterns. Questions of assimilation to patriarchal structures are further complicated by issues of race and AIDS (see especially Mary Foulke, Renee Hill, Richard Hardy, and Jane Spahr).

The real question for this reader, addressed only in passing, is why is the Judeo-Christian Bible and its traditions are the main force these authors are deconstructing, thereby proclaiming it as normative? True, Buddhism is

engaged by Michael Sweet, and Joseph Kramer discusses alternate rituals for gay men, but the Bible is the main rallying force behind these essays. As Mona West explains in the opening to her essay: "Whether or not we consider ourselves religious, and whether or not we consider the Bible to be the inspired word of God, our reality is that the Bible is used against the Queer community to condemn our lifestyles, exclude us from religious communities, perpetuate violence against us, and deny our basic human rights" (51). Point taken, but the Judeo-Christian focus of this book may alienate some readers. On the other hand, these scholars collective re-reading of the Bible may be appreciated.

Overall, any problems with individual arguments are counteracted by other essays, and this is what makes an anthology of this kind work. The editors, Goss and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart, have carefully included a wide variety of perspectives that the reader will find refreshing and informative.

Thinking About the Baby:
Gender and Transitions into Parenthood

Susan Walzer
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998

Reviewed by Wendy Faith

This bracingly incisive book focuses a sociological lens on the gender polarization between heterosexual spouses that coincides in American culture with the onset of parenting. Through a study of interview data from fifty new mothers and fathers, Susan Walzer reveals that parents unwittingly replicate Victorian-based images of motherhood and fatherhood that persist in the tacit sentiments of older family members, the clichéd messages of television programs, and the patent advice of baby-care "experts." Reinforced by gendered wage disparity, these images promote the idea that child-rearing is the primary responsibility of mothers while only an auxiliary activity of fathers.

By accentuating the numerous social pressures that help to shape parental consciousness, Walzer smartly debunks the humanistic assumption that maternal and paternal divisions of labour are reasonably negotiated between self-determining partners. She contrarily maintains that parents— "driven by complex feelings of accountability, anxiety, insecurity, and entitlement" — rationalize the preexistent "models of mothers as ever-present nurturers and of fathers as providers and part-time playmates." Especially commendable is her analysis of these roles, which circumvents the tiresome nature versus nurture polemic. While accepting in principle the claim that gestational, hormonal, and

lactational states affect the normalization of maternal behaviour, she undermines biological determinism by exploring the meanings that are socially imputed to such factors. In so doing, she casts considerable light on "why mothers experience significant stress in entering a role considered to be 'natural' for them."

But although this book begins with the wholehearted conviction that the sociological influences on parenting are generally "underrated," it ends with the halfhearted notion that men and women "*can* try to make fair choices within a less than fair social context." Included in the final chapter is advice on how individuals can protect their relationships from the negative effects of stereotyping. I appreciated the soundness of these suggestions; however, I expected greater discussion on what might be done collectively, rather than interpersonally, to combat the increased gender differentiation that concurs with sexual reproduction.

Nonetheless, this accessible study will be an eye-opener for many new mothers and fathers who unknowingly attempt to meet both the current demands of family life—such as the need for a dual income—and the neo-Victorian expectations of parenthood. As Walzer's analysis clearly shows, it is common for partners to profess that gender roles have changed and, at the same time, evaluate their own and their mate's parental conduct in terms of conservative cultural ideals. Thus, the model of the ever-present mother, who indefatigably devotes her physical, emotional, and mental energy to the well-being of her children, prevails even when both partners are required to provide financially for the family. Such insights prompted me to recollect my own experiences as a new mother only to discover (to my chagrin) that I had internalized some of the same gendered cultural imagery as Walzer's interviewees. Readers will undoubtedly find *Thinking About the Baby* not only engrossing but also illuminating.

In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing

Wendy Ho
Oxford: Altamira Press, 1999

Reviewed by Andrea Riesch Toepell

In Her Mother's House, by Wendy Ho, is part of the Critical Perspectives on Asian Pacific Americans Series, published by AltaMira Press. There are five other titles in this series.

In Her Mother's House is subtitled *The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. This is a good description of the fairly narrow field covered

by the book. The blurb on the back cover of the book says: *"In Her Mother's House* brings Asian American women's experiences and standpoints, as mothers and daughters, to the forefront of racial-ethnic and gender debates," and this is certainly the case.

The book begins with an apparently autobiographical chapter, describing the author, her mother, and grandmother in their private environment in Honolulu, Hawaii. Having set the stage for multigenerational mother-daughter discourse, the author proceeds to an exhaustive academic analysis of three authors, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Fae Myenne Ng, although numerous others are mentioned.

The book presumes at least some familiarity with the history of China and of Chinese immigration into the U.S.A., with general feminist knowledge, and with the peculiar dynamics of immigrant families in North America, specifically the relationships between first- and second-generation immigrants. *In Her Mother's House* provides some pointers on these issues, but mainly in the context of literary criticism. A reader must know that this is a book covering mother-daughter relationships, mostly in Chinese-American families, mostly as depicted by Kingston, Tan, and Ng, while engaging in polemics with other authors about Kingston's, Tan's, and Ng's writings. Considerable attention is also given to father-daughter relationships, in the same contexts. An interesting and exhaustive discussion is devoted to the concept of "talk-story", its use and interpretation by different authors and critics.

In Her Mother's House confines itself to the analysis of certain literary works about mother-daughter relationships, among Americans of Chinese descent, who experience various conflicts and generational differences, and who use specific methods of communication (e.g. talk-story). However, it will be obvious to most readers that such difficulties are not unique to Chinese or Asian families. Geographical and social mobility and intergenerational differences are common experiences for many, if not most, people on this continent

In Her Mother's House suffers from drawbacks not uncommon to other academic texts, namely logorrhea, thesaurus abuse, and excessive neologisms. Words often are used in their second or third meanings. A good example is consistent use of the word "engage" in the sense of to "engage the enemy's forces." Ho's writing style is uneven. Her book begins with a personal, almost poetic, well-written (if not to everyone's literary taste) autobiographical section, but the style soon writing becomes ponderous, jargon- and neologism-laden.

Despite her book's difficult style, Wendy Ho obviously is an expert in her field. The author shows her erudition by frequently quoting from her extensive list of references. This book will give a persevering reader the pleasure of having come to understand a complex, if somewhat narrow, field.

Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women's Freedom

Janice G. Raymond
North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1994 (first published 1993)

Reviewed by Emily Jeremiah

A passionate yet coolly reasoned polemic, Janice G. Raymond's, *Women as Wombs* offers an array of alarming insights regarding the worldwide implications of new reproductive technologies. Raymond's main charge is that such technologies commodify women, rendering them objects of exchange, mere vessels. Her argument is powerfully and cogently supported by numerous examples of corruption and malpractice on the part of "technological progenitors." It is couched in stringent yet elegant language and it cannot be ignored.

An activist and academic, Raymond is ambivalent towards the academy, which she charges with stuffy elitism, and she proffers here what she terms 'a dose of reality.' Such a claim might appear naive. Indeed, Raymond herself deploys the notion of "discourses" at several points in her book, thereby suggesting a poststructuralist awareness of reality as constructed. Nonetheless, Raymond's insistence on women's lived experience, on their 'dignity' and "integrity,"constitutes a refreshing and powerful corrective to certain forms of postmodernism which leave questions of ethics aside. It is this aspect of postmodernism which leads Raymond to reject it out of hand. I would disagree with her here. For feminist postmodernism has, in recent years, sought to develop an ethics of "mutual responsibility and care" (Shildrick, 1997: 122), which would be fluid and alive to specific contexts.

Raymond herself is a practitioner of such a postmodernist ethics (although she would balk at the thought). Postmodernist accounts of maternity view it as contingent, constructed, and relational, as does Raymond, whose treatment of reproduction is highly nuanced. One of the many strengths of Raymond's account is its global perspective; this is a metanarrative, but it is one intensely aware of cultural and national differences. Raymond thus shares with postmodernist feminism a concern to challenge and develop white, middle-class, feminist thinking of earlier years. Her preoccupation with issues of race and class underpins and strengthens this challenge. Raymond also stresses that mothering is a relational process; the postmodernist decentering of the subject which she criticizes has, in fact, offered fuel to this notion, and can, I believe, be drawn upon fruitfully rather that merely jettisoned. But while Raymond is a little unfair in her critique of postmodernist feminism, her call for women to act together is both urgent and compelling. It highlights usefully aspects of postmodernism which are problematic for humanist feminism; in particular, it

forces us to consider the notion of a feminist community as vital. Raymond thus both contributes to and challenges postmodernist thinking.

She offers numerous other insights. Raymond's view of the body as something one *is* rather than something one *owns*, is illuminating. It constitutes a powerful tool in the author's critique of liberalism with its ideals of (masculine) autonomy and agency, and it posits the embodied subject as a reality which is not to be ignored. Raymond is also excellent on the issue of choice, pointing out that decisions are made in specific contexts, and informed by innumerable factors; where reproductive liberals extol choice as the ultimate value, they are being glib and simplistic. In addition, Raymond delicately steers a course between presenting women as victims of an oppressive institution, and highlighting their agency. She is above all concerned with power, criticizing the ineffectual discourse of "women's rights" as inadequate. Raymond always is keenly aware of the complexity of context, identifying and untangling the mesh of factors involved in the issue of reproduction. She uncovers the links between sexuality and reproduction, between the status of women and that of children, and between the ideologies of maternity and femininity. *Women as Wombs* is thus searching, complex, and important.

Reference

Shildrick, Margrit. 1997. *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics*. London and New York: Routledge.

Contributor Notes

Lena Ampadu is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, at Towson University, Baltimore, Maryland, where she teaches courses in composition, African American Literature, and black women writers. Her research interests and scholarly publications focus on women writers in the African Diaspora, intersections between orality and literacy, and the rhetoric of nineteenth century-African American women.

Anna Beauchamp is a student in the Master of Adult Education program, at St. Francis Xavier University, researching ways in which women's learning as mothers influences their academic learning. She works as Associate Dean of The Collegiate, at The University of Winnipeg. Anna lives in Winnipeg with her partner James and their two daughters: Jillian (six) and Lauren (three).

Brigitte H. Bechtold immigrated to Montreal, Canada in 1979 as a teenager from St-Vincent and the Grenadines, in pursuit of a good education and better opportunities. She is presently pursuing a combined Doctoral degree in social work and Education. Ms. Joseph is employed as a child care social worker in Quebec. Her research interest is in anti-racist social work, and the experiences of Black social workers and students.

Candace Bernard is a social worker with the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services in the Adoption Disclosure Program. Her research interests are in the area of race, class and gender and she is presently completing a Masters in education thesis which is examining the impact of the intersection of race, class and gender on the educational experiences of African Nova Scotian youth.

Wanda Thomas Bernard is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the Maritime School of Social Work, Dalhousie University. Her research interests are in the area of discrimination, racism, oppression africentricity and empowerment. Dr. Thomas Bernard teaches in direct practice, anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work.

Camilla Cockerton is a lecturer in the geography department in the University

of Canterbury (Christchurch, New Zealand). Her PhD, on Tswana women's migration from colonial Botswana to South Africa, involved 15 months of fieldwork. This entailed six months of ethnographic research in a village on the edge of the Kalahari Desert (mostly conducting in-depth interviews with elderly Tswana women) and archival research in Gaborone, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. Hired at Canterbury University as a development specialist, she teaches development geography, Pacific Geography, and feminist geography. Her current research interests broadly include feminist landscapes, diasporas, motherhood, and migration, and, more specifically, farm labour in the Cook Islands, the Cook Islands diaspora in New Zealand, and the Oceania suffrage movement in the 1920s.

Dawn L. Comeau received her Master's degree in Women's Studies from San Diego State University where she also taught Women in the Social Sciences. She is currently working towards her PhD in Women's Studies at Emory University. Her research interests are lesbian mothering and lesbian health.

Cheryl Dobinson is the Administrative Co-ordinator for ARM. She holds a Masters in Sociology from York University and her studies have focused on women, youth, and sexuality. Her work on sexual identity has recently been published in *Herizons* and *The Journal of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* and her upcoming publications include a co-authored article on lesbians and film in *The Journal of Homosexuality* and a piece on transexual legal issues for *Fireweed*. Cheryl helped organize the 1997 conference on Mothers and Daughters as a graduate assistant for York University's Centre for Feminist Research, and is pleased to now be working for the organization that evolved from this conference.

Rishma Dunlop is an Assistant Professor of Education at York University. Her current research and teaching areas are English Language Arts, Literary Studies and the Imagination, Arts-Based Research and Alternative Practices in Educational Research. Her poetry has won numerous awards and has appeared in *Room of One's Own, Grain, Event, English Quarterly, Contemporary Verse 2, Whetstone, Poetry Nottingham International* (UK), *Literator* (South Africa), *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme, JCT,* and in the edited volume, *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns.* She was a finalist in the 1998 CBC/Canadian Literary Awards. Her collection of poems, *Boundary Bay,* was published in 2000 by Staccato Chapbooks.

Arlene E. Edwards is a Black, feminist, graduate student working on a PhD in community psychology at Georgia State University. She is originally from Trinidad and Tobago, and currently lives in Atlanta. Her interests are in the areas of Black community work, women's work, and the use of Black women's experiential products to work within Black communities in particular, and

communities of women's work in general. An example of Black women's work is community mothering—the extension of communal/parental behaviors by Black women to their community, as a means of interaction and intervention. She hopes to continue to develop the theory so that authentic translation may occur as it is used in intervention design, and documented in scholarly media.

Josephine Enang recently graduated from the Masters of Nursing program, Dalhousie University in Halifax. Her thesis focused on the childbirth experiences of African Nova Scotian women. Josephine is a midwife, by background, so has an interest in childbirth and is currently working in the IWKGrace Health Centre. She struggled with not having role models or mentors in her program. She was the only African student in her program, however her interest in looking at Black women's health was more the result of lack of research or information around those issues.

Chioma Ekpo is a graduate student at Dalhousie University, in the Women's Studies Department, currently completing her Masters degree. Her undergraduate degree was obtained from the University of Toronto, with a double major in Sociology and Women's Studies, and a minor in Social Anthropology. Chioma moved from Toronto to Halifax, Nova Scotia because of the rich Black heritage in Nova Scotia and its overall contribution to Canadian history. She thought that Nova Scotia would be a great place to obtain her Masters degree, as she was originally interested in African women writers. When she got there though, it was a different story entirely. Her thesis addresses Black Nova Scotian women's narratives. She is the only African student, from Nigeria, in her graduate program.

Wendy Faith is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English, at the University of Calgary. Her dissertation, entitled "Embodied Figures and Transfigured Bodies: the Language of Reproduction in Contemporary Literature," explores the ways in which certain rhetorical and semantic strategies are currently used to either enable or contest maternal stereotypes.

Karen Flynn is in her final year in the PhD program, in Women's Studies, at York University. Her research interests include, women, work and family, racism, feminist and post-colonial theory. She writes a regular column for the community newspaper *Share*.

Any Marie-Gerard Francois teaches in Women's Studies at Glendon College, the bilingual campus of York University, in Toronto, Canada.

Robin Edward Gearing, a father of two, has worked as a family therapist in various settings, focusing on the parenting roles of mothers and fathers. His current research examines the nurturing role between fathers and their chil-

dren. Robin works with families at The Hospital for Sick Children and in private practice.

Nancy F. Gerber recently completed her PhD in Literatures in English at Rutgers University. This article is adapted from her dissertation, titled "From Shadow to Substance: The Figure of the Mother-Artist in Contemporary American Fiction." She is an adjunct instructor in the Women's Studies Program at Rutgers University-Newark.

Priscilla A. Gibson is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. She researches African American grandmothers in kinship care and has presented at numerous national conferences on this topic. She teaches direct practice courses. She has over 25 years of direct practice experience with African American families, children with developmental disabilities and their families, culturally sensitive services and consumer participation in development community services.

Fiona Joy Green became a mother to her son Liam eleven years ago while in England completing her Masters in Women's Studies. For the past decade she has been teaching in the Women's Studies Program at the University of Winnipeg. She has also taught in the Departments of Sociology at the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg. Fiona's doctoral dissertation, "Feminists Mothering: Feminist Activism, Pedagogy and Praxis" (working title) is nearing completion.

Merryl Hammond is a feminist (step)mother of five. She has a PhD, and worked as a full-time, at-home mother for several years. She is the founder of Mothering Matters (MM), a support group for at-home mothers, which now has ten chapters in the Montreal area. (Write <mhammond@total.net> for details about MM.)

Jennifer Harris is a PhD candidate in English at York University, Toronto. She has published in a number of feminist journals, is an associate editor at the cultural studies journal, *Alphabet City*, and the co-editor of a recent issue of *the Canadian Review of American Studies* titled "Blackness and the 49th Parallel."

Cindy-Lou Henwood is a first year PhD student in the department of Sociology at York University. Her research interests includes race, gender and popular culture.

Emily Jeremiah studied at Exeter College, Oxford, and is currently based at the University of Wales Swansea, where she is completing a doctorate on maternal subjectivities in recent women's writing in German. Her research interests include feminist theory, theories of motherhood, and literature by women.

Contributor Notes

Bertyln Joseph is an Afro-Caribbean student at McGill University. She has Bachelors degrees in Sociology and in social work and has just completed her Masters in social work last year. Bertlyn is now in the process of pursuing her PhD. When she tried to get into the program there were a lot of difficulties and when she got there, there were no Black faculty members. This was a struggle for her and it became a challenge up until graduation.

Laurie Kruk is Assistant Professor in English Studies at Nipissing University, in North Bay, Ontario. She is the mother of a two-year-old daughter, and step-mother to an eleven-year-old son. She has published articles on Margaret Atwood, Joy Kogawa, Timothy Findley and Alistair MacLeod. Her interests include the short story, women's writing, gender studies, Native literature, and her growing awareness of "the family squeeze."

Erica Lawson was born in Jamaica of African descent and has lived in Toronto since 1981. She is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Her research interests are anti-racism education, Black feminisms, and anti-colonial educational transformation. Her dissertation focuses on the production of health knowledges among and between Caribbean immigrant women and their daughters.

Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb holds a PhD in English from the University of New Brunswick and has been granted awards by the University of Toronto, the University of New Brunswick, and SSHRC. Now based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Susan is the mother of two young children and a prolific free-lance writer. Her most recent scholarly work is *This Giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women's Writing* (Popular Press, 2000), a critical anthology co-edited with Dr. Julie Tharp.

Joyce MacIntyre is a status Native with the Six Nations Band; she works full-time as an operation's analyst, and is pursuing her degree, in Women's Studies, at York University. Joyce experienced the death of her only child, Duane, in 1992 and has since facilitated self-help groups and served on both the Cross-Cultural Policy Committee and the Parental Pod Committee of Bereaved Families of Ontario. A selection of her poems entitled *Reflections of Time* has been published through Bereaved Families of Ontario.

Allison Mackey is currently completing her honours degree in English and Philosophy at Nipissing University, North Bay, before moving on to graduate studies. She is also the mother of two sons, Ariel (five) and Mateo (one). Along with the task of combining her academic interests with her life as the mother of young children, Allison also faces the challenges of living in a bicultural/bilingual household; she and her partner Gustavo constantly strive to maintain

family and friendship ties by sharing their time between both Canada and Uruguay.

Dolana Mogadime was born in Pretoria, South Africa. She emigrated to Canada with her family at an early age in 1970. Dolana is currently pursing a PhD in Sociology and Equity Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Her dissertation analyzes life in the classroom for students and teachers of African, South Asian and South East Asian descent, who represent the most under researched in Canadian educational literature. The focus of her study on successful practice, will contribute to teachers' understanding of how to engage the interests of students from culturally diverse backgrounds whilst providing academically enriched programs of study. Dolana has presented papers, on transformative educational policy and in the area of racial and gender equity, at a number of international conferences. Recently at the conference "Mothering in the African Diaspora: Literature, History, Society, Popular Culture and the Arts" (York University, Canada), she spoke about the need for educators to develop a vision of education which provides adolescent Black girls with the opportunity to envision their own leadership possibilities.

Gail McCabe is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate Programme in Sociology at York University. Her areas of interest are Sociology of the Body; Sex and Gender; Sport; Migration; Power; Mass Communication and Feminist Political Economy. Her dissertation project "Re-inventing the Crone: Feminist Constructions of Age, Wisdom and Power" focuses on the conscious aging projects of old womyn emerging in the areas of spirituality, corporeality, creativity, technology, ecology, social, and political movement. Gail has been writing poetry since early childhood and for her it is a libratory act which enables her to make sense of her own experience; maintain her sanity in a schizophrenogenic world, and resist the alienation of a claustrophobic social system. Poetry writing is something passed on from her mother, Sara, through Gail and to her daughters. Gail takes great pleasure in reading her children's poetry and of course, her poems are also her children, so she finds it gratifying to bring them to birth.

Leigh M. O'Brien is an Associate Professor at Nazareth College, Rochester, New York, where she teaches Early Childhood Education and Foundations of Education courses. Her research currently focuses on the use of narrative in education, and gender and education. She is also the mother of a seven-year-old girl who has helped her re-think education.

Andrea O'Reilly is an Assistant Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University where she teaches courses on Toni Morrison, on motherhood, and on mothers and daughters. She has presented her research at

international conferences and is the author of over a dozen articles and chapters. She is also the co-editor/editor of several books on mothering and motherhood, and author of *Toni Morrison On Mothering* (forthcoming). She was co-ordinator of the first international conferences on "Mothers and Daughters," 1997 and "Mothers and Sons," 1998 sponsored by the Centre for Feminist Research at York University. Andrea is the Founding President of the Association for Research on Mothering, and founding editor/publisher of the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. She also conducts community workshops on motherhood, mothers and sons, and mothers and daughters, and has been interviewed widely on these topics. Andrea and her common-law spouse of 17 years are the parents of a 15-year-old son, and two daughters, ages 10 and 13.

Ruth Panofsky is a member of the Department of English at Ryerson Polytechnic University where she teaches Canadian Literature. She is author *of Adele Wiseman: An Annotated Bibliography* (1992) and co-editor of *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman* (1997). Her articles, book reviews, and poems have appeared in literary journals and major Canadian newspapers.

Venetria K. Patton obtained her PhD from the University of California, Riverside in 1996. Currently, she is the Coordinator of African American and African Studies and an Assistant Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her book, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction*, was recently published by SUNY Press.

Christine Peets is the mother of two sons, and is an independent writer, editor, and researcher. She has written extensively on childcare and other social and environmental issues. Her research has dealt with the mother-son relationship; and her relationship with her own mother. She has presented her work at one international conference, and looks forward to future presentations. She was the Conference Co-ordinator for "Healthy Children=Healthy Communities" in Kingston, Ontario, Canada in 1999. Currently, Christine is expanding her research on "mother-teachings" and is also doing further research on mothering and health. She is the (incoming, June 2000) President of the Kingston and Area Home Business Association, and is the editor of the ARM newsletter.

Crystal'Aisha PerrymanMark is a poetess, writer, and revolutionary. She pens poetry under the name Crysais, is committed to anti-oppression and social justice, believes in everyday revolutions and the strength of internal power. A Bachelor of Arts student at York University and a young mother of the three-year-old soul named Sable Cora, with another on the way, Crysais is dedicated to the principles of truth, passion, and integrity and explores this in her creative and academic work. Her particular focus lays in the experience of young

motherhood for Black women. Believing that Motherhood is Sacred, she is committed to its political, spiritual, and theoretical praxis.

Cassie Premo Steele is the author of *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldua and The Poetry of Witness* (St. Martin's Press) and the editor *of Moon Days: Creative Writings about Menstruation* (distributed by Ash Tree Publishing). She is also an award-winning poet, currently at work on a book of poems about pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. She teaches Comparative Literature at the University of South Carolina.

Laura Thomas is a graduate student in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. She studies gender relations in the history of Canadian college sport from an interdisciplinary and feminist perspective. She also writes poetry and plays with non-traditional, post-structuralist narratives in the context of her academic work.

Trudelle Thomas is an Associate Professor of English at Xavier University, a Jesuit university in Cincinnati, Ohio where she teaches courses in writing and literature. She is writing a book about spirituality and motherhood. Her essays have appeared *in College Composition and Communication, The Journal of American Culture, Border States,* and elsewhere. She is also a child advocate, quilt-artist, and power walker.

Ruthe Thompson is an assistant professor of English and acting director of Women's Studies at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota. Her essay "Working Mother" appeared in *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Her entry on feminist artist Judy Chicago's controversial "The Dinner Party" installation will be published in the *forthcoming International Encyclopedia of Censorship* (Fitzroy Dearborn). She has authored numerous articles for national magazines, publishing most recently in *American Artist,* and is currently creating two films: one on gender politics in academia and another on rural women's experiences with breast cancer.

Andrea Riesch Toepell is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario. She has done extensive research in the field of community health and gender and health issues. She is the mother of two daughters. She has a multiethnic and multicultural family.

Njoki Nathani Wane is an Assistant Professor in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. She teaches both in the graduate and pre-service programs. Her research and teaching areas include: black feminisms, African feminisms, anti-

racist studies, women and development, and indigenous knowledges.

Marybeth White currently mothers three children; Heather (eleven), Sean (nine), and Rheanna (two). While mothering she completed her Honours Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Religious Studies at York University. She has facilitated support groups for breastfeeding mothers and advocated for the legislation of midwifery in Ontario. Her areas of interest include Buddhism, Existentialism, and Feminist Philosophy.

Nicole Willey is currently pursing her PhD at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Her primary focus is post-colonial women's writing. She completed her Master's thesis, "Colonizing Motherhood in the Caribbean and Nigeria: Mothers in Literature," at Kent State University, Ohio. She has recently published in *Alabama English* and on the webzine *How2*. Currently working through the connections between African feminism and African American women writers, she will be presenting papers on Jessie Fauset and Ntozake Shange later this year. In a past life, she taught high school English in Maryland.

Winsom is a Toronto-based artist who envisions, translates, and creates designs from the metaphysical world which she taps into. Her work is also inspired by the spirituality and mysticism of her African, Awarak, and Carib ancestors. She has travelled extensively in West Africa and has spent many years researching the ancient religions of Ashanti, Carib and Awarak culture. Winsom's work has been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Boston's Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, and many other numerous galleries across the universe.

Sarah V. Young is Professor Emerita of Social Work at Longwood College in Virginia. In addition to carrying several administrative roles, she has taught students in social work, teacher education, honors, and women's studies. Her publications deal with curriculum transformation, diversity, and pedagogical issues. Her latest role is that of grandmother.

MOTHERS AND SONS

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Edited by Andrea O'Reilly

The relationship between mothers and sons has been explored for ages. This groundbreaking work looks at many untouched areas of the mother-son relationship including race, sexuality and ability. These deeply personal reflections include stories of lesbian mothers identifying challenges in raising sons in our heterosexist culture as well as black mothers and sons and Jewish mothers. For all with an interest in family issues, gender issues, or a new perspective on mothering, this book is a must read.

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Andrea O'Reilly is Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at York University, Canada and the co-editor of several books on mothering including *Redefining Motherhood*, and *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Tranformation.*

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——Call for Papers——

The editorial board is seeking submissions for the sixth
Journal of The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
to be published in Fall/Winter 2001 on the topic of

Mothering, Fathering and a Culture of Peace

The journal will explore the roles of mothering and fathering in creating and sustaining a culture of peace from a variety of perspectives. We welcome submissions from students, activists, scholars, policy makers, and artists who research in this area.

Topics can include, but are not limited to: challenges in nurturing for peace and peacework, educating children for peace, empowering for peace and justice, grandparenting for peace and justice, impact of media/sports/work on nurturing for peace, mothers and fathers who protest injustice, nurturing and human rights, nurturing for peace and the environment, in children's literature or in crisis situations, nurturing for peace success stories, prevention of family and community violence, spirituality, nurturing and peacemaking, teacher preparation for peace and justice, women and men working together for peace. We also welcome creative reflections such as: poetry, short stories, and artwork on the subject.

If you are interested in writing a book review, we have books in need of review, or if you know of a recent publication that you think would be relevant, please contact Cheryl Dobinson at cjdobins@yorku.ca

Submission Guidelines: Book reviews are to be no more than 2 pages (500 words), articles should be 15 pages (3750 words). All should be in MLA style, WordPerfect 5.1 and IBM compatible. Please see our style guide for complete details. For more information, please contact us. One must be a member of ARM to submit an abstract.

Deadline: May 1,2001
Please direct your submissions to:
Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson, York University 4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
416-736-2100 X60366
fax: 905-775-1386
arm@yorku.ca

───Call for Papers───

The Association for Research on Mothering

in celebration of *International Women's Day* is hosting a one-day
Symposium on

Mothering, Sex and Sexuality
Saturday March 3, 2001
York University, Toronto, Canada

We encourage papers from a variety and diversity of perspectives. We also welcome creative reflections such as: poetry, short stories, artwork, photography, etc. on the subject as we are planning a poetry reading/art exhibition for a creative evening March 2, 2001.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:
•new mothering and sexuality •pregnancy, childbirth and sexuality •mothering and sexual identity •lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered mothering •mothering and erotica/pornography •mothers and sex trade work/stripping •incest taboos •clash of mothering and transgressive sexualities •whore/Madonna dichotomy •"the family bed" and family patterns •sexual aspects of the birthing process •new reproductive technology and sexuality •adoption or infertility and sexuality •desexualization of the maternal •fears of sexuality and pregnancy—maternity as punishment •mothers and sexual education •butch/male/masculine mothering •mothering as a survivor of sexual abuse •medical/male control of women's sexuality during pregnancy and birth •negotiating sexuality and mothering •the maternal breast/ the sexual breast •sexual taboos during breastfeeding •anthropology and natural spacing of children •cross-cultural patterns of nurturance •mother/infant relationship as the basis of sexual intimacy and erotic communication •feminism/sexuality/maternity •being maternal/being sexual •personal narratives of mothering and sex •celibacy and motherhood •relinquishing mothers and sexuality •mothers, sex and sexuality in literature, popular culture, art and film •children's responses to their mother's sexuality.

If you are interested in being considered as a speaker, please send a 250 word abstract and a 50 word bio by **January 1, 2001** to:

Cheryl Dobinson, Association for Research on Mothering
726 Atkinson College, York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3
Call us at (416) 736-2100 x60366, or email us at arm@yorku.ca

One must be a member of ARM to submit an abstract.

Call for Proposals

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)

Mothering: Power/Oppression
An International Conference

July 7-8, 2001, The University of Queensland, Brisbane,
Queensland, Australia

The subject of mothering/motherhood has been a highly contested area in feminism, especially as it relates to the oppression of women via the institution of motherhood. As Adrienne Rich articulated 25 years ago in her classic 1976 book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, although motherhood as an institution is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power for women. Thus, an analysis of both the oppressive and the powerful aspects of motherhood, as well as the complex relationship between the oppressive institution and the potentially empowering experience of actual mothers, set the stage for much of the feminist work on mothering/ motherhood which followed and continues to shape maternal scholarship today.

This conference will explore, examine, critique and respond to the key issues of power and oppression as they relate to mothering and motherhood in recent research, theory, organizing, activism, experience and practice. Our aim is to bring together academic scholars, family life professionals/ researchers/educators, mothers and fathers, workers (both paid and voluntary) in the field of mothering/motherhood, public policy makers, activists, and students to explore this important topic from cross-cultural, international, intergenerational and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Suggested conference themes include (but are not limited to):
- Mothers' experiences of power and oppression
- Reclaiming, subverting and reinventing mothering as powerful
- Mothers' resistance to/negotiation of oppression
- Mothering and changing experiences of power/oppression
- Effects of oppression on mothers/mothering
- Maternal theory on power and oppression
- The legacy of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*
- Historical research on mothering and power/oppression
- Power and oppression at different stages of motherhood

•Intersections of oppression (race, class, sexuality, ability, religion etc) and mothering
•Power and oppression in pregnancy and birth experiences – traditional medical system vs. choosing midwives, doulas, homebirth etc.
•Women and informed reproductive choices
•Power imbalances and new reproductive technology
•Power, oppression and young mothers
•The stigma of single motherhood
•Mothers, oppression and the state/public policy
•Mothering and stratification in the workforce—maternity leave, medical benefits, loss of income, childcare programs
•Power, oppression and stay-at-home mothers
•Mothering and financial in/dependence
•Law, legal rights and mothers; Custody issues/battles
•Anti-oppression mothering – experiences & strategies
•Emancipatory mothering of daughters
•Challenges of mothering boys against oppression
•Mothers as activists, organizing for change
•Representations of power/oppression and mothering
•Society's 'lip service' of respect for mothers vs. reality of unpaid, under-appreciated and unsupported motherwork
•Social fear of maternal power
•Impact of feminism on mothering, power and oppression.

We invite proposals for panel presentations, informed personal reflections, scholarly papers, and workshops. If you are interested in being considered as a speaker, please submit a one page proposal and short bio by **January 15, 2001 to:**
Marie Porter or Julie Kelso,
The University of Queensland, Brisbane,
Queensland, Australia, 4034
Email: m.porter@mailbox.uq.edu.au **or** j.kelso@mailbox.uq.edu.au;
Phone: 07 3365 2162 or 07 3365 2154; **Fax:** 07 3365 3071

One must be a member of ARM to submit an abstract!

The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) is committed to serious scholarship on mothering from a feminist, multicultural perspective. For information about ARM and/or to request a membership brochure, please contact Andrea O'Reilly or Cheryl Dobinson at ARM, 726 Atkinson College, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3J 1P3. Email: arm@yorku.ca Website: www.yorku.ca/crm.

--------Call for Proposals--------

The Association for Research on Mothering
invites submissions of abstracts for a conference on

Mothering, Literature, Popular Culture and the Arts

October 12-14, 2001

*We welcome a variety of contributions including
academic papers, performance pieces, artwork and
paintings, sculptures and poetry.*

*There will also be 'Open Stream' Sessions on the
General Topic of Mothering -Motherhood.*

*If you are interested in being considered as a contributor please
send us a 250 word abstract and a 50 word bio by March 15, 2001.
For more information or to submit an abstract, please contact us
at the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)
726 Atkinson College,
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