

The Continuity of Global Crossings

African-Caribbean Women and Transnational Motherhood

In this paper, I investigate the post-migratory experiences of working-class African-Caribbean female migrants from the English-speaking Caribbean who left their children with relatives in their home countries while pursuing better economic opportunities in Canada from the 1970s to the early 1990s. I problematize the intersectional relationship between female migrant labour, transnationality, and motherhood within the rubric of globalized gender, race and class relations. I do so by exploring the ways in which working-class African-Caribbean women perceive themselves as mothers and relate to their children within a transnational and post-migratory context in Canada. Moreover, I argue that transnational motherhood raises several questions about the paradoxical nature of the social construction of motherhood in the face of dominant notions of motherhood, based on the “good mother/bad mother” binary, as examined through the themes of separation and support, and reunification.

Historically, working-class African-Caribbean women have been on the move as female migrants in order to support themselves and their families. In the process, they have drawn on help from their female relatives for the care of their children. While Caribbean women’s labour is contextualized within the broader dimensions of globalization and debt-servicing and structural adjustment policies in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the so-called third world, so, too, is social reproduction (both paid and unpaid childcare and domestic work) implicated in macroeconomic processes (Arat-Koc; Bakan and Stasiulus; Ehrenreich and Hochschild; Parrenas; Romero; Crawford 2003). Transnational motherhood encompasses the both the material and social aspects of care and support that female migrants give to their children and families from abroad. This social arrangement disrupts gender norms based on separate sphere ideol-

ogy, which splits and devalues women's productive and reproductive activities, and privileges the male breadwinner role. Moving beyond motherhood tied to housewifery, Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila sum up the major activities of transnational mothers: "Milk, shoes, and schooling—these are the currency of transnational motherhood. Providing for children's sustenance, protecting their current well-being, and preparing them for the future are the widely shared concerns of motherhood" (562). Moreover, through the transfer of remittances female migrants are able to ensure the survival of their children and families.

In this piece, I explore the ways in which working-class African-Caribbean women perceive themselves as mothers and relate to their children within a transnational and post-migratory context in Canada. I argue that transnational motherhood raises several questions about the paradoxical nature of the social construction of motherhood in the face of dominant notions of motherhood, based on the 'good mother/bad mother' binary, as examined through the themes of separation and support, and reunification. By investigating the experiences of working-class African-Caribbean women, as transnational mothers, I seek to contribute to cross-cultural research in the area that is already notable (Hondagneu-Sotelo; Parrenas; Romero).

Problematizing Motherhood

Dominant notions of motherhood reinforce the primacy of biological motherhood and exclusivity of mother-child relations in social reproduction (Chodorow 1978). Such relations are privileged and legitimized within a Euro-American, heterosexual, middle-class nuclear familial norm. Based on the private/public dichotomy, gender ideology under patriarchal capitalist relations assigns gender-specific roles to women, as mothers and wives, within the household sphere where they take on childcare and domestic duties, whereas their male counterparts, as husbands, are seen as breadwinners or providers in the public sphere (Benston; Eisenstein; Luxton). There is a clear demarcation between productive and reproductive activities along gender lines; and motherhood, in this case, is not rooted in women's agency—with accorded autonomy, rights and status—but instead is an institution for men's benefit (Rich; O'Reilly; Oakley).

Another way that motherhood has been conceptualized is through maternalist ideology. Maternalist ideology refers to mothers valorizing their role as nurturers to their children as a 'natural' extension of their self-identity and sense of self (Villani; Eyer), which can take place inside or outside of patriarchal familial structures. Maternalist ideology is reinforced by the ethics of care philosophy whereby objectivist male-centred perspectives on rights and

conduct are displaced by a subjective relational perspective on women's interaction with others, through care for the common good and also out of a sense of moral obligation (Gilligan).

Whether it is through patriarchal capitalist relations or maternalist ideology, gender essentialism is reinforced through strict sex-role differentiation between men and women whereby women are seen primarily as nurturers or caregivers to children, and others, to the subordination of other roles and ways of being. Feminists have rightfully critiqued biological deterministic assumptions about women's care work, and the moral currency that comes with it, which reduce women's activities to primary level, attributable to some kind of feminine "essence" or "nature," which makes them *inherently* suitable, willing, and readily available, to serve others (Oakley; Villani et al.; Gustafson). Instead, the social construction of motherhood allows for a more expansive and nuanced understanding of how social reproduction is shaped by varying socio-cultural factors and is mutually constituted with other social variables such as race, class, culture and sexuality in shaping women's maternal experiences (Collins; Glenn; Mohammed; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila; Parrenas). This perspective also takes into consideration how the care and rearing of children can take place by individuals other than birth mothers. As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila rightfully state: "The ideal of biological mothers raising their own children is widely held but is also widely broken at both ends of the class spectrum. Wealthy elites have always relied on others—nannies, governesses, and boarding schools—to raise their children, while poor families often rely on kin and 'other mothers'" (557).

Policing Motherhood: The Good Mother/Bad Mother Binary

The good mother/bad mother binary serves to control, police and sanction the actions and activities of mothers who are expected to meet or conform to dominant standards of motherhood. Diana Gustafson's work, *Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence*, is noteworthy here. She states that, "master discourses about motherwork advance social expectations for women's connection with their children. One salient feature of this master discourse is the good mother/bad mother binary. Subtle and not-so-subtle images of good mother and bad mother serve as the benchmark for evaluating mothering performance"(25). With the 'good mother' construct, women are presented as loving self-sacrificing nurturers, who put their children's needs before their own. The good mother's identity and sense of self worth are defined and come through her child: "Biological ties ... bind together mother and child emotionally, socially, and morally" (Gustafson 26). Since the 'good mother' has a high sense of moral obligation, taking full responsibility for

the care, well being and social development of her child, she is highly critical of herself when she is unable to meet such expectations and, as a result, she engages in maternal blame (Eyer; Caplan).

The 'bad mother,' on the other hand, is characterised as a mother who is an inept nurturer, lacking in demonstrative love and who is not readily available to meet her child's emotional and physical needs. Whether it is due to work, career or personal circumstances, the 'bad mother' is seen as advancing other interests ahead of her child's needs, misusing her time when spent with her child and/or finding herself separated from her child. The 'bad mother construct' is indicative of what Gustafson classifies as the "unbecoming" of motherhood for those women who decide, or are forced, to live apart from their children for whatever reasons. Gustafson states that,

Unbecoming is a social descriptor that attaches to the women whose decision to live apart from their children deviates from dominant social and moral expectations of the responsible female parent.... Unbecoming captures the process of moving from an authentic state of mother to delegitimized category of bad mother or non-mother, from being an insider among mothers to an outsider (35).

Clearly, the good mother/bad mother binary does not allow for mothers to arrange childcare and experience motherhood in different ways beyond the confines of rigid gender and cultural norms. Because transnational mothers have to deal with periods of separation from their children, sometimes over the long-term, they are constantly battling the 'bad mother' or the 'outsider mother' label. Therefore, I am interested in exploring how Caribbean transnational mothers may feel pressured to conform to dominant standards of motherhood, even when it is not reasonable, worthwhile or even practical for them to do so.

African-Caribbean Families: Socio-economic and Cultural Context

The structure and function of working-class African-Caribbean families in the study were characterized by the importance of the extended family, matrilocality, child-shifting and flexibility in socio-sexual heterosexual relations (Senior; Mohammed; Barrow; Clarke). Motherhood and wifehood are not inextricably linked for women, as marriage is not a social prerequisite for having children. This places women's experiences of sexuality, selfhood and motherhood outside the realm of dominant nuclear middle-class family norms and in opposition to normative constructions of femininity based on female dependency and respectability. Therefore, isolation in the private sphere as stay-at-home mothers

and wives is not a practical reality for many working-class African-Caribbean women. There are several reasons for this, including male economic instability, non-reliance on the male wage and un-established conjugal relations (Senior; Barrow). Since the time of slavery, working-class African-Caribbean women have had to work to support themselves and their families, making economic independence an integral part of their mothering role, which is simply known as their worker-mother role (Crawford forthcoming).

Other-mothering is an important aspect of motherhood for working-class African-Caribbean women, which is demonstrated through the culturally class-based practices of child-shifting and matrifocality. Through child-shifting (informal child fostering), birth mothers are willing to out-source the care of their dependent children to others, usually close female relatives or friends, if they are unable to care for them due to economic (poverty, seasonal work, large family etc.) and/or personal reasons (illness, teenage pregnancy, safety concerns, etc.) (Russell-Brown; Gordon). The length of child fostering is decided by the parent(s) in consultation with the caregiver. Also, the legacy of matrifocality in the Caribbean reflects the central role that elder women (grandmothers, aunts and sisters) play in maintaining inter-generational households and caring for their younger kinfolk (Clarke; Smith). Moreover, these practices facilitate women's migratory movements and support transnational motherhood because dependent children are being cared for by others.

Transnational Motherhood and the Meanings of Motherhood

In the following sections, I explore the multiple meanings of motherhood through working-class African-Caribbean women's experiences as transnational mothers.¹ Transnational motherhood ultimately raises many theoretical questions about divergent conceptualizations of the social constructions of motherhood as perceived by female migrants and how they attempt to negotiate, and also reconcile, normative gender codes on both a practical and ideological level. The meanings of motherhood for women in the study varied and brought out contradictory responses about the different expectations women had of themselves, as mothers, which were influenced by gender ideology, personal values and socio-cultural norms. Women engaged in self-assessment based on how they perceived themselves as well as how others perceived them—their children and mainstream Canadian society.

Working-class African-Caribbean women in my study² placed a positive value on motherhood. They saw motherhood as an important part of their identity and were committed to the well-being of their children. Transnational motherhood, ultimately, extends African-Caribbean women's worker-mother

role across borders. Women remitted money, clothing, school supplies and other items to support their children and households. They were active agents in utilizing cultural practices such as saving schemes (susu or partner) and community networks to establish themselves financially while transferring the new knowledge they had obtained to their family and friends.

In relation to what motherhood meant to participants, some women contested the “outsider mother” label because they did not see separation or absence from their children, due to migration, as an abdication of their maternal role or as abandonment of their children:

Motherhood means everything to me. I feel privileged to be a mother and especially looking back at where I was and where I am now. I consider myself to be blessed. (Patsy)

Motherhood means a lot of things. It means love. It means taking care of your children. I always say that God is first and my children are second, even before my husband. (Hazel)

But a few women felt pressured to conform to dominant standards of motherhood. Although their situation did not allow it, they stressed that mothers should be there to physically care for their children. They made it clear that separation from their children was a consequence of migration, and not a choice that they impetuously made.

I always encourage people when you have your children do not give them away. That's my way... for motherhood for me means to have your children, live with them and do as much as you can that is what I say. (Delores).

In being a mother support your children ... in my situation, I didn't get a chance to talk to her, and if possible stay with your children. (Cossette)

While transnational mothering promotes a more expansive notion of motherhood to include “spatial and temporal separations” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 548), and is anchored by child-shifting practices, other-mothering and strong kin networks for Caribbean women (Ho; Thompson and Bauer; Olwig), maternalist ideology persisted in shaping how some mothers felt obligated to care for their children in gender-specific ways.

What Kind of Mother Are You?

The good mother/bad mother binary surfaced in some women’s responses.

When Lorna, a mother of five, was asked what motherhood meant to her, she proceeded to assess her role as a mother based on the good mother/bad mother binary: “Because of circumstances I don’t blame myself for not being a good mother. . . . Motherhood means being there emotionally, financially and physically for your children” (Lorna). Although Lorna claims she is not a ‘good mother,’ she attempts to maintain some integrity in the matter by attributing separation from her children to circumstances beyond her control—lengthy separation from her children was not something that she desired or wanted but occurred as a result of immigration problems. Lorna was adamant that long-term separation jeopardised parent-child relationships and made the reunification process extremely difficult. She explains:

A shorter time: I would probably come and go. I would find some other way of doing it but not to stay away for any extended time. I wouldn’t want to leave my kids for a long period of time for us to grow apart. There is a big loss there. That teenage life was theirs was just gone, without a mommy around or something like that. Because when we were home, the kids were very good, the point when we were home. They were disciplined. They were good kids. But now they just went bad. (Lorna)

Rhacel Parrenas also found a similar response in her study on Filipina migrants. She states that, “for missing the growing years of children, many mothers are remorseful and admit to lost intimacy in the transnational family” (120). For Caribbean transnational mothers, child-shifting practices over the long-term is complicated within transnational relations because mothers have less parental control and influence over their children because they can not monitor the development of their children through periodic visits, in turn, making them feel powerless in the process.

The good mother/bad mother binary ultimately operates along gender, race and class lines. In the first instance, due to the gendered dynamics of the social reproduction, women more than men are scrutinized and vilified for not caring directly for their children or simply not fulfilling their expected ‘natural’ role (Gustafson). Secondly, race and class privileges inform the social hierarchy of motherhood whereby female migrants of colour are characterised as ‘bad mothers’ because childcare and familial arrangements deviate from white middle-class standards. The irony of this is that while some female migrants work as domestics, taking care of the children and households of their white female employers, they are being judged negatively for not doing the same for their families. Shellee Colen exposes how gender, race and class inequalities operate in paid reproductive work, in what she calls stratified reproduction, disadvantaging third world women.

By stratified reproduction I mean that physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in the global economy, and migration status and that are structured by social, economic and political forces. The reproductive labor—physical, mental, and emotional—of bearing, raising and socializing children and of creating and maintaining households and people (infancy to old age) is differently experienced, valued, and rewarded according to inequalities of access to material and social resources in particular historical and cultural contexts. (78)

Racism has informed how Caribbean domestics have been exploited as workers and also how they have been seen solely as workers, and *not as mothers*, in maintaining white middle-class families under foreign domestic work schemes in Canada (Arat-Koc; Calliste; Silvera; Crawford 2003). Hazel, a mother of seven, shared how Caribbean women are viewed as ‘bad mothers’ by white Canadian society: “They viewed them as not good mothers. How could you leave your children, like people would say that to you ... like when you are working they would say how could you leave your children” (Hazel). But Hazel resisted the ‘bad mother’ label and took pride in working hard to create a better future for her children.

In a case of stratified reproduction, Carol, a mother of four, experienced the *unbecoming* process, as an “outcast mother,” while speaking to her employer about her family. She identified class and culture dynamics that differentiated her mothering experiences from her white female employer’s when she was questioned about being separated from her children.

In some way when she said that I couldn't relate to her because she was 40 and her child was three years old. Some people choose that way. But that wasn't something that I choose. In some way she is questioning my motherhood. How could you leave three children behind? Would you do that? I mean she had a point, but we came from a different culture. Her mother and father became rich after and they only had two children. She was very educated and seems like she was more than 35 when she got married. I didn't have what she had. (Carol)

Since transnational mothers experience the *unbecoming* of motherhood, because they are seen as ‘wronging’ their children as a result of ‘leaving them behind,’ maternal sacrifice appears to be a common way that mothers seek to explain their absence from their children. Implicit in this assumption is that female migrants are doing what they are doing for the betterment of their

children, and separation from them is a small price to pay for economic security. Given that transnational mothers face invisibility as mothers in white mainstream society, maternalist sentiments may help in elevating women's self-esteem and self worth. For example, Hazel felt mothers are more important than fathers because of the additional sacrifices that mothers are willing to make for their children:

And I think that the mothers do more for the children than the men. I'm saying not all men because there are some good men. But I think the mother is the one that do the two jobs. The mother is the one who is going to make sure that everything goes right. You know. If you look around you if a man lost his engineering job does he go drive a cab? No! He wants an engineering job back, but if a woman and you look around if a woman lost her job as a bank teller, she gone in the nursing home to work and she gone in the McDonalds to work. The first thing that she is going to tell you is that she has her children to support.... (Hazel)

Working-class African-Caribbean women's economic role continued to be a central part of their mothering role, which challenges the divisibility of spheres and roles—private/public and productive/reproductive. As Hazel succinctly states, “women are both the breadwinner and milk-winner” to their children.

What Do Children Think About Their Mothers?

While transnational motherhood reinforces the multiplicity of women's role as mothers on a practical level, it invariably exposes the pervasiveness of dominant ideologies of motherhood through the splitting of the provider/caregiver roles for these women. A few women stated out-rightly that their children did not see them as ‘good mothers,’ because they were not there for them when they were younger or because they did not raise them. Parrenas states that “regulated by ‘feelings rules,’ emotions are determined by ideologies, and [in families] the ideology of woman as nurturer is a central determinant of the emotional needs and expectations of its members” (116). Due to gender norms and socialization, it is not surprising that some children upheld dominant notions of motherhood, in which the primary role for mothers is to nurture and socialize children, and, secondly, is to be an economic provider. Statements such as: “she hates me” (Cossette), “they don't accept me” (Delores), “it is hard to bond” (Lorna) or “we are not close and we can't stay in the same room sometimes” (Hazel) were descriptors used by mothers who were separated from their children for four years or more. The reunification process for children, whether positive or negative, depends on multiple factors, such as age of, the length of separation,

socialization, attachment to caregiver, parental experience and influence, and cannot be reduced to just one factor. But it is clear that lengthy separation between mothers and children disrupts the bonding process, making communication inconsistent and strained. This challenges assumptions about ‘maternal instinct.’ Children may have come to expect or desire the ‘good mother’ archetype instead of a mother who is less than perfect. Delores felt her sons saw her more as a “friend” or “sister” rather than mother or parent: “Maybe they look at me as friend, or sister, or as a person who grow them up differently” (Delores).

I also interviewed seven daughters for my study and they, too, shed some light on how children experience the separation and reunification process. Kelly, who had experienced short-term separation from her mother at an early age (she was three years old when her parents migrated and five years old when she reunited with them), felt that her mother tried to provide a better life for her even though she did not have the resources to do so comfortably. Education was encouraged in Kelly’s household but her mother also supported her interest in sports and school club activities. Kelly reflects on her mother’s vision for her:

My mother had less than a grade eight education. Maybe that is why she stressed education so much. She wanted me to have more than she had. She couldn’t really help me with my schoolwork but she expected me to do my homework and get descent grades. Education was seen as a way out for her, better chances, opportunities and stuff like that. (Kelly)

The responses that children had towards their mothers were complicated by lengthy separation and by the admirable feelings that some children held for their caregivers. Kim explains the tensions that can occur in the triangular mother-child-caregiver relationship when estrangement occurs and communication breaks down:

I know my friends they even felt resentment with their mothers because a lot of them left Jamaica to be with their mothers in Canada. A lot of them, they left an environment where they were raised by a very loving grandmother and aunt that really loved them, and then they came to Canada here to somebody that they really don’t know, and they try to discipline them and scold them and they are like: who are you? You know what I mean, “I’m your mother,” “No, you are not, grandma is my mother.” (Kim)

While some children may have challenged biological motherhood by contesting their mothers’ attempt to exercise maternal authority over them, they,

nonetheless, idealized gender-specific notions of motherhood, which they projected onto their female caregivers.

Daughters who had established bonds with their mothers recalled feelings of confusion and sadness due to their unexpected absence. Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese note that for some children feelings of abandonment occur as soon as their parents leave. “They [do] not accept the argument that parents left to make a better life for them abroad. Their choice would have been to have their parents with them despite economic hardship” (Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese 7). This was the case for Doris and her two older siblings whose parents migrated without them in the early 1980s. Doris was seven years old at the time and recalled being very unhappy: “I didn’t know why they left. I was confused and sad. I was the youngest and I remember crying a lot. I missed my family, the love and attention” (Doris). Another daughter, Teen, felt that she and her siblings did not really know about plans that their parents had: “I don’t think we were told that they were leaving, and when I asked my mom she says that we were too young to understand anyway. You know back in the day, they didn’t tell kids anything” (Teen). Moreover, some mothers may have underestimated their children’s understanding of their migratory plans because of their age but these accounts demonstrate that children need to be reassured about the situation by being included in the decision-making process.

Re-bonding, Communication and Influence

Mothers expressed love for their children regardless of how they children responded to them upon reunification. Although a few women were able to be affectionate with their younger children, especially those who were Canadian-born, others felt awkward about showing affection or being demonstrative toward their Caribbean-born children, especially their teenage children, when feelings of resentment or estrangement persisted.

While some mothers held on to a broader vision of opportunity for their families, and endured a lot in the process, some children could not get past the emotional sacrifices made in the process. But regardless of the material gains that transnational mothers might make for their children, Parrenas argues that it is underappreciated because children “do not deny the emotional difficulties wrought by separation nor do they replace its emotional costs with material gain but only camouflage it” (141). Hazel was bothered by the fact that some children seemed ungrateful for the sacrifices that their parents made for them:

And that is why and I see children come up and be so disgruntled with their parents, and they don’t want to go to school, and they have all of this opportunity—it really bothers me. If I could hold them, I would shake them.

Like I said, you don't know what your parents go through especially mothers. There is a lot of sacrifice that a lot of mothers make. (Hazel)

Although women in the study had good intentions about securing a better future for their children, many did not effectively communicate this to their children prior to their departure. Patsy, a mother of three, assumed that her children were too young to understand the situation so she did not discuss her plans with them. She stated that, "I don't know how much they understood at the time. I think now they do but back then I don't think they understood when they were younger" (Patsy). Likewise, Lorna did not consider asking her children how they felt about her departure: "That's not something I have asked them. They were small. I never asked" (Lorna). While mothers claimed their children's age was a major reason why did not discuss their migratory plans with their children, it is quite possible they may have wanted to lessen the emotional impact by avoiding such discussions.

Influence

Mothers attempted to influence their children in positive ways. They were proud of their accomplishments, such as owning a home and being able to travel occasionally, but the greatest reward was exposing their children and family members to better opportunities. These were things they could never imagine having in the Caribbean.

But I feel good for a single person. And I'm a strong person. I opened the door for my family, my five kids and two of my sisters came. My mom's here. (Lorna)

Carol was, simply, grateful for a chance to improve her life:

I think I got more out of being here than if I was home. With all the hassle and all I had to go through there is so much to be thankful for.

Since a few women were able to upgrade their education and advance out of low-paying service sector and healthcare aide jobs, education was seen as the passport to betterment for their children. Taking into consideration gender, daughters, in particular, were instructed to take their schooling seriously. This was practical insight because women with higher levels of education tend to have better opportunities to improve their lives and be in control of life-choices related to their sexuality and reproduction (Mohammed). Mothers were proud of their children's educational achievements even if they were not

able to help their children with their studies or provide much financial support. Their children's achievements also reflected their success. Patsy shared her proud feelings:

I feel privileged to be a mother, and especially looking back at where I was and where I am now. I consider myself to be blessed. I have three children who are highly educated and I really consider it that I am blessed. They came here and they don't follow what others do. They are not followers. They are leaders. Their friends always wanted to do what they do instead of them doing what they friends do. (Patsy)

In a few cases, education was stressed as a deterrent to early sexual activity. Some mothers remembered too vividly having to quit school early because they became pregnant. This might explain the heightened fear that some mothers demonstrated during their daughters' teenage years: "I wanted them to have an education. I didn't want them to grow up where I grow up. I didn't want my daughter to become a teenage mom like me and all that" (Hazel). Hazel was devastated when she found out that her daughter, her third child, was pregnant. She did not want her daughter to have the life that she had as an under-educated single-mother. When the initial shock and anger subsided, Hazel was determined that her daughter would finish school and that she would get the help she needed to raise her child. Hazel explains,

She had the baby in June and she went back to school. She never missed a day of school. My mother was very angry because I was rough on her. My mother said, "Send my grandchild back to me" and I said to my daughter, "You have to go to school, there is no way you are going to sit around here and end up on welfare. You are going to go to school." And I knew it was important so my mother said, "Okay, send the baby," and she was nine weeks old, and my mother raised her until was two years old. (Hazel)

The help came from Hazel's mother, the infant's great grandmother, who decided to take care of the child for a couple of years in Jamaica. This way childcare was secured while Hazel worked and her daughter continued on with her post-secondary education. This is an example of inter-generational other-mothering practices taking place from the host country to home country.

Conclusion

The various responses given by Caribbean transnational mothers who faced migration, separation and reunification issues with their children show that

the experiences of motherhood and the meanings given to this role by women were far from unitary or fixed. The multiple feelings and emotions—whether negative and/or positive—reflect the complexity of transnational motherhood through the trials and ambiguities of mother-child relationships. While working-class African-Caribbean women viewed and practiced motherhood in a collectivized way, through matrifocality and child-shifting, they also had personal expectations of themselves as mothers based on obligation and love for their children. These expectations were complicated by perceptions held by their children as well as white mainstream society. As transnational mothers, some mothers were upset about being separated from their children longer than they expected, which produced feelings of regret and guilt. But other mothers adamantly resisted the ‘bad mother’ or ‘outsider mother’ label. Moreover, although African-Caribbean women’s mothering practices did not conform to idealized norms, on the practical level, maternalist ideology through the notion of maternal sacrifice did, however, remain ideologically strong in defining motherhood for women.

¹My discussion on Caribbean women and transnational motherhood stems from my doctoral research conducted in 2004–2005. My research focuses on the experiences of eleven working-class African-Caribbean women from the English-speaking Caribbean who migrated to Canada during the 1970s to the early 1990s in search of better economic opportunities. I examined intersectional relationship between female migrant labour, transnationality and motherhood within global capitalism as women worked, predominantly in domestic services, and settled in Canada while caring for their children and families from abroad.

²In placing the experiences of working-class African-Caribbeans at the forefront of this study, my fieldwork is based on primary data gathered from personal (semi-structured) interviews. My methodology consists of a combination of feminist qualitative inquiry, grounded theory and phenomenology. I had the opportunity to interview ten women living in Toronto, who were at one time female migrants from the English-speaking Caribbean—Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and St. Kitts and Nevis—during the 1970s to early 1990s. Most of the participants were initially undocumented upon arrival, so they worked in precarious domestic jobs while providing for their children in the Caribbean. Six women were single and/or in visiting unions while two women were married and another two were in common law relationships prior to migrating. Seven women left three to four children behind. Ten children were left at five years old and under (of those, six were under two years old) while five children were left between the ages of ten to twelve years old. Finally, four women were

separated from their children for three to four years, three women for five to eight years, two women for nine to twelve years and one woman's case was pending at the time of the study. The average years of mother-child separation for the entire sample were 6.4 years.

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