

## Engaging Empowered Mothering

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### Black Caribbean Diasporic (M)othering Under Patriarchal Motherhood

*Women living in Diaspora are presented with different conflicts under patriarchal motherhood. The work of Zadie Smith, in her novel *White Teeth*, depicts racialized women struggling with their identities as mothers while negotiating their experiences from being mothered in a different culture and how to mother for a “new” nation. Smith depicts women who have migrated from Bangladesh and the Caribbean, and take up their roles as mothers in England. This cross-cultural shift, in turn, shapes how they feel about themselves as mothers. This is not to say that these women are disempowered; rather, there are moments of isolation in their practice as mothers, which facilitate empowerment. While the boundaries of patriarchal motherhood limit mothers’ authority in their roles, this paper argues that these boundaries present unique challenges for women living in Diaspora. This paper will look at Diasporic women’s navigation of the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Diaspora is experienced differently on the basis of gender, racial identity, class, and nationhood. This paper utilizes a feminist mothering theoretical lens under which empowered mothering is recognized as an alternate location for resistance to occur.*

#### Introduction

Motherhood is socio-historically specific and constructed based on the ideals of a given culture and society. A critical examination of the institution of motherhood reveals that mothering practices are neither “natural” nor “innate” although they are depicted as such. Western representations of motherhood shape what we perceive as normative or appropriate through social and cultural institutions. Adrienne Rich theorized about the ways in which motherhood could be seen as a location of power rather than in its predominantly deval-

ued state. Rich articulated that women's practice of mothering is a potential site of empowerment where mothers could be liberated from the regulation and isolation they experience under patriarchal motherhood (Rich 13). The control of women's roles as mothers disempowers any sense of actual agency that they may possess. Rich went on to affirm that the institution of patriarchal motherhood intensified the divide between the "private" and "public" spheres in Western culture and by extension afforded women little to no support for their work. This privatization and lack of support has led me to question how women from other cultural backgrounds interact with the regulatory practices of motherhood. Specifically, I want to examine how Black Caribbean diasporic women confront patriarchal motherhood and if the boundaries of patriarchal motherhood present unique challenges for women living in Diaspora.

Patriarchal motherhood is normalized through the state's investment in its perpetuation. The state is represented by governing entities, whether federal or municipal, that shape our interactions with society through the provision of sponsored services. For example, by gendering and privatizing mother-work, the state does not have to provide any services or money to care for children. When the state does offer support to families, it is typically minimal and tenuous. This reality is difficult for mothers because it renders their work invisible and without value. Within patriarchal motherhood, the ideal mother figure is white, heterosexual and monogamous, middle-class, and able-bodied. This ideal of the "good mother" regulates both women and men who do not meet these criteria. The political economy of mothering is borne out of the reality that in an effort to reinforce white male privilege, while at the same time continuing the birth rate of the nation, someone needs to be encouraged to raise the nation's "future citizens."

In our imaginings of the "good mother," we neglect to acknowledge how a woman's nationality could influence not only her self-perception as a mother but also her engagement with the state. Normative patriarchal motherhood assumes that a mother is participating in the process of "mothering for a nation" and has been mothered within this nation. Therefore, women who have conflicting associations with their understandings of "home"—perhaps they do not reside within the country they were born and raised—are faced with another set of barriers in their roles as mothers as well as in their alignment with the "good" mother. The process of migration whereby mothers are no longer closely associated with their immediate family, culture, and community presents an isolating process for them.

In *White Teeth* (2000), Zadie Smith explores the complexities of the lives of mothers living in the English Diaspora. The characters in the novel attempt to reconcile the diasporic complexities of living in England. In this novel, Di-

aspora is problematized to articulate a multiplicity of negotiated and shifting meanings. Diaspora refers to

a place where the points of departure and the points of arrival are constantly shifting and the search for certainty, stability, and fixidity are overshadowed by the dynamic nature of transnational flows. Diasporas have come to be associated with resistance to the nation-state within which they are located, and in this vein transnationalism and Diaspora are best discussed through the politics of culture, identity, and subjectivity. (Massaquoi 140)

It is in this resistance to the nation-state that I see the potential for empowered mothering. Empowered mothering utilizes resistance as a strategy to decipher the dominant discourse and provides alternative discourses through a sense of personal agency (Horowitz 54). Smith's novel examines the experience of diaspora without totalizing or essentializing her characters' lived realities. The mothers in Smith's novels contest the very nature of patriarchal motherhood given their already unstable identities outside of the social construction of the "good mother." This external location allows these women to carve out their own understandings of what it means to be a good mother.

While the boundaries of patriarchal motherhood limit mothers' authority in their mothering roles, in Smith's novel Black Caribbean women who negotiate living in the Diaspora in England are presented with unique challenges. They thus engage with the practice of empowered mothering rather than the regulatory practices embedded in the institution of patriarchal motherhood. Diasporic conditions create different conflicts for Black Caribbean women in their practice of mothering when compared to women who have not migrated. Black Caribbean women experience patriarchy differently than women who would be deemed "natural" citizens. They interact with the patriarchal state in a different way because their citizenship status and racial location are consequently different from the perceived Western population. This otherness limits their feeling of belonging and isolates Black Caribbean diasporic women because they may not feel supported by their community and the nation at large.

It is my contention that feminist mothering theory needs to look closely at the implications of cross-border migration and the impact it can have on women's experiences of mothering; this perspective is largely absent from the current canon. The negotiation that Black Caribbean diasporic mothers face can be found in Smith's presentation of her female characters; literature, when combined with feminist mothering theory, provides an excellent starting point

for theorizing how diasporic women's negotiations differ from mainstream understandings of motherhood and how these negotiations are potential sites for empowered mothering.

*White Teeth* depicts diasporic women engaging in empowered mothering through their strategic disengagement from patriarchal motherhood in that they do not conform to privatized notions of mothering within a nuclear family arrangement. The way that they were raised and the make up of their families may differ from normative, privatized nuclear representations of the family that are difficult to reproduce in diasporic contexts. The female characters in Smith's novel draw on each other's tenacity and lived experiences to reinforce their own locations as empowered mothers. Empowered mothering, as defined by Andrea O'Reilly, "recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy" ("Introduction" 12). When maternal authority and agency are engaged in the process of mothering, motherhood becomes "a political site wherein the mother can effect social change" (O'Reilly "Introduction" 12).

The mothers in Smith's novel utilize empowered mothering practices to not only affirm their experiences of mothering but to also encourage their children to be empowered individuals given the stigma and racism they experience in their daily lives. Empowered mothering attempts to transgress aspects of patriarchal motherhood that can be limiting or oppressive to women.<sup>1</sup> This goal in and of itself is a feminist goal.

The mothers in *White Teeth* are agentic, authoritative, authentic and autonomous in their roles as mothers; therefore, they directly oppose normative representations of patriarchal motherhood. Erika Horowitz discusses empowered mothering by suggesting that women find it difficult to identify with a society that punishes any deviation from the ideal mother (Horowitz 53). Because some diasporic women do not resolutely identify with the societies within which they live, they are more likely to engage in empowered mothering as a result of their lived realities. Their lived realities are not only limited to their own experiences of racism and isolation but also include the experiences of their children. Throughout *White Teeth*, the mothers are confronted with engaging their children's experiences, which differ vastly from their own experiences growing up in their "home" countries. These experiences prove to be incredibly isolating and challenging.

The privatization of motherhood in Western cultures isolates Black Caribbean diasporic women in the United States and England because the construction of the family differs from their own cultural understandings. In her article "We Kind of Family," Merle Hodge defines the family in a social context and then specifies how the Caribbean context differs. Hodge writes,

A family is an organization of people that provides for its members' material needs (food, clothing and shelter), and their emotional needs (approval, acceptance, solidarity and warmth), and socializes the young. There are different kinds of groupings that perform the functions of the family. In the Caribbean, the term "family" could refer to one, or all, of three organizations: a sexual union and its offspring; a household; or a network not confined to any one household. (476)

Hodge's definition reveals that Caribbean understandings of the family are more communal and are not restricted to the physical space of the home. The makeup of the Caribbean family is in direct opposition to patriarchal representations of the nuclear family and therefore is not easily replicated in a Western context. Caribbean families are also not fixed and can embody the traditional nuclear model of the family while at the same time relying on the community for support. When we think about Black Caribbean diasporic women living in the United States and Britain, in relation to Smith's novels, we can understand how the very nature of their upbringing deviates from normative understandings of the Western family. In the process of migration, Black Caribbean diasporic women lose their support networks and may not feel reinforced in their mothering practices. Although Smith's text is a work of fiction, these narratives closely mirror the realities of Black Caribbean mothers in England. *White Teeth* allows for a theoretical assessment of how women practice empowered mothering through agency, autonomy, authenticity and authority, four themes that frame my analysis of mothers' lives. Furthermore, the texts reveal how home, resistance, identity, and culture profoundly shape the tensions and possibilities within diasporic existences as women negotiate the "in-between" spaces that allow them to engage empowered mothering.

### **Diaspora and Mothering: Negotiating Identities**

Diaspora is a concept with a number of different yet relatively similar definitions and applications. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to identify not only the definitions that I will be using but also how diaspora will be applied to *White Teeth* going forward. *White Teeth* depicts the friendship that develops between Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal post-World War II. Archibald's wife Clara Jones' experiences of diaspora influence how she mothers her daughter Irie and also how she was mothered upon migrating to England in the 1970s. Her friendship that develops with Samad's wife Alsana also influences the way in which she engages with empowered mothering. As Charmaine Crawford suggests, "the traditional meaning of the word diaspora refers to the dispersal of a group of people from their homeland." (Crawford 97). However, this defi-

dition is further complicated when we consider that migration does not often only occur once, especially when we look to the Caribbean. Crawford goes on to explain that the Caribbean is a region of diasporas made up of people from Africa, white settlers, and the West Indies. Smith's text deals with characters that were members of the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and are now members of the Caribbean Diaspora in Britain. In *White Teeth*, we can identify emerging diasporas or characters that are directly influenced by experiences of diaspora. Paul Zeleza writes that diaspora,

entails a culture and a consciousness, sometimes diffuse and sometimes concentrated, of a 'here' separate from a 'there', a 'here' that is often characterized by a regime of marginalization and a 'there' that is invoked as a rhetoric of self-affirmation of belonging to 'here' differently...Diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings. (Zeleza, 41)

I use Zeleza's definition of diaspora because I see it as one of the few definitions that brings together the themes of diasporic existence that are present in Smith's novels. Zeleza's definition highlights the push and pull of being 'here' and 'there' as well as the recognition that one's identity under diaspora is a process of being and becoming. He also recognizes the influence that culture has in shaping this being and becoming. Embedded in diaspora is the notion of transnationality, which is reflective of the contentious relationship between one's home (origin) and diaspora (away from or in exile) through the exchange of commodities, services, and people (Crawford 98). I see the concept of home as a site for feminist inquiry. Within the complexities of diasporic arrangements, one's notion of home becomes destabilized. Given the reality that under patriarchal motherhood there is a direct link to the privatization of the home, it is important to question how this uncertainty surrounding "home" is played out in the private sphere.

I am cautious, when using diaspora, of the likelihood that experiences and manifestations of culture can be essentialized. I have chosen Smith's novel because of the plurality of experiences of diaspora and therefore there is less possibility that such narratives can be read as representative of one diasporic experience. In his article "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," Zeleza cautions scholars not to subsume histories of diaspora. When engaging with Smith's text I apply Kim Butler's methodological framework of diasporan study. Scholars need to ask the reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal: how has one's relationship with their homeland affected their experiences in a new country, what is their relationship with the hostland,

are there interrelations within diasporan groups, can a comparative study of different diasporas be provided (Zezeza 40). Engaging these questions in conjunction with a discourse analysis can help to shed light on the plethora of experiences that Smith's characters face, particularly when considering the effect of diasporic living on their roles as mothers. I see this as a strategic method due to the fact that some of Smith's characters overtly identify with experiences of dispersal while others do not and may not recognize how this impacts their mothering.

The concept of home is central to understanding diaspora and it is also important to ideas of resistance, culture, and identity. Crawford explains that, "Diasporic identities are produced and reproduced through the collective memory of a group of people. The pliability of memory allows for *home* to either be muted or be imagined in favourable or nostalgic ways in fostering national pride." (Crawford 98). This reality is important when considering the role a mother can play in this negotiation given that mothers are often the bearers of tradition, culture, and oral history. In Smith's text, some mothers completely disavow their heritage: their children know little about their matrilineal origins; while for others, their mothers' pasts become intrinsic to their understandings of self. In this way, we can see how memory becomes a pliable artefact moving its way in and out of collective family consciousness. Moments of collectivity are important when considering the isolation that migration imposes on the family and moreover, the isolation that is experienced when deviating from normative depictions of the family. bell hooks' theory of the homeplace as a site of resistance can be applied to the experiences of the diasporic family. bell hooks writes,

In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith. The folks who made this life possible, who were our primary guides and teachers, were black women. (266)

hooks' recognition of women agentially shaping the home as a refuge politicizes the very nature of the home in the context of African American families. We can see that hooks addresses several of the values and roles that Hodge proposes in defining the family in a Caribbean context: the provision of comfort and shelter, fuel for their bodies, faith. hooks continues the politicization of the homeplace by seeing its role in confronting issues of humanization and resistance (267). Black women expand the role of the caregiver from its

patriarchal meaning by elevating the spirits of their families and communities (268). I argue that the concept of the homeplace as a site of resistance can be extended to diasporic mothers. They too must protect and elevate themselves and their children from the white supremacist cultures that they encounter in Western countries. They employ resistance by encouraging their children to value themselves more than the society within which they reside values them. If we consider diasporic students learning in a classroom, chances are that their teachers will not represent their histories and cultures. Therefore, the homeplace becomes a site of resistance from the mainstreaming of Western cultures for diasporic identities and is a potential site for identity formation in that there is a recognition of the past and present, the “here” and “there.”

Identity, home, resistance, and culture are intrinsic to my understanding of diaspora and further to my understanding of what it means to be a diasporic mother. Empowered mothering, combined with the homeplace as a site of resistance, provides Black Caribbean diasporic women with the opportunity to agentially engage mothering practices on their own terms. This reality is present in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* as we are presented with mothers who are unapologetic in their mothering practices and attempt to navigate the lived experiences of their children.

## White Teeth

Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth* depicts the relationship between the Jones and Iqbal families as they negotiate themes of culture, belonging, and Diaspora. Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal first meet when they are stationed together in a small village in Bulgaria as British soldiers in World War II. Archie is white, lower-middle class, and British. Samad is Bengali and returns to Bangladesh after the war. Samad immigrates to England in 1972 with his Bengali wife, Alsana, in hopes of starting a new life, making a little money, and returning to Bangladesh. Upon arriving in England Samad contacts Archie, as Archie is his only friend in the London area and the two men pick up where they left off twenty-five years ago. Given the close proximity of their homes, a friendship develops between Alsana and Archie’s wife Clara who was born in Jamaica and immigrated to England in her teenage years. The two women foster a friendship out of their feelings of isolation and cultural disillusion in the English Diaspora. They also relate on the basis that they are both married to older men who share a preoccupation with the past.

Alsana and Clara experience their first pregnancies at the same time. During their pregnancies, they turn to each other for conversation and support. Alsana gives birth to twin boys, Magid and Millat, and Clara gives birth to a girl, Irie Ambrosia. Since their children are the same age and are friends inside



and outside of school, Alsana and Clara are able to discuss their negotiations of mothering and their children's experiences in England. While Alsana is undoubtedly the more vocal of the two mothers, their alliance helps them negotiate their experiences of diaspora and mothering. In this way, they form "a network not confined to any one household" and create their own version of an extended family (Hodge 476). Clara's experiences, as a Jamaican woman raising a British-born daughter, are the focus of my interrogation.

*White Teeth* depicts several significant negotiations that individuals experiencing diaspora have to face in a new country. Identity and belonging are at the forefront of these concerns. An interesting theme that directly links to notions of identity in the novel involves the process of naming. In sharing the names that Alsana and Clara have chosen for their children, Alsana is quick and resolute in her decision while Clara is more hesitant in picking a name. "Alsana is decisive. 'Meena and Malana, if they are girls. If boys: Magid and Millat.... But Clara is more cautious, because naming seems to her a fearful responsibility, a god-like task for a mere mortal. 'If it's a girl, I tink I like *Irie*. It patois. Means everyting *OK, cool, peaceful*, you know?'" (Smith 75). As we later find out, Alsana chooses two traditional Muslim names, Magid and Millat, and Clara gives birth to Irie Ambrosia Jones, thus honouring her Jamaican culture and her grandmother Ambrosia. Irie Jones' name reveals a sense of syncrecity through the transposing of Jamaican and British family names. The novel exposes the fact that naming practices, where parents are attempting to reconcile two conflicting cultures, is widespread in London, England.

It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. Names that secrete within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checks. (326)

Naming serves as a way that cultures can be preserved or attained. This theme highlights the presence of migration in British society yet does not address what happens in the spaces between the supposedly opposing names. In this way, the tensions between the hyphens and spaces of names suggest a literal manifestation of Diaspora. While Magid, Millat, and Irie are not alone in their first generation experiences, there are times throughout their upbringing where they experience isolation and racism and their mothers are there to help negotiate these tensions.

Several such tensions are present in the children's interactions within the school. Samad is outraged by the prospect of Magid's, Millat's, and Irie's par-

ticipation in the Pagan holiday of the Harvest festival. When participating in the Harvest Festival, children must collect food and distribute it to the elderly in the community. Samad is concerned that the school calendar is already too preoccupied with Christian holidays and would like to see more holidays included that are representative of his children's Bengali culture as well as Irie Jones' Jamaican culture. Alsana and Clara do not oppose the children's participation in the Harvest Festival, leading to the following scene:

In the back seat were the two children he had been waiting for: both with their little glasses.... But beyond these basic details, everything was not as it should be.... Both children were dressed in black from head to toe. Both wore white armbands on their left arms upon which were painted crude renditions of baskets of vegetables. Both had pads of writing paper and a pen tied around their necks with string. "Who did this to you?" Silence. "Was it Amma? And Mrs. Jones?" Silence.... Samad twisted in his car seat to face the two dissenters. "Am I meant to ask you what this is about?" Magid grasped his pen and, in his neat, clinical hand, printed: IF YOU WANT TO, then ripped off the piece of paper and handed it to Samad. "A Vow of Silence. I see. You too Irie? I would have thought you were too sensible for such nonsense." Irie scribbled for a moment on her pad and passed the missive forward. WE ARE PROTESTING. "Pros-testing? What are Pros and why are you testing them? Did your mother teach you this word?" Irie looked like she was going to burst with the sheer force of her explanation, but Magid mimed the zipping up of her mouth, snatched back the piece of paper and crossed out the first *s*. "Oh, I see. *Protesting*." Magid and Irie nodded maniacally. "Well, that is indeed fascinating. And I suppose your mothers engineered this whole scenario? The costumes? The notepads?" Silence. (150)

This scene illustrates that both Alsana and Clara are aware of their children's realities and promote a more syncretic understanding of their children's culture. They recognize the importance of their children's involvement in the Harvest Festival and want them to participate in the negotiation of their culture. This act of resistance by the two mothers as well as their encouragement of the children's participation, demonstrates that Alsana and Clara exude authority and autonomy in their practices as mothers despite their husbands' oppositional expectations.

Although both Clara and Alsana want their children to feel a sense of belonging to British culture, they also fear cultural and racial erasure. Clara and Alsana hold this fear, as did Clara's mother, Hortense, when she migrated with her teenaged daughter.

When Hortense Bowden, half white herself, got to hearing about Clara's marriage, she came round to the house, stood on the doorstep, said, "Understand: I and I don't speak from this moment forth," turned on her heel and was true to her word. Hortense hadn't put all that effort into marrying black, into dragging her genes back from the brink, just so her daughter could bring yet more high-coloured children into the world. (327)

While Clara was undoubtedly hurt by this assertion, she expresses similar feelings as Irie ages.

But with Irie and Clara the issue was mostly unspoken, for Clara knew she was not in a position to preach. Still, she made no attempt to disguise her disappointment or the aching sadness. From Irie's bedroom shrine of green-eyed Hollywood idols to the gaggle of white friends who regularly trooped in and out of her bedroom, Clara saw an ocean of pink skins surrounding her daughter and she feared the tide that would take her away. (328)

Clara is disillusioned by her daughter's understanding of culture thus translating to feelings of loss. Clara wants to encourage freethinking and wants Irie to have her own opinion (241). Her response to Irie's upbringing should not be interpreted as a passive approach to dealing with her child growing up in a different culture. Clara agentically allows Irie to construct her own identity based on her lived reality.

Clara does not teach Irie explicitly about her culture but rather exudes several of the characteristics of the Caribbean family such as nurturance, respect, dignity, and the community that Alsana and Clara develop. Yet when a teenaged Irie finds the confines of her home frustrating, Irie reaches out to her grandmother to learn about her Jamaican heritage. Upon arriving at Hortense's, Hortense says,

"You finally dash from that godless woman, I see.... No one knows better dan me what dat woman be like. Never at home, learnin' all her isms and skisms in the university, leavin' husband and pickney at home, hungry and maga...." Irie replies by saying, "Gran, I haven't come to find God. I just want to do some quiet study here and get my head together. I need to stay a few months—at least till the New Year." (384)

In this statement, Hortense reveals the initial rift in Irie's mother-line. Irie finds refuge in her grandmother's homeplace. Hortense, a Jehovah's Witness,

was unable to confine her daughter from the reality of living in England and desperately wanted her daughter to be a devout Jehovah's Witness as well (30). Clara's interests, clothing, and beliefs become more representative of mainstream British teenagers in 1974 (37). When Hortense converts the object of Clara's affection, Ryan Topps, Clara leaves home and disavows her mother (44). Clara's experiences with her own mother's repressive parenting tactics have shaped how she interacts with and faces Irie's growing up.

When Clara realizes that Irie is staying with Hortense, she is quick to call her and give her a strong warning. Clara says, "Hortense, I don't want you filling her head with a whole load of nonsense. You hear me? Your mother was fool to it, and then you were fool to it, but the buck stopped with me and it ain't going no further" (394). Clara is emphatic in her assertion that Irie should not be taught anything about her grandmother's faith. Irie, who is on another line in Hortense's home, witnesses her mother's authentic engagement with her mothering practices. Although, Clara is often shadowed by Alsana's assertiveness, we see that Clara practices agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority when it comes to Irie's upbringing.

Unbeknownst to Clara, Irie's atheism is just as strong as her mother's (395). In reality, what Irie gains from staying with her grandmother is an understanding of her matrilineal heritage. The brief glimpses that Irie receives from Hortense illuminate Jamaica for her.

And in the mornings it wasn't Italianate vineyards out there any more, it was sugar, sugar, sugar, and next door was nothing but tobacco and she presumptuously fancied that the smell of plantain sent her back somewhere, somewhere quite fictional for she'd never been there. Somewhere Columbus called St Jago but the arawaks stubbornly re-named Xaymaca, the name lasting longer than they did.... So *this* was where she came from. (400)

This experience of learning about her matrilineal heritage is important to Irie's understanding of identity. Hortense's role is vital to this shift in Irie's confidence and in many ways, I believe, was the only person who could convey this history to Irie. While Clara's practice of allowing Irie to negotiate and explore her own identity is strategic, perhaps these were some of the questions that Irie could not ask Clara and as a result needed to feel the warmth and nurturance of her grandmother's home to fully understand where she came from.

Irie's experiences emphasize some of the negotiations of being and becoming that happen within a diasporic context. Unlike Irie, we lose sight of Clara's explicit testimony in the text in terms of her processes of identity

making and culture; yet they can be identified in her mothering practices. Clara and Alsana cultivate and maintain a community that allows them to feel supported in their roles as mothers given that they do not have immediate family in close proximity. Their acts of resistance to mainstream Western culture reinforce Clara's sense of agency, authenticity, authority, and autonomy. As Notisha Massaquoi explained, diasporas can be sites where identities can be constructed and explored and resistance to dominant discourse can occur (Massaquoi 141). Massaquoi sees identity as an important component of agency. In Clara's rejection of her mother's oppressive parenting, Clara becomes more aware of her identity, further; how she intends to raise her daughter. Her confidence in her identity and her negotiations of living in the diaspora help her to practice empowered mothering through agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the lives of women living in diasporic communities in England as represented in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. Clara and Alsana allow for a theoretical assessment of how women practice empowered mothering through agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority. Although these mothers are fictitious, their narratives closely mirror the negotiations of diasporic mothers in the England. Their experiences also suggest that home, resistance, identity, and culture profoundly shape the tensions and possibilities within diasporic existences. Their negotiations of the "in-between" spaces allow them to engage empowered mothering; as they are already outside of normative patriarchal representations of motherhood.

O'Reilly's definition of empowered mothering suggests that "both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy" (O'Reilly "Introduction" 12). Throughout different stages of *White Teeth* these mothers utilize agency to negotiate mothering their children in new countries and authority to affirm these negotiations. Engaging maternal authority and agency in the process of mothering allows motherhood to become "a political site wherein the mother can effect social change" (O'Reilly "Introduction" 12). Clara practices empowered mothering because as a woman living in Diaspora, she finds it difficult to identify with a society that punishes any deviation from the ideal mother, specifically the mother that is idealized under patriarchal motherhood (Horowitz 53). Clara engages authenticity when describing and affirming her mothering practices. Although she establishes a support network, both women utilize autonomy as a way to convey their roles as mothers when experiencing any challenges to their identities. Clara's experiences in *White Teeth*, although

a work of fiction, highlight the daily negotiations women living in diaspora are forced to make when raising their children.

Diasporic conditions produce different conflicts for Black Caribbean women practicing empowered mothering in comparison to women who have not migrated. This is attributed to the fact that Black Caribbean women interact with patriarchal regimes differently than women who have normative citizenship affiliations with the country within which they reside. Black Caribbean women have contestable citizenship statuses and racial locations in normative, regulatory Western countries. This othering limits their sense of belonging and isolates them in their communities. The experiences of othering are present in *White Teeth*, Clara is relatively isolated although she finds personal friendship that helps to bolster her sense of agency and autonomy. This friendship reduces some of the privatization that occurs under patriarchal motherhood. She can discuss mothering authentically and affirm her practice in a resistant self-fashioned community. In line with Hodge's assertion that Caribbean families are not homogenous and are not represented by the nuclear family, Clara and Alsana's community serves as a transnational manifestation of the Caribbean family (Hodge 476).

Diaspora is a central theme in *White Teeth* and in my analysis. Diaspora includes a culture and consciousness of the split between "here" and "there." As a result, diaspora involves a process of being and becoming (Zezeza 41). In my view, the negotiations that women experiencing diaspora face are rarely highlighted when we consider feminist mothering theory. Given the role that mothers play in transposing culture to their children and in developing their children's sense of self, it is important to question the impact that experiences of diaspora can have on the transmission of culture and values. hooks' theory of the homeplace as a site of resistance offers a tangible method that Black Caribbean mothers can utilize in their empowered mothering practices and in beginning to politicize their roles. The homeplace allows for a refuge where women can agentially mother their children away from white supremacist patriarchal culture. *White Teeth* highlights themes of diaspora such as home, resistance, culture, and identity. We can see that Clara interacts with these themes and attempts to reconcile these challenges in her daughter's life.

I see identity, home, resistance, and culture as intrinsic to my understanding of diaspora. These themes are also present in the negotiations that women who experience diaspora face in their practice of mothering. Identity, home, resistance, and culture are themes that women, who are viewed as "legitimate" citizens of a nation rarely, if ever, encounter. Empowered mothering along with the homeplace as a site of resistance allows diasporic women to engage home, resistance, culture, and identity. In this way, they are able to agentially engage and address these issues on their own terms. While Zadie Smith's novel offers

a fictitious account of some of these tensions, the voices of women negotiating diaspora and mothering need to be addressed more broadly. Theories surrounding transnational mothering seem to be more widely addressed yet these themes do not begin to shed light on the shifting “in-between” spaces that women living in diaspora experience. Diasporic women have an important and widespread experience to share. Their voices offer empowered alternative approaches to mothering that can begin to dismantle some of the limited depictions of their experiences. Shedding light on these voices is a necessary endeavour for feminist exploration.

<sup>1</sup>It is important to note that O’Reilly has slightly altered her initial definition of “empowered mothering” in preference of “maternal empowerment” (O’Reilly, 2010).

## References

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