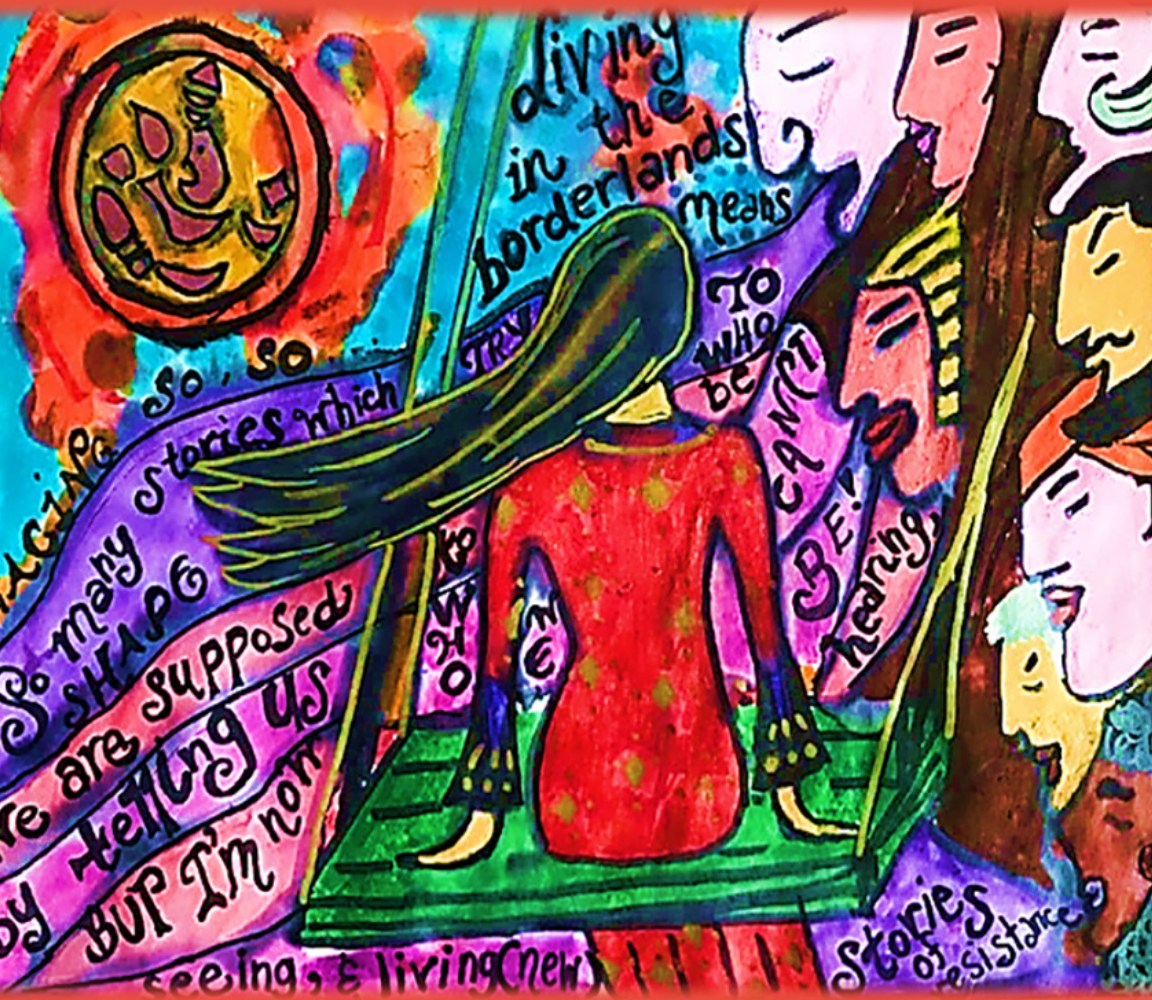
Journal of the Motherhood Initiative

Maternal Activism

Fall 2021
Volume 12, Number 2



Daena J. Goldsmith, Leah Lovett, Jinny Menon, Trina Greene Brown, Josephine L. Savarese, Tiffany Anderson and many more

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Journal of the Motherhood Initiative, (JMI)
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Tel: (289) 383 0134 Email: info@demeterpress.org

The *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* (ISSN 1923-4139)

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Mom Blogging as Maternal Activism: How to Be an Ally for Autism Acceptance

The autism acceptance movement advocates for respect, support, and accommodations so that autistics can participate in public life. This article examines two blogs by mothers of autistic children as case studies of how to be an ally to autism acceptance. In the early 2000s, the authors of Squidalicious and diary of a mom blogged about their experiences as mothers of autistic children who came to be advocates for autism acceptance. Dominant narratives of autism often portray it as a medical tragedy, and mothers of autistics are cast as warriors seeking cures or as martyrs to unfulfilling caregiving. In contrast, these blogs portray autism as a form of neurodiversity that includes both strengths and challenges, such as difficulties that come from social and physical environments that do not accommodate autism. By blogging about the everyday ups and downs of their lives, these mothers engage in five clusters of activity that constitute their allying with the autism acceptance movement: advocating for inclusion and accommodations; personalizing autism through portraying family life; providing social support for parents, children, and autistic advocates; educating readers about autism acceptance; and showing their own change and learning. Examining these practices in this specific context yields insight into the potential and challenges of online maternal activism.

Mothers have always been deeply implicated in discourses about autism. From the "refrigerator mothers" who were blamed in the 1950s for causing autism to present-day celebrity moms touting cures, representations of autism are bound up with representations of mothers. Mothers have also played critical roles in the evolution of biomedical knowledge and in public advocacy. Today, mothers are visible in the dominant narrative of autism as a medical tragedy that should be treated and prevented. "Warrior moms" fight for a cure or oppose vaccinations. Some post videos of their children in meltdowns to generate sympathy, and high-profile charities promote these stories to create a sense of urgency for

fundraising. News coverage of mothers who kill their autistic children too often implies that this otherwise unthinkable action is understandable if we presume that autism is a fate worse than death.

In contrast to the dominant narrative and the warrior, martyr, and murderer roles it allocates to mothers, I analyze two blogs that model how to be an ally mom in the movement for autism acceptance and self-advocacy. This movement seeks respect, support, and accommodations that enable autistics to participate in public life. Changing language and narratives is a central strategy. For example, both of the blogs I analyze refer to "autistics" rather than "children/adults with autism" to resist likening autism to a disease and to recognize neurology as a fundamental part of identity that can be a source of pride. My analysis of these two case studies provides insight into ally strategies in this particular movement and medium. It also prompts reflection about the larger issue of the sustainability of online maternal activism.

Autism Acceptance and Self-Advocacy

The dominant discourse in authoritative news sources and in nonprofits, such as Autism Speaks, represents autism as a tragedy to be cured or prevented. Autism is seen as a medical condition characterized by deficits and impairments in social communication and social interactions and by restricted, repetitive activities and interests. News coverage emphasizes symptoms, statistics, and treatments (Billawalla and Wolbring 5) and is more often negative than positive, portraying autistics as both vulnerable and dangerous as well as sources of suffering to their parents (Huws and Jones 101). Mainstream media turn for expertise to medical authorities, government officials, family members, and nonprofits and seldom quote autistics (McKeever 228). These representations align with funding priorities. In the US, for example, more resources go to research on cause and cure than to support and accommodations for adults (Office of Autism Research Coordination 22-23).

A competing discourse redefines autism as a form of neurodiversity that entails strengths as well as impairments that need acceptance and accommodation rather than a cure. Neurological differences are seen as "natural, healthy, and valuable forms of human diversity" similar to race, culture, gender, or sexual orientation (Walker 156). Advocates do not deny autism is a disability, but they focus on addressing difficulties that arise from a society that fails to respect and accommodate autistics. Advocates seek a public voice and a shift in attention from searching for a cure to providing supports that mitigate challenges and enable participation in society.

Online interaction is key to the autism acceptance movement (Davidson 208). Geographically separated individuals find common cause and coordinate offline meetings. Internet advocacy challenges stereotypes by demonstrating

autistics speaking for themselves, forming relationships, and asserting expertise and identity. Some advocates frame their mission in terms of struggles for expertise and representation through counternarratives (Broderick and Ne'eman 470) and use online communication to disseminate their stories.

Mothers of autistic children are active online, but their alliances are varied. Jessica Hughes has documented rifts between autistic advocates and neurotypical (NT) parents who post online. NT parents who seek treatments or wonder about causes have been criticized for failing to accept neurodiversity. Some NT parents' vivid descriptions of autistic children engaging in self-harm or meltdowns have been accused of violating the child's privacy and contributing to negative stereotypes. Debates are also waged about the centrality of NT parent voices and whether they or adult autistics should speak for and about the interests of autistic children (Hughes 130-89).

Calls to overcome these divisions have come from all sides. For example, the editors of the autism acceptance website *Thinking Person's Guide to Autism* (*TPGA*) state that "[B]eing a parent of a disabled child is not the same as having a disability, and we need to figure out how we can have productive conversations about that disconnect—especially when it affects our ability to work toward common goals" (Rosa, "The Self Advocate/Parent Dialogues"). As autistic advocate Kassaine S. of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network explains: "We are fighting an uphill battle against a strong power gradient. Allies can use their privilege to lend legitimacy and to somewhat relieve the power imbalance. And allies can lead the way in us being treated as equal by showing everyone else how it is done" ("What Is an Ally?").

The ally role is an important way for NT mothers to participate in the autism acceptance movement. An ally is a member of a majority group who rejects the dominant ideology and works for and with an oppressed group. The ally role is complex. Sometimes it calls for outspoken action, whereas at other times, it is appropriate to listen as members of the oppressed group speak and act. Ally status is less convincing as a self-proclaimed title than when members of the oppressed group ascribe it based on actions. Some autistic advocates emphasize that allies need to make room for autistic voices rather than their own NT voices (Brown; Schaber).

Mom Blogs as Sites for Autism Acceptance Activism

Mom blogs are online sites where mothers post text and images that chronicle the everyday experience of mothering. Blogs are updated frequently, with posts appearing in reverse chronological order. Although some profit from advertising, most emphasize self-expression and community for a small audience (Morrison 38). Connection and interaction are central, including

links to other blogs and online content, comments (which often display reciprocal reading among bloggers), and cross-promotion on other social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Mom blogs have garnered public scrutiny, fierce loyalty, and scholarly dissection. Press coverage has criticized bloggers for exploiting their children and for narcissistic attention to unsavory aspects of childcare (Hochman). In contrast, some feminist scholars say they are "radical feminist acts" that provide a realistic portrayal of everyday mothering and supplant expert advice with solidarity among mothers (Lopez). A blogger who interacts with reader response is engaged in "a constantly evolving negotiation" of the role of mother and of one's place in "Internet parenting cultures" (Hammond 84). The presence of lesser known voices from the margins also diversifies our image of who mothers are and how they mother (Friedman 359).

Blogs exemplify how new media technologies expand our options for personal, social, and political engagement while blurring boundaries among them. What starts as personal expression connects participants with like-minded others and with the larger society and polity (Papacharissi 129). These informal interactions can change cultural norms and "engender communities of expression with shared horizons of meaning" (McAfee 283), which, in turn, shapes citizen identities in ways that contribute to political choices. Noëlle McAfee urges us not to dismiss how new media engage users politically because these "ordinary discussions of informal publics that circulate throughout society structure our feelings, shape our identities, open up new worlds and possibilities, identify 'macrosocial problems' needing the attention of formal structures, and spur collective action" (275). This is especially important for understanding mothers who are engaged in autism activism. Users who are not already disability activists find interaction in online spaces a way to connect their story with the experiences of others and with policy issues (Trevisan 53, 57-58). Likewise, many maternal activists do not initially see advocacy on behalf of their children as "political" but do end up engaging in collective action as they "compare notes, confront authorities, and stand up for what they believe" (Panitsch 28).

How to Be an Ally Mom Blogger

Squidalicious and *diary of a mom* are blogs authored by NT mothers of autistic children and are case studies demonstrating what it can look like to be an ally to autism acceptance. Shannon Des Roches Rosa began writing *Squidalicious* in July 2003. The blog has led her to authoring books, facilitating online communities (including the *TPGA* blog), serving as a contributing editor on parenting at *BlogHer*, and engaging in offline activism. Her blog includes over 2,500 posts and has a high profile in the autism acceptance community. She

has 12,800 Twitter followers, and the TPGA Facebook community includes over 200,000 followers. Jess Wilson started *a diary of a mom* in March 2008 with posts about her family, including her autistic daughter, Brooke. Jess is a widely read voice for autism acceptance who engages in advocacy both offline and online (on her blog, in a Facebook group, at *Huffington Post*, and within an online community support page). The Facebook page associated with the blog has over 313,000 followers, and the Twitter account has nearly five thousand.

Madeline Peters et al. have described the practices of allies to the disability rights movement, including individual practices (e.g., seeking opinions from people with disabilities and accepting a person as more than their disability), institutional practices (e.g., discovering the essential functions people with disabilities can perform and scheduling activities with disabilities in mind), and cultural practices (e.g., assuming people with disabilities live full and complex lives and considering how language reflects how we see one another) (532-34). I compared their list with posts from these two blogs to generate five clusters of activity that constitute allying with the autism acceptance movement: advocating, personalizing, supporting, educating, and learning. Examining these practices in this specific context yields insight into the potential and challenges of maternal activism online.

Advocating

Rosa and Wilson both do work that is easily recognizable as advocacy to facilitate inclusion, services, and accommodations, including the following activities: fundraising, speaking engagements, lobbying, campaigning for politicians who support the cause, criticizing media coverage, submitting comments to government agencies and hearings, meeting with White House staff, participating in vaccine-promotion campaigns, registering complaints against organizations that discriminate against autistics, and participating in school programs. Their blogs report offline advocacy and encourage readers to act. For example, Rosa described overcoming her reluctance to meet with her congressional representative in person. She provided a list of talking points for readers and told them, "If I can do it, you can, too!" Wilson alerted her readers that the Massachusetts Autism Commission lacked an autistic representative and told readers how to register a complaint with the Commission. Advocacy that takes place in other online spaces is linked on the blog (e.g., a list of Rosa's recent speaking engagements with links to texts, videos, and podcasts). Plenty of advocacy also takes place on the blogs. For instance, Rosa periodically solicits funds for autism-related causes (e.g., an all-abilities playground, an autism centre, and an autism-friendly camp), and she participates in a yearly campaign in which social media likes, comments, and shares tagged "#Blogust" produce funding for free vaccines.

Blogging gives their advocacy a distinctive character and potential, "harness[ing] the energy and the synergy of the blogosphere for a whole lot of good" (Rosa, "Projecting"). Persuasive appeals reach a worldwide audience. Embedding advocacy in narrative gives poignancy to the appeal, and reader comments express feeling personally connected to the bloggers and, by extension, their issues. Fundraising and organizing utilize crowdsourcing, with readers passing information on to their own social networks. Stories about bloggers' advocacy help readers envision what it would be like to engage in advocacy themselves.

An example from Wilson's blog exemplifies these processes. In March 2011, Wilson posted a letter to then President Obama. A year later, she was invited to the White House to attend an autism event that brought together parents, advocates, teachers, and other stakeholders to meet with staff from federal agencies to identify policies and facilitate interagency coordination. Wilson posted about the speakers she heard, the policy discussions, and her own experiences (including her transformation from "just a mom" to "parent advocate"). At that meeting, Wilson met an assistant to the president, who invited her to a private White House meeting in May 2012. Before the visit, Wilson posted, "What do you want him to know?" The eighty-eight responses generated a list for Wilson and functioned as a virtual town hall in which readers responded to one another's arguments for policies, including mandating insurance coverage, improving support for families, shifting the focus of funded research, and improving educational programs and funding. Wilson's blog and the community that formed around it launched her into the role of public advocate, and her detailed reporting brought her readers along. They were represented and informed, and their comments indicated that, independent of any effects on policymakers, they were galvanized to work in their own communities.

Personalizing

Another kind of activism involved personalizing autism through stories of daily life. The journal format is especially conducive to this. As Wilson explained: "Tell your stories, demystify autism, pull back the curtain to reveal the amazing people behind it" (Wilson, "our autism"). Photos accompanying stories are compelling: Children are shown engaging with other family members and in ordinary settings at home and in the world. The posts give a face to "autism, and that face contests a narrative of autism as deficit or tragedy. Nearly every post on these blogs personalizes, but the following two serve as exemplars.

"Happy 12th Birthday, Leo!" opened with a photo of Rosa's son "at about the time he was given a diagnosis of Extreme Cuteness." Readers will recognize

the juxtaposition of this diagnosis with Leo's autism diagnosis—a contrast Rosa acknowledged later in the post as she marveled at how Leo "continues to defy the klaxons of doom that so many experts set off around him when the first photo was taken, who continues to grow and mature and gain skills and… need us less (*sniff*)." The post described Leo's birthday plans (cupcakes in class, dinner at his favorite restaurant, a movie, and bouncy-house with friends) as well as examples of his growing independence. Photos showed an attractive child in ordinary settings, gazing into the camera with a mischievous smile. The post resembled a type common in mom blogs, in which a child's birthday prompts reflection on how much and how quickly he has grown.

Wilson explicitly takes up the goal of personalizing autism in her post, "not just numbers, people." She gave links to recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) statistics on the prevalence of autism and then described her weariness at talking about statistics. She stated: "Autism is one word… but there is no one autism." A photo showed her daughter in a pink "Skating Club" sweatshirt, smiling and looking attentively at something in the distance. Beneath the photo, Wilson said, "There's going to be a lot of talk about the data today. And it matters. But what matters more is that for every number—for every data point and every statistic—there is a face. And behind that face a life. And behind that life the lives of those who love them. Not just numbers. PEOPLE." Even in posts that do not explicitly state the goal, these blogs personalize autism by showing faces and describing the daily lives of autistics and their families.

Supporting

Support for parents is frequently given through information and affirmation in posts and also in reader comments that reciprocate support for the author and one another. Comments underscore the value of this support for parents who feel isolated or, at the very least, out of step with their peers. Said one, "There are so many people in my life with NT kids who just DON'T understand what I go through, and I find online people who do." Another added, "I have sent SO many people your blog URL who have children with autism because they need to hear and see that there is hope" (Rosa, "For New Autism Parents").

Support was the explicit purpose in a post Wilson titled "dear you." She stated in all caps, "YOU ROCK" and then explained:

> I don't mean that you deserve a medal just for parenting your kid. That's what parents do. We parent. Our kids. So yay, for you cause you stuck around? Hell no. And I don't mean to imply that I'm offering sympathy because your path is different—and likely more difficult—than most. It is what it is. And I'm not much for sympathy. What I mean is that you rock because of the WAY that you parent your kid.

The post then listed ways of parenting that she admires—such as adjusting to accommodate children's needs, showing patience, seeing your child's victories and celebrating simple successes, refusing to define your child by their challenges, realizing your child is communicating even without words, teaching other children "that typical is an illusion and compassion is everything," looking out for one another and treating others' children as your own, listening to autistic adults so you can better understand your own child, and giving your child space to fail and to succeed. The post offered not only affirmation but also information about a way of parenting that is consistent with autism acceptance. In online conflicts between NT parents and autistic advocates, parents often justify posting detailed negative portrayals by saying that they need validation for their difficult lives. In contrast, Wilson's post shows a way of supporting parents without stigmatizing or demeaning descriptions of autistic children.

The blogs also model supporting autistic children while encouraging competence and independence. For example, Rosa addressed how parents' concerns for safety or efficiency may prevent children from opportunities to be independent. She described how offering Leo the chance to pour his own juice revealed that he was able to do it, "which I would have missed had I not slowed down and handed over the reins." The post celebrated Leo's new skill even though it did not correspond to typical developmental milestones: "I consider scenarios like this part of Autism Acceptance: being able to appreciate that it is totally fucking awesome for my nearly-twelve-year-old son to pour his own juice, without any bittersweet undertones. This is not denying Leo's reality or mine. This is understanding what autism means for Leo, and adjusting to his natural patterns of rhythm and growth." Reader comments affirmed this perspective, congratulated Leo, and supported Rosa ("Competence and Constant Vigilance").

Both blogs support autistic advocates by amplifying their expertise, modelling respectful engagement, and showing the value of learning from autistic adults. Over time, both blogs included more links to blogs written by autistic adults, who also showed up among the commenters. In "the courage to listen," Wilson used a mothering analogy to explain why parents should discontinue blogging or parenting practices that adult autistics identify as hurtful: Suppose she applied a sunburn spray that was advertised as soothing but made her daughter cry because it stung? Would a mother keep using the spray because her intention was to help or would she listen to her daughter and stop? Wilson compared this to NT parents dismissing concerns of autistic advocates. She acknowledged it is "crushing and frustrating and heartbreaking and yes, even angry-making" to have one's actions criticized but urged NT readers to be allies nonetheless: "If we keep allowing our egos to stand in the way of our ears, we'll just keep inadvertently hurting the very people whom we so

desperately want to help." In addition to speaking as a mother, Wilson also linked to a post by an autistic advocate explaining this phenomenon from her perspective. Reader comments created a discussion among autistic adults, parents, and others about what is or is not experienced as helpful.

Educating

Both blogs educate about a variety of issues, such as revealing actions by others that stigmatize, addressing problematic language and modelling better alternatives, raising awareness of how ordinary events can be challenging, showing autistics' capabilities, and demonstrating how accommodations facilitate participation. Simply writing about their lives educated readers about "the beautiful, frustrating, complicated, messy, overwhelming story of autism" in order "to break down the walls, to find understanding and compassion and validation and celebration and support and community and all of the things I want so badly for my girl" (Wilson, "our autism"). Stories of personal experience told over time as children grow are invaluable for showing the diversity of autistic experience. Commenters on this post shared their own stories, both similar to and different from Wilson's, and agreed on the importance of complicating stereotypes and including all autistics.

Several posts detailed offline interactions. Recounting these interactions educated readers who might have similar reactions or questions. For example, Rosa described a conversation with a salesperson for vertical blinds who asked, "Is your son really that difficult?" after Rosa expressed concerns that Leo would "love them to pieces, quite literally." Rosa responded by explaining that Leo is not difficult but that "his autism means he sometimes *has difficulty* reining in his impulses…. He would likely see [the blinds], as he does in most doctors' offices, as more fun than any plaything on this planet. And he might pull them all down, in his enthusiasm. It's not that Leo is difficult—it's that I know what can be difficult for him." The salesperson "seemed to get it. She nodded, and said that what I told her made sense because 'we all make allowances for each other, especially as parents.'" The story taught readers about autism and about how to educate others ("Is Your Son").

Wilson taught about language and autistic capabilities in a post that juxtaposed negatively worded expert assessments with her daughter's activities. In response to "Child Presents with Significant Motor Planning Deficits—often appears to get physically *stuck"* Wilson wrote, "For the record, I abhor the word Deficits. Challenges? Yes. Lots of 'em. Deficits? Hell no." She described seeing girls doing cartwheels at recess: "Out there on the playground with them was the Child Who Presents with Significant Motor Planning Deficits. The one whose *skill acquisition is stymied by overwhelming anxiety.* The one who is so *daunted by the perceived inevitability of failure/frustration that she*

refuses to attempt new tasks." The post included video of Brooke doing cartwheels, with the caption "The one whose heart is twenty times bigger than her ~~deficits~~ challenges will ever be. Don't believe everything you read." The post showed readers the capabilities and perseverance of her autistic child as well as an alternative way of framing "deficits" as "challenges" instead ("doing cartwheels").

Rosa and Wilson expressed a sense of urgency to give to parents of newly diagnosed children the kind of information they wish they had received. In a post entitled, "For New Autism Parents: On Gratitude," Rosa wrote the following:

> I think a lot about the information and attitudes I'd have wanted to jack, Neuromancer-style, straight into my brain eight years ago so I could instantly be the parent Leo needed me to be…. There's often no substitute for experience constructed out of progressive, natural epiphanies. Still, that experience can be altered dramatically by external factors, like consistent exposure to positive attitudes and helpful perspectives…. So I'm going to dole out some perspective, *and* attitude.

The post struck a balance between acknowledging that some "parts are really damn hard" and feeling "grateful that this beautiful boy is my son." This post explicitly distilled lessons she had learned. In addition, her daily stories gave readers a vicarious experience of "progressive, natural epiphanies," which resulted in "consistent exposure" to a way of seeing autism through the lens of acceptance. Rosa also pursued this goal as a co-editor of *TPGA*. The site (and a book of the same title) are "the resource we wish we'd had when autism first became part of our lives: a one-stop source for carefully curated, evidence-based information from autism parents, autistics, and autism professionals" (TPGA, "Mission").

Learning

One of the most challenging yet important facets of the ally role is the willingness to learn from autistic adults, model change, and admit mistakes. Rosa and Wilson started out knowing only the dominant framing of autism as medical tragedy. Interactions and experiences—offline and online—led them eventually to advocate for autism acceptance instead. Their blogs were one important way they connected with alternative views of autism.

Rosa described the changes in "Self-Pity Is for Suckers" (the text of an address she gave at the national BlogHer convention). Her blog was originally called "The Adventures of Leelo the Soon-to-Be-Not-Autistic-boy and His Potty-Mouthed Mom," reflecting her desire to document the road to cure. She

reported: : "I embraced self-pity. I let it define me. I was not alone; at the time there were plenty of other prominent autism parent voices in the Blogosphere who were floundering right along with me." She then started encountering parents who rejected this position and confronted her, to which she "recoiled, petulantly." Eventually, "I started hearing from people who told me I needed to reject self-pity so I could get to work," and she connected with "autistic people, parents, and professionals who told me that seeing autism as suckage was seeing my son as suckage. That he deserved better…. And that is what I blog about now."

Blogs are distinctively suited to demonstrating how allies continue to grow and learn through personal experience. For example, "inclusion—it's not just for school" described how Wilson unwittingly took over an event in a way that excluded an adult autistic friend: "We'd invited an autistic friend into the room and then failed to ask for their input, their involvement, their participation." She concluded: "But how many times does our own inherently ableist behavior go unchecked? How many times do we open the door and think that's enough? It's not." Blogs also enable guest posts or links directly to autistic adults so that readers learn from them, too, and comments show parent readers engaging with autistic advocates.

Additionally, norms among bloggers encourage archiving past blog posts and discourage bloggers from editing or deleting previous entries so that blogs publicly chronicle changes in attitudes and thinking. The unedited archive shows readers how and why these bloggers moved towards autism acceptance. Wilson went so far as to collect in a sidebar entitled "why I can't support autism speaks" the links to posts that show the chronology and reasoning for her break with that prominent organization. Being able to speak about their own evolution (and readers' ability to see it for themselves, either by following along as it happened or by following links in the archives) makes these bloggers' other ally activism practices more persuasive. Each represents herself not as perfect but as willing to listen and admit mistakes.

Implications for Maternal Activism

> Together, we'll test the waters out there when it's right. We will humanize autism. We'll spread our message of acceptance, understanding, and compassion. We'll get the word out about the desperate need for research, support, and services. We'll talk about why it matters so damn much. And then we'll come back here and do what we do every day—together. (Wilson, "huffington post").

These blogs demonstrate how telling stories online and building communities around those stories can contribute to the goal of changing the conversation

about autism. Through advocating, personalizing, supporting, educating, and learning, these blogs show alternative ways of mothering autistic children and make a compelling case for seeing autistic children and their mothers in a new light. NT mothers who blog are well situated to play an ally role because the mom blog is a familiar genre that appeals to a variety of readers, not only other mothers of autistic children, but also mothers of NT children, teachers, and therapists. When posts from these blogs run in the parenting sections of *Huffington Post* or *BlogHer*, they gain an even broader audience. Readers who are unlikely to seek out an advocacy website encounter autism acceptance contextualized in stories of mothering, and their comments testify to having gained new perspectives. Not all online storytelling about mothering autistic children has activist goals, and there have been rifts between some autistic advocates and some NT parents. Consequently, Rosa and Wilson are significant for demonstrating how mom bloggers can be allies rather than adversaries to autistic self-advocacy and acceptance.

As important as the content of their blogs are the ways that the process of blogging and commenting transformed authors and readers. Narrating everyday life in public and engaging with readers, including those from outside one's immediate social circle, have potential to politicize. Wilson reflected: "I'm not a political animal by nature. I'm becoming one, however, by necessity.... My kids, our kids, everyone on the spectrum, needs more than we can give them individually" ("#gladididn'tsaycamelot"). Blogging was a vehicle for arriving at that realization and then acting upon it.

Being an ally blogger is not without challenges, however. For example, how do mothers write authentically about experiences—positive and negative—without violating their child's privacy and or feeding the dominant narrative of autism as a tragedy and parents as its victims? In a post entitled "thoughtful, not scrubbed," Wilson articulated the balancing act she strives to achieve: showing respect for autistic individuals but without "sanitizing our narratives to the point where they're one-dimensional—and not remotely recognizable or believable because they're no longer real." Both authors model ways of seeing and writing about autism that acknowledge challenges while honouring dignity and celebrating difference. Equally important, they amplify autistic voices, and when their own words fail to strike a balance, they listen and learn. The long-form story or essay in a blog has a greater capacity for this kind of nuanced balancing than other social media forms that are shorter and more short term.

There is considerable labour associated with blogging in this thoughtful, political, self-reflexive way. Producing content and responding to comments are mostly uncompensated (Rosa's site has a couple of ads for autism-related books), and the time involved is considerable. In some years, Rosa and Wilson logged over two-hundred posts, and most received at least some comments to

which they often responded. Moderating a community of readers also entails an emotional response (and responsibility). Wilson eventually created a Community Support Page when she became overwhelmed at the prospect of responding personally to the many requests for help that came her way. Each author has come in for criticism—some of it public, some of it communicated privately, some of it bluntly worded. Responding, reflecting, and changing are a kind of labour, too. The sustainability challenges of this maternal activism parallel concerns in the larger online feminist movement, where uncompensated labour risks burnout and may only be possible for those activists who have resources and time (Martin and Valenti 22-23).

Sustainability is an issue not only for bloggers but also for the blog genre. Mom blogs are less prominent and popular than they once were. Both Rosa and Wilson blog less frequently now; their online presence is distributed across a variety of platforms, including posts on *BlogHer, Huffington Post, TPGA*, Twitter, and Facebook. These platforms expand the reach of their message and share with others some of the responsibility for content. Tweets or status updates require less time to produce (and can be posted from a mobile phone). However, these other platforms lack some of the distinctive features of mom blogs that this analysis has identified as particularly conducive for autism acceptance ally activism: the ability to make a case in long form and without interruption; the capability for interaction in a community created through regular reading and commenting; and the opportunity for individuals with different views to engage with one another. A challenge for these and other mom blog activists is to coordinate a multiplatform online presence that capitalizes on the advantages of new platforms while sustaining the ability for personal reflection and ongoing community interaction.

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CRYSTAL WHETSTONE

Mothers for and against the Nation: Complexities of a Maternal Politics of Care

The politics of care linked with maternal activism often takes for granted a mutually agreed upon understanding of care. However, care is deployed in varying ways by those engaging in maternal activism. Caring cannot be assumed to be inclusive and may be exclusive, particularly when used by maternal activists linked with rightwing politics. This article explores how a maternal politics of care can reflect both progressive and reactionary politics. It uses Andrea O'Reilly's framework of patriarchal motherhood to explore theoretically divergent international case studies of maternal activism. These cases demonstrate that a maternal politics of care can be used to support a myriad of issues on either side of the political spectrum to reflect individualized and exclusionary visions of care, "paternalistic maternalism," (Wu), or a collective politics of care. Despite the connections often drawn between mothering labour and care labour, the function of care differs across the political spectrum. For some, caring entails collective liberation and common good and disrupts exclusive—often racist—membership in the nation. For others, care for some necessitates the denial of care for others to ensure the purity of the nation. For others still, some mothers are unable to properly care. The latter reflects a white-saviour complex, which is as concerning as the politics of hate that seeks to limit caring to certain groups. What this suggests is that constructions of who can care and who is worthy of care are deeply raced and classed as well as based on gender, sexual preference, and other social identity factors.

Maternal activism, a form of civil society organizing in which women draw upon their roles as mothers to engage politically, inspires women across race, class, nationality, sexual orientation, religious distinctions, and political orientation (Orleck 4). Women's engagement with maternal activism—or a maternal politics of care—can reflect both progressive and reactionary politics. Using Andrea O'Reilly's framework of patriarchal motherhood, I explore

international case studies of maternal activism. These case studies demonstrate that a maternal politics of care can be used to support a myriad of issues on either side of the political spectrum to reflect individualized and exclusionary visions of care, "paternalistic maternalism," (Wu 254), or a collective politics of care. Despite the connections often drawn between mothering labour and care labour, the function of care differs across the political spectrum. Progressive forms of maternal activism rely on a form of caring that is rooted in collective equity, whereas reactionary forms of maternal activism deploy care in a hierarchal manner, in which only some are deemed as worthy of care. In addition, paternalistic forms of maternal activism can deploy care based on perceived incapability of others—they need to be saved by those who know better. In these cases, a racist as well as nationalist politics is at work, which some mother-activists challenge and others embrace. That paternalistic maternal activism reflects a white-saviour complex is as concerning as the politics of hate, which seeks to limit caring to certain groups.

This article mediates on the entrenched colonial, racist, and xenophobic aspects of not only maternal activism rooted in the politics of hate but as well the "paternalistic maternalism" (Wu) of some forms of maternal activism. This approach troubles the politics of care associated with maternal activism by highlighting the white-saviour complex. The focus and methods of reactionary and paternalistic forms of the politics of maternal care produce, on the one hand, a politics of hate that seeks to save deserving white people from immigrants and persons of colour through caring for some and not others and, on the other hand, a politics of paternalism, which is deployed by some maternal activists to guide women of colour and women from the Global South. Despite these differences, both forms of maternal activism refract disturbing constructions that deny the full inclusion of a collective politics of care that seeks equity and social justice, which is seen in progressive forms of maternal activism. In all, a maternal politics of care constitutes a broad spectrum of approaches. Frames that either romanticize or critique maternal activisms as a singular phenomenon ignore the complexities within the enactment of a maternal politics of care—complexities rooted in class, caste, race, gender, location, and other considerations.

Patriarchal Motherhood

O'Reilly calls attention to the core assumptions of patriarchal motherhood, which include presumed gender ideals that situate mothering as women's primal identity and locate women strictly within the confines of the domestic sphere—or the women's domain. In the household sphere, a woman is expected to carry out intensive motherwork within a heteronormative nuclear family to which she devotes herself wholeheartedly. She provides for the

family's nurturing needs while the husband/father supports the family through wage labour. Patriarchal motherhood renders this mothering work natural by suggesting that women rely on instincts rather than skills to mother, even as patriarchal motherhood pressures women to follow the advice of childrearing experts. The patriarchal motherhood construct divorces mothering from its political considerations and emphasizes the importance of blood ties or biologically based motherhood (O'Reilly 14). This latter factor aligns with the rightwing mother of the nation construct, which deems women the biological and cultural reproducers of not only individual nuclear families but the larger nation-state. In this worldview, women as mothers hold together the nuclear family and the nation-state through their motherwork (Yuval-Davis 22-23). This rightwing approach is politically and culturally different from other conceptions of the role of mothers in the nation, such as within Indigenous nations, which promote progressive roles for women and support all members of a community. Any transgressions against patriarchal motherhood by mothers are frequently deemed antipatriotic or even treasonous—as will be demonstrated.

The examples of maternal activisms that follow disrupt the patriarchal notion that motherhood can be confined to the household sphere, and the majority of maternal-activists also embody a sense of collective power. Mother-activists negotiate their activism by disrupting and/or embodying varying aspects of O'Reilly's concept of patriarchal motherhood. In each case, the politics of care functions to advocate for different ends. Groups like Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the mothers' movements in the former Yugoslavia, and the US-based Women Strike for Peace operated in constrained political environments dominated by conservative discourses, which depicted support for progressive political ideologies as dangerous to national security and fundamentally antipatriotic. Such danger was often rendered in terms of women's real or perceived support for socialism/communism or any form of peace advocacy. These forms of activism disrupt the construct of patriarchal motherhood and emphasize the socially constructed nature of mothering as well as contest the borders placed around national belonging. In contrast, individualistic forms of maternal activism can reenact structural, often racist violence. Anti-immigrant United States (US) groups like Mothers Against Illegal Amnesty (MAIA) and the Activist Mommy, a white Anglo American, operate in the climate of the Global War on Terror and the global reign of neoliberalism—a socioeconomic ideology rooted in individualistic self-help that promotes unrestrained capitalism and deep cuts to state welfare policies (Cainkar 1, 110, 229; Bloch and Taylor 199). The Global War on Terror, launched as a reactionary response to the 9/11 attacks on the US, led to military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and prompted intense nativism and othering domestically. The priorities of MAIA and Activist Mommy

overlay with the construction of the mother of the nation, who must protect her country from enemies by serving her nuclear family (Yuval-Davis 22-23). The mother of the nation figure aligns with the values of patriarchal motherhood, as it promotes the politics of a xenophobic and heteronormative nation state.

A more nuanced examination of maternal activism that exists between a collective politics of care, as exemplified by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and the individualized and exclusionary visions of care, as exemplified by the MAIA, requires an exploration of the paternalistic maternalism of the Women Strike Peace group. In the context of the Vietnam War, members of this group deemed themselves—as white, middle-class Americans—as the proper guides to their Vietnamese allies, whom they deemed as less knowledgeable and capable as themselves. Women Strike for Peace members felt they needed to help Vietnamese women to resist the US occupation, as well as better care for and protect their children (Wu 254). This white-saviour complex situates paternalistic maternalism far closer to the exclusionary understanding of care that is associated with the politics of hate than it does a collective politics of care that is inclusive and promotes social justice. Rather, the white-saviour complex upholds the deeply racist and classist views of colonialism and thus supports a colonialist maternal politics of care.

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo formed in 1977 in reaction to the disappearance of their children by a rightwing fascist military dictatorship, which used state terrorism to target leftist activists. This led to kidnapping, detaining, torturing, and killing an estimated thirty thousand people (Bouvard 1, 23-24, 29, 31). The military regime claimed to be defending the nation against terrorists, or those who supported socialist or communist ideologies and social justice activism in general. The regime identified their brutal rule as the only way to save Argentina from the internal enemy that sought to break apart the traditional values of the family as well as destroy capitalism and Christianity. The leaders of the military dictatorship proclaimed themselves defenders of Western civilization, which construed the heteronormative nuclear family, gender and racial hierarchy, as well as submission to authority as central to national security (Kohut and Vilella xi, xxxix, 34; Taylor 183-185). Cofounded by a group of mothers in a desperate search for their disappeared children, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo eventually included—at their height—hundreds of women who used their maternal suffering to bring international attention to the human rights abuses of the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983 (Bouvard 1, 75).

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo first sought only the return of their

disappeared children, but over time, they began to agitate to hold the military dictatorship accountable for its crimes against humanity. The women also demanded an end to the armed conflict in which the state was at war with its own citizens (Bouvard 68, 95). The group was integral to Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983, and today, despite its split in 1986 into two branches, the group remains a mainstay in Argentine politics (Bouvard 94, 162; Politi). While Argentina continues to wrestle with the brutal memories of its dictatorship, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have spent over four decades seeking justice for past wrongs and continue the political work of their collective children. Their efforts have shattered constructions of patriarchal motherhood that assert mothers' responsibilities as limited to the domestic sphere and as an individualized practice. Instead, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo united to address their collective concerns. One branch of the group (Mothers Association) has even disrupted biologically based maternalism, asserting that all the disappeared are their children, not just their own biological children (Bouvard 182-183; Taylor 189).

Mothers' Movements in the Former Yugoslavia

The former socialist Yugoslavia is now made up of the independent countries of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and the autonomous province of Vojvodina. Conservative nationalist discourses, including xenophobia, rose in Yugoslavia starting in the 1980s and intensified with the collapse of the Tito regime and the rootlessness of the population—a direct result of intense urbanization, which had removed citizens from closer-knit networks in more rural areas (Korač 25-26). When national-ism erupted, it emphasized strict gender norms, religion, and shared blood, or ethnonationalism. In this environment, women's role as reproducers of the ethnic community was stressed, as was the need for independent countries for each ethnic group in Yugoslavia. This hostile environment emphasized the naturalness of both the heteronormative nuclear family and the homogenous nation-state (Korač 26-27).

A series of conflicts that would eventually break up Yugoslavia began in the 1990s. In response, informal mothers' movements erupted spontaneously across the region as "a massive grassroots protest" that sought an end to the armed conflict (Korač 29). It began in Serbia in 1991 when the federal army invaded Slovenia after it declared independence. Hundreds of Serbian mothers stormed the country's parliament while in session to demand a peaceful end to the war and the return of their sons from fighting in Slovenia. This protest was followed by similar spontaneous mothers' protests in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The state responded to each mothers' movements in the same way: Women were arrested and interrogated by the police, and the

media—which portrayed women's actions as rooted in support of nationalism rather than being against armed fighting—was used to curtail any further rallying of mothers in the cause of peace (Korač 29).

However, the informality of the mothers' movement allowed for its easy manipulation by the nationalist media throughout the region. The mothers' movement rejected the construction of the "patriotic mother" who gladly sends her sons to war. However, the media downplayed the mothers' movement, often ignoring their actions. Instead, the media propagated the image of the dutiful mother of the nation who sacrifices her sons for the nationalist cause, which ultimately pitted women and mothers from different ethnic communities against one another (Korač 29). Because these movements were spontaneous, there was "no clear strategy or well-articulated message" to guide activists (Korač 29). With the media promoting ethnonationalism, the mothers' movement was spun into support for communitarian violence (Korač 29-30). Although these mothers worked towards a kind of caring that stressed equity through concern for their own children and the children of others, the ethnonationalism that engulfed the region worked to hide these messages in favour of antagonistic othering discourses. Even though it was not successful in preventing war, the mothers' movement did display a collective power that ostensibly moved care beyond their own children and prompted mothers' involvement in the public sphere—all of which disrupt patriarchal motherhood.

Women Strike for Peace

In November 1961, at the height of the Cold War between the USSR and US (c. 1947-1991), Women Strike for Peace (WSP) was founded. As a US women-only peace organization, WSP fought for nuclear disarmament and deployed an activism that revolved around members' identities as mothers and housewives. During this period, a hypernationalist Cold War mentality reigned, as did McCarthyism—a rightwing movement that labelled nearly any questioning of US government policies as treason (Swerdlow 100-103). Since nuclear armament was deemed critical to national security, WSP members defended their controversial antinuclear organizing through their maternal duty to protect their children from nuclear warfare (Swerdlow 1, 48, 235). WSP deftly manoeuvred in the politically hostile environment of continued McCarthyism, which vilified leftist and antinuclear activities as dangerous to the security of the country and inherently unpatriotic. This led to a widespread clampdown on leftist activism. Yet WSP thrived even with FBI surveillance and an inquiry by the House of Un-American Activities Committee (Swerdlow 100-103, 119, 125). After 1965, the group began protesting the Vietnam War, which also created controversy, since it signalled to many on the right that the women in WSP were not supportive of their country (Swerdlow 4).

By deploying a discourse steeped in an ideology of domesticity, largely through their positioning as concerned mothers, the women of WSP deflected much of the rightwing criticism that their antinuclear and antiwar activism entailed (Swerdlow 1, 235). WSP played up the white and middle-class status of most of its members, who donned dainty hats and gloves during their protests, relying on the politics of respectability (Wu, 222). The ease with which they performed respectability was a privilege stemming from the members' racial and class backgrounds. The politics of respectability is often denied to poor mothers and mothers of colour. Patriarchal motherhood insists that mothering be contained within the domestic sphere. Disrupting this expectation, WSP members asserted that their maternal duties included not only their move into the public sphere but also a collective resistance, which understood mothering as a communal practice that extended beyond biological children. WSP members cared deeply about peace. However, there were deeply problematic aspects of WSP's care labour, as the group believed it was the white woman's burden to save Vietnamese women, who could not act for themselves. (Wu 253-54). Feminist historian Judy Wu has aptly characterized the WSP as engaging in a paternalistic maternalism, since the WSP believed that it knew what was best for Vietnamese women and that it was the only group who could help them (Wu 254). WSP believed women from the Global South were incapable of caring for themselves and their communities, which was reminiscent of maternal colonialism, in which middle-to-upper class white women in the US looked upon Indigenous mothers as incapable or inferior at care labour and motherwork (Jacobs 471, 462). Whereas WSP members viewed themselves as agentic figures, they saw their Vietnamese counterparts as anything but equals.

Mothers Against Illegal Amnesty (MAIA)

Founded in 2006 under the slogan "Protect Our Children; Secure Our Borders," MAIA targeted the children of undocumented immigrants, whom they labelled "anchor babies" (Juffer 80).[1] Similar to how some poorer mothers are thought to have children simply for the welfare benefits, immigrant mothers are often stereotypically presumed to have children in order to gain state resources (Bloch and Taylor 202-04). Such discourses show how mothering and mothers are valued differently based on class, immigration status, and race. Patriarchal constructs of motherhood as a function of xenophobic nationalism have, in the case of MAIA, led to a maternal politics of virulent hate, which stipulates an "us versus them" mentality (O'Reilly 14; Juffer 84).

MAIA members portrayed immigrants and their children (particularly those who were undocumented) as parasitic as well as a threat to both US

national security and the ability of US-born citizens to access education and other resources (Juffer 85-87). This worldview embodies a zero-sum approach, in which only a limited number of resources are available. If the children of immigrants have access to these resources, then US-born children have somehow lost something. Such thinking is rooted in neoliberal ideology, which promotes competition (Bloch and Taylor 206). MAIA's carework suggests that resources are scarce, and if immigrant children or the children of immigrants receive care from the state, it will deplete the care available to citizens. This deeply colonial, racist, and xenophobic narrative constructs some children as undeserving of care. Today, this narrative is still wide reaching, as under the former Trump Administration, families seeking asylum were separated from one another and subjected to inhumane conditions, which deprived them of basic necessities, including healthcare, leading to widespread sickness and some deaths among children (Dickerson; Hennessy-Fiske).

Activist Mommy

Elizabeth Johnson, the "Activist Mommy," runs the website activistmommy.com. Johnson is a self-described vlogger who takes on "the lies of abortion, feminism, Islam, and the homosexual agenda" to stand up for "families and patriots" ("About the Activist Mommy"). Like MAIA, Johnson's narrative is based on a "nation under attack" outlook. While Johnson is similar to MAIA on issues of immigration, she is more concerned with what she sees as bullying by progressives, which is apparent in Johnson's fears around the corrupting presence of LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially trans people. In a March 2018 video entitled "They Are Coming for Our Children!" Johnson angrily names the "social Marxists and transgender activists" who oppress Christian conservatives and try to "steal our kids from us and plunge our nation into moral chaos." She calls on her fellow "Mama Bears" to "rise up … and take your kids back from this subversive agenda." Johnson requests that all those who support her to stand up against these bullies and share the hashtag "#HandsOffOurKids" ("Watch: They Are Coming for Our Children").

The other major portion of Johnson's website is a blog, regularly updated with stories that support her argument that Christians and conservatives are persecuted in the US for their beliefs ("My Blog"). The blog frequently misrepresents stories and issues to emphasize progressives' ridiculous ideas. In the blog published on January 23, 2019, Johnson writes, "Google Employees Reportedly Furious Over Use of the Word 'Family.'" Johnson's title presents the negative reaction of Google employees to a Google executive's use of the word "family" as anger against families. In fact, Google employees were pushing for a more inclusive use of the word to refer not simply to heterosexual

couples with children but to any household. Johnson likewise uses her blog to uphold the rightwing mother-of-nation trope in terms of anti-immigrant sentiment: "It is not a right to illegally immigrate to or live in the United States. Each year, thousands of people compete to enter the US legally, while millions live her [sic] undocumented and allowed to fly under the radar by so many Democrat-run cities and states" ("New York Sheriff"). Notably, Johnson supports ending abortion among immigrants and migrants: "Just because a child's mother does not have a legal right to live in a country does in no way mean she and her child don't have a sacred, divine right to life" ("Trump Admin"). Although much of Johnson's content is focused on gender—mainly in terms of disruptions to socially conservative gender performance—she also embodies the patriarchal mother who supports only the heteronormative nuclear family that serves the nation through the reproduction of the right kind of families, which is to be read as nonimmigrant (O'Reilly 14; Yuval-Davis 22-23).

Patriarchal Motherhood in MAIA and Activist Mommy

MAIA and Activist Mommy limit maternal politics of care to only a select, deserving few. Likewise, when caring is stretched to include pity and othering—as in WSP—this is equally as problematic. The wide-ranging differences among MAIA and Activist Mommy to WSP to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the mothers' movements of the former Yugoslavia present a spectrum of maternal movements that encompass a hierarchy of care that excludes, a paternalistic care that rests upon the assumed inability of others, and a collective politics of care that seeks equity and social justice. What this suggests is that constructions of who can care and who is worthy of care are deeply raced and classed as well as based on gender, sexual preference, and other social identity factors. Although the outright politics of hate of MAIA and Activist Mommy are obviously problematic, the paternalistic maternal politics of care of the WSP, which was rooted in the white-saviour complex, is no less problematic. Neither form of maternal activism—despite one being rooted in progressive politics—promotes a collective politics of care that includes all persons as equally agentic and deserving. Only a collective politics of care demonstrates a caring that embodies collective liberation and the common good and disrupts the exclusive—often racist—membership in the nation-state.

Conclusion: How Care Functions in Maternal Activism

Care is fundamental to maternal activism. Yet mother-activists fundamentally differ in their interpretations of how this caring work is carried out. For some, caring entails collective liberation and the common good and disrupts exclusive

membership in the nation-state. For others, care necessitates the denial of care for others to ensure the purity of the nation-state. For others still, some mothers are unable to properly care for their children. The activism of these groups demonstrates an explicitly racial politics; MAIA was primarily concerned with immigrants of colour, whereas WSP wanted to save Vietnamese women. At the same time, some progressive forms of maternal activism may employ essentialist tenets of patriarchal motherhood, such as the relegation of mothering work as natural—be it a strategic decision to underlie political participation in the public sphere or a reflection of their actual perspectives.

Endnotes

1. It appears that the group is now defunct. Their webpage brings up a 404 error (http://www.mothersagainstillegalaliens.org/).

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Mothers in Law: Towards Equality within the Profession for Lawyer Mothers

Mothers who work in the legal profession face a wide range of obstacles to their success. This article reports on a qualitative study of lawyer-mothers in Ottawa, Ontario, that problematizes and calls into question the widely held assumption that the law profession is on a path of progress towards better accommodation for the needs of mothers, thereby troubling assumptions that gender equality in the legal profession is generally improving.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into harsh relief the challenges parents, disproportionately mothers, face when they try to balance professional work in the legal field with caregiving and emotional labour obligations at home. The findings presented in this article underscore that these challenges are not transient symptoms of the pandemic but are visible manifestations of ongoing problems in the legal profession, which are not improving.

In September 2015, a study published on LeanIn.org made the bold claim that "contrary to popular belief, corporate America is not on the path to gender equality" (Thomas). The study, massive in its scope, found that women are not voluntarily leaving American workplaces and are not being pushed out as much as they are being held down by stress, discrimination, bias, and other systemic barriers. The study found that conditions are not actually improving for women workers and that the assumed slow progress towards gender equality in paid workplaces is simply not underway.

However, just over a month later, on the Canadian side of the border, the newly minted Liberal government swore in a diverse cabinet comprised, by design, of precisely 50 percent women and 50 percent men. Justin Trudeau,

the new prime minister, explained his commitment to gender parity with a shrug, an eye roll, and a phrase that would become a viral hashtag: "because it's 2015."[2] In Ontario at the time the study was undertaken, there was a female Premier who is a mother and grandmother, and a female Provincial Attorney General, also a mother, as well as a female Federal Attorney General. At the time this paper is being published, the Premier and Attorney General in Ontario are both again men. As lawyer-mothers, we are concerned with the question of whether lawyer-mothers are moving forwards in terms of their relative equality to men within the legal profession.

In early 2016, we met with and interviewed ten lawyer-mothers in a diverse range of fields in the legal profession, all based in the Ottawa region. Interviews took place in person, in offices, over kitchen tables, and over the phone. We learned that while conditions for some Canadian woman lawyer-mothers are improving, the situation, at least anecdotally described by the interviewees, is actually worse than in the past. Our study confirms that, anecdotally, the numbers provided by prior quantitative studies about challenges faced by lawyer mothers continue to ring true. The lawyer-mothers we spoke with are not experiencing overall better conditions within the legal profession than those in decades past. The progress that has been achieved is uneven, arbitrary, and ad hoc, and it really depends upon the whims and negotiations of individuals.

Despite the efforts of generations of feminists and activists—and support in those efforts from mainstream elements within the legal profession such as the various professional bar associations and provincial and territorial law societies—it remains true that lawyer-mothers face high barriers when they seek to be included in the legal profession as colleagues who share power, pay, prestige, professional responsibility, and are able to advance in their careers.

The statistical studies we reviewed in preparation for our study, as well as the qualitative participant interviews we carried out with Canadian lawyers who are also mothers, do not support the widely accepted cultural grand narrative that women are on a path towards equality in the profession overall, at least not where private practice is specifically considered and the women concerned are mothers. To address the situation, active systemic and cultural changes need to be intentionally made. We cannot rest on the supposition that progress for some will inevitably lead to progress for all, as it is abundantly clear from this study that this is not the case.

The Study

We decided to look at the question of mothers' equality within the legal profession from both statistical and qualitative angles. To do so, we reviewed literature documenting statistical studies of woman lawyers in Canada. Since

a lot of quantitative research about women in the legal profession has already been done, we decided to complement this statistical data with a qualitative data set concerning the experiential knowledge of a group of our colleagues, as well as ourselves, who are all mothers and lawyers working in Canada's capital, Ottawa. We conducted participant interviews with ten lawyer-mothers. Our group of informants includes diversity in ethnicity, race, age, marital status, and socio-economic background, as well as in terms of practice areas. Two informants work as civil litigators, two work as criminal lawyers, one has a policy role with an NGO, three work as part-time and full-time legal academics, one is a long-time public prosecutor, and one has left the legal profession, at least for the moment. Informants vary in age from their mid-twenties to their mid-forties. They have varying levels of experience working as lawyers—from four to fourteen years. Participants in the study were asked to describe and discuss the following questions:

1. What was your experience in terms of announcing your pregnancy and negotiating leave?
2. How did having children affect your practice? What happened that aligned with what you expected? What surprised you?
3. What sort of barriers have you encountered with respect to being a mother in the legal profession? Were you expecting to face these challenges?

This article reports on the responses we received to our questions and provides an analysis of those responses. From our study of mothers' experiences in the legal profession, it is evident that their situation is complex. Our conversations revealed that the narrative of mothers' progress in the legal profession and the claim that such progress is stalled or nonexistent coexist together; they are incomplete truths. Yes, there is some progress, but a grand narrative of overall progress is oversimplistic and unduly optimistic.

Considering Equality—A Caveat

Choosing how to define terms is important. Equality can be a question of numbers (statistical parity), or status (e.g., partnership), or remuneration or control. If we were to bring into being a legal profession where gender equality generally, and specifically equality for lawyer-mothers, it would be equitable remuneration, control, and participation regardless of gender. And let's keep in mind what is assumed in this research and the questions we asked: the idea that the legal profession should be maintained—that it is coherent, and it should promote equality. Trying to improve the legal profession accepts the existence of the legal profession, and this acceptance as a starting point implies a whole series of capitalist assumptions about how work should be conceived

and how mothers should be involved in it. Mothers are also assumed to be a monolithic category when, in fact, great diversity exists—single mothers, young mothers, older mothers, LGTBQ2S+ mothers, married heterosexual mothers, immigrant mothers, and others who identify differently.

To investigate mothers' position within the legal profession is to assume a liberal feminist framework in which mothers want to be lawyers and should want to be them. We acknowledge the legitimacy of the critique that analyses levels of equality within professions that do not trouble the professions themselves run the risk of being an example of what Anne-Marie Slaughter calls "plutocrat feminism" (Slaughter, Unfinished Business). However, we are prepared to start for analytical purposes—while reflexively acknowledging our social position as lawyers—with the position that participating fully in the legal profession is socially desirable for mothers.

Prior Studies

Much has been made about the changing face of the legal profession, with increasing racial and gender diversity featuring prominently in this change. Women have made up roughly 50 per cent of the student body of Canadian law schools for a generation (Ornstein). Correspondingly, Canada's legal profession is increasingly diverse at its entry point of the Call to the Bar, after articling.

However, while the demographic makeup of the legal profession is changing, this change is uneven. Men, women, Indigenous, and otherwise racialized people tend to be found in different niches within the profession. As is noted by the Law Society of Upper Canada in its *2013 Snapshot of the Profession*, "Men are more likely to be in sole practice and law firm partners, while there is a higher proportion of women in all the other statuses, especially in-house, in clinics, in government and in education."

Catalyst, a consultancy, like the LeanIn study, has also concluded that optimistic projections about progress towards equality between men and women in the Canadian and American legal profession have been overstated. According to its study of gender and the positions of women in the Canadian and US legal profession, Catalyst estimates "that it will take more than a woman lawyer's lifetime to achieve equality."

The burden of childcare faced by lawyer mothers was precisely what was at stake in *Symes v. Canada,* [1993] 4 S.C.R. 695. In that case, lawyer Beth Symes, later a bencher with the Law Society of Upper Canada, was successful at the trial level, but the judgment was reversed on appeal. A majority of the Supreme Court of Canada, with Justices L'Heureux-Dube and Mclachlin notably dissenting, held that a woman law partner's expenses in relation to her nanny's pay were not deductible from her income tax. Rebecca Johnson's book exploring this case describes a social context that is not at all dissimilar to one faced by lawyer-

mothers today.

Over the last several decades, a number of initiatives have been introduced and implemented to strive for better levels of equality for women generally and mothers specifically in the profession. In 1993, the Canadian Bar Association put forward its Touchstones Report (1993). More recently, in 2008, the Law Society of Upper Canada (LSUC)[3] initiated its Justicia Project. The LSUC now offers a coaching project for women expecting a child. According to recent media reports, however, take up of the program has been low.

In March 2016, the Criminal Lawyers' Association released a report to address the issue of women leaving the profession (Madon). The report looked at quantitative data from the LSUC and Legal Aid Ontario as well as qualitative data from focus groups and surveys. The unpredictability of work hours influences childcare obligations, and some women felt excluded from their referral networks because they were viewed as having other priorities at home. The study found that the most commonly cited reasons for leaving included the need for greater job security and financial stability, and it identified the need for more support for women with children or other family obligations.

Our Findings

"Your working ovaries are a major career liability."

A mentioned in the introduction, we spoke with a wide range of mothers who are Ottawa-area lawyers. It is a relatively small legal community, so we reached out through our networks to speak with acquaintances and colleagues. Among our respondents were a former public prosecutor, a qualified mediator, a former civil litigator, a current civil litigator, a solicitor, a criminal defense lawyer, a contract lawyer, and a legal academic. Several respondents said that anonymity would be crucial to their continued work in their practices, and we have therefore agreed not to reveal further information about our respondents.

What follows are some highlights of our findings. First, the good news. The mothers who continued to practice as lawyers said they enjoyed their work, felt fulfilled by it, and even said comments like "I love my work" and "I love my job." They were powerfully attached to their identities as lawyers. Considering the high levels of depression in the legal profession, it is quite striking that these mothers reported high levels of job satisfaction—for them, it is a job worth fighting for. And perhaps that grit is some of the value they bring to the profession.

The more challenging news from our interviews is more complicated. What we heard about was a culture of secrecy, in which pregnant women are disempowered, motherhood is stigmatized, and accommodation decisions are arbitrary and ad hoc. And in all of this, race is interwoven with disempowerment

in complex ways.

In describing their experiences announcing their pregnancies and negotiating maternity leave, the mothers had a diversity of stories. Some were very positive. For example, one respondent working in private practice said: ""I felt wonderfully supported. My mentor bought me flowers. We worked out a plan." Other stories indicated ambivalence. One respondent characterized her experience as stressful: "Everyone was positive and supportive, but there was no concrete plan in place. I was less than three months from birth when a maternity policy was announced." Still another said, more ominously: "Things went well initially. The trouble came later, when I reentered the workplace after a maternity leave." However, many more responses were alarmingly negative. For example, one respondent said: "I was told: 'Your working ovaries are a major career liability.'" Another said, "The response was overtly humiliating." And still another, "The response was passive aggressive."

As demonstrated by the above, the responses the women received from their workplaces when they became pregnant varied, but virtually all described responses that were arbitrary and ad hoc. Although the public sector and some firms have clear policies in place, the range of responses from our interviewees demonstrates that equality has not floated all boats. There was a common theme of pregnancy being a sort of surprise or even crisis. Some firms or organizations were not equipped or prepared to handle an impending parental leave, and they scrambled to adjust. At worst, the announcement was seen as a sort of betrayal of the investment the firm made in the lawyer. Furthermore, despite the public service being viewed as a more accommodating place of work, the public sector lawyer we spoke to found that the culture very much discourages flexible work arrangements. Employees were discouraged from even asking to be able to work from home or access measures—such as income averaging—that would allow unpaid time off.

The mothers interviewed reported feeling vulnerable in terms of their maternity leave. Few workplaces had written policies surrounding leave and what happens to an individual's files when they are gone. Meanwhile, women who are in solo practice reported having no recourse to income replacement and being faced with a stark choice of either trying to maintain a practice or taking a brief leave, with neither option palatable. They described how the LSUC's Parental Leave Assistance Program provides some support to parents to cover costs while they are on leave. It is not, however, intended to be an income replacement program; it is instead an expense recovery program that allows sole practitioners and partners to cover their overhead. Although the program is helpful to some, its eligibility requirements are stringent, and it stipulates that lawyers cease all work while collecting any money. This model is particularly difficult for practitioners in criminal or family law, who often need to manage files while on leave. LawPro, the company that manages

insurance for lawyers in Ontario, also requires that lawyers cease all work when they are on leave. Again, this puts many mothers in a difficult position of having to choose between maintaining their practice and managing their clients or saving money on their insurance premium. The scheme seems to be modelled for a workplace where another lawyer could completely take over the practice without any input or support from the lawyer on leave. However, this does not reflect the reality of many parents who are taking short leaves and may wish (or need) to stay connected to their clients and work.

There was some concern expressed about accommodation fatigue, where firms had accommodated a mother in the past but had little interest or plan to support more. This was particularly problematic in a context of unwritten maternity or parental leaves, in which lawyer-mothers cannot plan on receiving a particular response or on receiving a particular level of support.

Competitiveness and a fetishization of toughness in workplace cultures were also reported to be problematic. In some instances, positive role models and mentors were present, but for many mothers, they were not. The presence of more senior women lawyers in legal workplaces did not ensure a supportive environment. Interviewees reported receiving advice to "look into boarding schools" for their kids and to simply "buck up." The women interviewed were a bright, personable, composed, and articulate group. It does appear that there is a risk for the resilience of high-achieving women to be exploited by legal profession employers who understand that it is not culturally condoned for workers to ask for support or accommodation.

Interviewees reported losing access to career-advancing work once they became mothers. Although many women in private practice look to the federal government as a safe reprieve from ad hoc or nonexistent policies, the mere fact of having a robust maternity scheme does not preclude discrimination. One woman we spoke to who works as a lawyer in the public service spoke of larger, more complex files being redistributed while she was pregnant, before they really needed to be. It seemed as if pregnant women are written off despite their ability to work. Similarly, upon returning to work, she noted an attitudinal shift, as if she were somehow now less capable: "Women need to really prove themselves and take on big files in order to show that they are back in the game."

Some spoke of the availability of part-time contract-based work, which had flexibility as an advantage but precarity and invisibility as disadvantages. Respondents also indicated that the delegation of work is often still informed by stereotypical assumptions as to what mothers can handle based on their families being the priority. One interviewee said, "The good work would just drift away." One woman commented on how she was not given a certain file that involved some travel, even though she had relevant experience. Her manager asked if she could "guarantee" that her children would not be sick.

Our study's obvious conclusion is that progress for mothers in the legal profession has been uneven. Clearly, there remain a number of barriers to progress. Written maternity and parental leave policies continue to be done on an ad hoc basis, leaving many women to negotiate the terms of their leave and return on an individual basis and from a position of vulnerability (Knapton and Flaherty).

Quite frankly, our findings are not, on the whole, surprising. Motherhood transforms a person's identity, their physicality (at least for a time), and changes their availability for paid work. We are always inside capitalism. Certain forms of difference have proven, if not easier, at least more manageable for business to accommodate than motherhood. A business case, for example, can be made for including racial and ethnic diversity and has been made. It is difficult for a mother if she conforms to traditional role expectations consistent with the ideology of intensive mothering (O'Reilly) to simultaneously conform to role expectations of the ideal worker, who is always available. Motherhood becomes a simultaneously valorized and stigmatized identity for women in the paid workplace, and the legal profession is a space where the double-bind position of lawyer-mothers is particularly pronounced.

Furthermore, our findings confirm our individual experiences because we are lawyers and mothers. Challenging work circumstances are a day-to-day reality we live. However, Rebecca, in particular, whose children are the oldest, was surprised by how challenging the more recent circumstances of newer mothers have been. The stories of our colleagues confirm the systemic dimensions of our individual experiences. Since neither the presence of lawyer-mothers in the profession nor study of it is new, it is thoroughly unacceptable that legal sector employers are in many cases still not ready for discussions about maternity and parental leaves and accommodating childcare responsibilities.

Suggestions for Change

Clearly, both policy and cultural change are needed in order for mothers to attain full equality within the legal profession. Action needs to take place from the top down and the bottom up. At the level of policy, we suggest that regulated leaves with transparent policies should be implemented across the legal profession. Accommodation of family responsibilities is already mandated by federal, provincial, and territorial human rights legislation. However, lawyers as professional workers are exempted from much of this, and law firms are not regulated as entities. This leaves a gap which regulators should fill. Furthermore, the culture of the legal profession, including its highly competitive work environments, militates against women stepping forward to ask for help when they become, or as they continue to be, mothers.

It is clear that in some workplaces within the legal profession, progress has been made for mothers. Several of Canada's largest firms ("Bay Street firms") not only have maternity leave policies but have more recently introduced parental leave policies aimed at new fathers. This has become the norm expected in Bay Street firms, but, in smaller firms, it is more rare. Of course, having a policy is one thing, and availing oneself of parental leave is another. Law firms need to develop a culture of normalizing it for fathers to take the leave. And much like the larger, predominantly Bay Street firms have done with their female lawyers, firms need to provide support to fathers to help them transition in and out of a leave period.

As women lawyers advance in their careers to become partners, support for taking maternity or parental leave becomes even more precarious. Unable to receive employment insurance and with varying levels of support from fellow partners, these lawyer-mothers also need to contend with maintaining a client base. It is one thing to support a year-long maternity leave by an associate who can be loaded up with work again once she returns, but it is quite another to hand over your clients to other partners to manage and expect that they will be returned. Supports need to be put in place for partner-level mothers.

It may be that the current regulatory movement towards entity regulation holds promise for potential increases in mothers' level of equality within the legal profession. Adam Dodek asks why firms are generally not directly regulated and contends that there is a need to check the power of firms: "The absence of law firm regulation creates a problem of legitimacy for Law Societies mandated to regulate the practice of law in the public interest."

In Ontario, the LSUC is currently reviewing the option of pursuing compliance-based regulation and entity regulation (*Compliance-Based Entity Regulation Task Force*). Although there is some disagreement as to whether entity regulation is a necessary part of the process, there is broad support for compliance-based regulation. The idea that lawyers and firms should proactively adopt best practices can be supportive of mothers in the law. If firms were required to self-evaluate and report to the Law Society as to how they are meeting their equality, equity, and diversity goals, it would be a step in the right direction to removing the otherwise ad hoc nature of addressing parental leaves.

The solution of regulated leaves with transparent policies needs to be accompanied by larger cultural shifts in how we perceive and treat parental leaves. The women interviewed in our study expressed relief and gratitude to have an opportunity to talk about the challenges they have faced. Within the profession, we need to end the silence and stigma around mothers' experiences.

Furthermore, caregiving needs to be re-conceptualized as work that is not necessarily gendered. As US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg said in 2001: "Women will have achieved true equality when men share with them

the responsibility of bringing up the next generation" ("A Conversation"). If partners switch up their roles in the home, they can develop more empathy for one another and work towards parity in domestic labour; diversification of modes of performance of domestic labour can go a long way towards helping women advance in the legal profession (Bromwich).

A great deal of public attention has been attracted by lawyer-mother Anne-Marie Slaughter's 2015 book, *Unfinished Business: Women, Men, Work, Family*. The aspect of Slaughter's argument that most seamlessly crosses national boundaries is her perspective on care and gender. One especially salient quote from the book is actually the title of chapter six: "The Next Phase of the Women's Movement Is a Men's Movement." Slaughter develops a convincing and timely argument that conceptualizes care in a way that includes and encourages carework done by men, which can help move conversations and plans around work-family balance forwards to the great benefit of all concerned. Although policy changes are worth fighting for, influencing how partners of whatever gender approach domestic work and carework on a day-to-day basis is a microintervention worth engaging in if we seek to bring about a social revolution.

The notion that carework is not automatically or inherently gendered is not a new idea. Queer theory has discussed it (Jagose) as well as motherhood scholarship (O'Reilly). Joan Brockman, in her 2001 book *Gender in the Legal Profession* made substantially the same point for which Slaughter is now being credited: For women to attain equality in the legal profession, perceptions of the role of women in the family also need to change. Since childcare remains disproportionately shouldered by women, it is incumbent on male lawyers to engage themselves in conversations and advocacy about childcare as well as actually do the work.

Equality for mothers within the legal profession will not be achieved by firm policies, employment equity initiatives, and certainly not by pledges alone. Although these initiatives move lawyer-mothers towards more equality in terms of power, prestige, pay and practice, the legal profession is not separated from social life. Social movements striving towards more equal sharing of caregiving labour between genders and social actors and towards measuring and valuing care in economic equations and reframing the paid workplace to accommodate the reality of carework will be important to changing women's—and especially mothers' roles—within paid spheres, including those work spaces across the field of the legal profession.

To bring about change, legal employers should have dedicated paternity leave and written, transparent, and consistent maternity leave policies and should develop a culture that encourages men and women to take their full-leave entitlements. Government and regulators should put frameworks in place to make this mandatory as well as broaden the eligibility requirements

for programs, such as PLAP (Ontario's Law Society's now-defunct Parental Leave Assistance Program), to allow more lawyers to access the funds and maintain their practices more effectively. Colleagues and legal sector leaders should work to support, mentor, sponsor, and collaborate with lawyer-mothers. There needs to be strategy and support for ramping down and up one's practice. Recognition should be given for the value mothers bring to the table. It is clear from our life experiences and the conversations in this study that parenting helps people develop skills by helping people prioritize and set bigger goals, and it inspires them to work harder and smarter. The lawyer-mothers we spoke to had many different things to say, but the one common thread holding together their comments was their determination to continue working in the legal profession while striving to parent well.

Conclusion

Our study has confirmed that in the Canadian legal profession, an assumption of progress lulls us into complacency about, and denial of, the barriers women who are mothers continue to face when they seek to attain full equality within the profession. The grand narrative of gender progress can alienate mothers who are experiencing systemic challenges and lead them to individualize their experiences and feel depressed, inadequate, and isolated. Although there are many woman lawyers doing important work in a variety of fields across the legal profession, the qualitative and quantitative studies we report on in this article speak to conditions in which mothers are not being fairly treated and are not on a general path or trend towards equality within the legal profession. Policy changes at the regulatory, government, and corporate levels, as well as cultural shifts within the profession and in how caregiving is valued and gendered in society, are necessary to improve the working conditions of lawyer-mothers.

Furthermore, we contend that the barriers lawyer-mothers face are concerning not just because they affect the mothers who form part of the statistical samples shown in various studies, or of the interviewees we spoke with in our qualitative study but rather because a loss of their labour is the profession's loss. We cannot honestly tell talented first-year law students, or the promising articling students and junior woman lawyers that we mentor, that the conditions they face will be better than those we walked into. Women who enter the legal profession today and become mothers while they are lawyers are better off than Beth Symes was in the early 1990s and when Rebecca was when she first had children in the early 2000s. In some ways, and in some sites within the profession, positive change has happened. However, mothers are actually worse off in others. This dynamic has been thrown into sharp relief in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the issues being

faced by lawyer-mothers in the context of this pandemic are not passing or transitory symptoms of the current context: They are long-term problems. The passage of time itself guarantees no progress. If we are to effectively move towards equality for lawyer-mothers, further regulatory, governmental, and cultural changes must be made.

Endnotes

1. All views presented in this paper are the authors' own. The authors do not speak on behalf of any association or organization.
2. Now, there are some limitations to the depth of the equality seen in the Liberal cabinet—all of the junior ministers are female, for example.
3. The LSUC is now called the LSO (Law Society of Ontario).

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CLARE DUFFY, JODIE HAWKES, LEAH LOVETT, PAULA MCCLOSKEY, LENA ŠIMIĆ, ZOË SVENDSEN, JENNIFER VERSON, AND ANNA TOWNLEY

FAN Mothers in Our Fragile Social Network against Climate Change

This email chain conversation between eight mother-artist activists written over a period of one year between January 2018 and January 2019 reflects our various family lives and attitudes to climate change at that time. The authors identify as belonging to the Family Activist Network and, consequently, to the environmental movement in the age of the Anthropocene. The piece addresses: (1) the many contradictions, paradoxes, hypocrisies, and incongruences inherent in trying to be mother-artist activists; (2) feminist solidarity; (3) questioning if it is possible to reconcile activism with maternity, under what circumstances, and according to what models of activist/maternal practice; (4) intergenerational injustice; (5) the question of acting or not acting; (6) the question of paying attention—noticing how you live and how you create the conditions for another human to live; (7) other life—other humans, nonhumans, and the earth; and (8) the spectacle of mothers and children in protest— the whole performance of mothering in the public realm, at rallies, marches, and art-activist events.

FAN (the Family Activist Network) was founded in 2014 to consider family life and climate change through a variety of art-activist formats. FAN existed between 2014 and 2019 and included academics, activists, actors, artists, architects, babies, cultural workers, dreamers, parents, playwrights, school children, and toddlers. They were Anna, Clare, Corin, Edward, Ella, Fionn, Gabriel, Gary, Hamish, Hope, Innes, James, Jennifer, Jodie, Jude, Laylah, Lawrence, Leah, Leo, Lena, Mahmood, Mala, Martha, Max, Neal, Oisín, Paula, Pete, Roma, Ruby, Sam, Sandy, Sarah, Sid, Susi, Tom, Valerie, and Zoë. Some members were engaged in their own arts collectives (a place of their own, METIS, Migrant Artists Mutual Aid, Search Party, The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, and Townley & Bradby), and

others worked independently. All sought to imagine and create another possible world with social and ecological justice at its core. Since 2015, FAN has met on an average of two times a year at demonstrations and working/activist holidays. What follows is an email correspondence by FAN mothers, which was created over a period of one year between January 2018 and January 2019. We wrote in between school runs and nursery drop offs, over breakfast, before work, after studying, and in the middle of the night.

Lena: How about we, FAN mothers, submit something together—a reflection on what it means to mother and be a part of FAN, to belong to our fragile social movement/network against climate change? In what ways does FAN enable a different kind of mothering?

Leah: I wonder whether we can use this form (i.e., of the group email chain) as a way to present the contribution? It seems quite key to the organizational infrastructure of FAN and also speaks (to me anyway) of the practical and spatial realities of parenting (perhaps mothering?)—a loose network of people, a conversation across multiple sites, interrupted.

I'm also curious about how and whether it is possible to reconcile activism with maternity, under what circumstances, and according to what models of activist/maternal practice?

Clare: I wrote a five-minute play called "The Blue Puzzle," and I wrote a monologue for "A Mother" (Duffy). Climate Change Action Theatre commissions fifty playwrights from every continent biannually to write a five-minute play about global warming. The plays are put on all around the world. They particularly wanted us to write something hopeful for the last one. It forced me to try to think about a positive future for my child, even if all the terrible predictions come true.

Paula: So, maybe something about the many contradictions, paradoxes, hypocrisies, and incongruences inherent in trying to be a mother-artist and sometimes activist. How none of these titles fit comfortably at any one time. The perpetual failing and striving. I have four children, which many deem problematic, especially in the face of catastrophic climate change and discussions of population growth and consumption and so on, although this is a hugely complex terrain. For example, population control arguments are often racist, serving anti-immigration agendas at the same time individualizing responsibility, assigning the blame for climate change on mothers and their reproductive capacities. The children are here, and I am their mother. It's no use just sitting back and worrying about it.

Engaging in maternal art activism (from my highly privileged position)

with small children has allowed me to pay attention, to really notice how I live, to consider the choices I make through creating the conditions for another human to live and how this connects me to other humans, but also to nonhumans and the earth. Perhaps there is something to be said for how all caring work (in the broadest sense, not confined to biological relations) might open up access to paying attention to lives beyond the familial, towards thinking about other kinships and towards taking responsibility for others. I think the intrauterine is also important to mention here—in terms of how the intrauterine process, shared by all humans, of being created with another (the mother) allow postbirth humans to think about connections to others. How might this be transformative? Or how might it provide a frame to re-think how we relate and take responsibility for others?

I am also thinking about the whole issue of the ethics of maternal art activism. For example, people often ask if my children want to be involved. This came up when going to COP21 in Paris. Following a year of slow correspondence, this was FAN's first meetup and action together. Four weeks before we planned to travel together to Paris, there was a large-scale attack in Paris across three sites. What followed was a complex set of concerns and issues to consider, which each family responded to differently.

Zoë: I'm in the midst of attempting to complete multiple administrative tasks to clear the decks (ha!) for creative work. I've been saving up looking at the maternal activist material. I'll have a look now.

Jennifer: While my participation with FAN is always somewhat on the very fringes, my experience of feminist solidarity and mothering through our collaborations and friendship has been life changing and sustaining in my work as an artist and activist.

Paula: To echo what Jen has just written—the huge amount of support and solidarity to be had by coming together collectively with all our differences and similarities. There have been so many amazing interactions. I always remember how much Anna notices and cares for pregnant FAN mothers and those breastfeeding, even while mothering her own three daughters. She would always hang back and offer her maternal wisdom and support. Another form of paying attention from the knowing position of understanding how hard it is to act when you are creating life, when you are nourishing new life.

Anna: There's something very powerful about being part of a supportive group. I feel it gives me foundation and strength to go out and take part in other stuff that I would normally shy away from.

Lena: I will try to create a proposal. I think we can all agree that we are willing to submit a personal/creative response (via the e-mail chain method that Leah proposed) on what it means to mother right here/now in the age of Anthropocene, and to express feminist solidarity through belonging to FAN. I will e-mail over the weekend with the proposal, and if anyone manages to edit/comment, great—if not, no worries. If anyone suddenly gets some time/energy to write it all up, by all means do! I will try to pull it together, as I believe this is a good way to get us focused and thinking/writing together.

Clare: We're all doing poorly today (runny noses and temperatures). I'm pretending to Hamish that I'm opening the computer, so we can watch an after-lunch film, but I'm secretly communicating with you, too.

Proposal: This collection will allow us to reflect on our various family lives and attitudes to climate change, on belonging to FAN, and, consequently, to the environmental movement in the age of the Anthropocene. We plan to address: (1) the many contradictions, paradoxes, hypocrisies, and incongruences inherent trying to be mother-artist activists; (2) feminist solidarity; (3) questioning if it is possible to reconcile activism with maternity, under what circumstances, and according to what models of activist/maternal practice; (4) intergenerational injustice; (5) the question of acting or not acting; (6) the question of paying attention—noticing how you live and how you create the conditions for another human to live; (7) Other life—other humans, nonhumans, and the earth; and (8) the spectacle of mothers and children in protest—the whole performance of mothering in the public realm, at rallies, marches, and art-activist events.

Leah: I want to share an anecdote as a starting point/provocation. When we had our second child, we decided to switch to washable nappies. We did this as a practical attempt to confront the environmental impact of parenting. We didn't really consider it as a viable option with our first but felt guilty about the amount of waste we were producing, and I was thinking about environment and parenting more because of our participation in FAN. I had discovered that biodegradable nappies don't degrade in landfill, so I stocked up on Terry towels, covers, all-in-one washables, the works. It wasn't cheap. We used them loads to begin with, but the sheer weight of washing destroyed our washing machine. We had prevented nappy waste going in the landfill, but we had totalled a massive, plastic-armoured machine in the process.

There was also the tedious labour involved in all the washing. When my husband was away for work, I felt like the stereotype of the 1950s housewife. In the end, maybe it was pointless because the difference I was making as an anxious, middle-class woman is negligible when set against the massive weight

of all of society's piss-soaked nappies and the industrial waste and greenhouse gases they produce that contribute to climate change. Norah MacKendrick has researched the phenomenon in which women, and particularly mothers, take on the responsibility for limiting toxic exposure through what she terms, "precautionary consumption." Writing in the context of Canada, she highlights the underlying fallacy of precautionary consumption. It overlooks the pervasiveness of toxics. MacKendrick cautions against diverting attention from structural and industrial accountability for climate change to individual consumers—particularly women (and mothers)—in ways that reproduce normative ideas of the good mother.

What's the point of me washing loads of shitty nappies when disposables are the only option for so many people? I'm thinking especially of the rising numbers of families in insecure accommodation in my local area of Newham, who don't have ready access to laundry facilities or drying space. Is it enough to do what I can to reduce my consumption and production of waste, even if that means performing motherhood in ways that risk alienating my neighbours? Does living sustainably necessarily mean forfeiting convenience? Is convenience really that great if it means your participation in an unsustainable system of endless consumption, or might the time I used washing nappies have been given over to modes of activist practice, such as artmaking? Is there a middle ground? I don't know, but we switched back to disposables for the sake of our new washing machine and our sanity.

Jodie: From nappies to prams, when we were trying to decide whether we should go to Paris or not, someone wrote how they wouldn't want to be trying to get away from another attack or an angry police officer if they had their baby with them strapped in the pram. It was an image that stuck in my head—the desperate attempt to unclip those fiddly pram straps, the pram wheels on lock, the weight of it, and all the stuff crammed in underneath and on top while you are trying to run, move, get somewhere, the encumbered mother fleeing in panic while trying to undo the Velcro rain cover.

Sometimes I cut across the park to save time. The wheels are heavy in the mud, and I push and I sweat across the grass just to drop the baby at nursery and get to work quicker. It's like an uphill slog—slow, heavy, while everyone else around me seems to be skipping. Today, the grass has been cut. It's wet, and I can smell the earth. In the co-op, I see the staff in a huddle. I hear them say: "That lady that just came in with the pram." Then I see it while I'm in the queue—grass. A trail around the whole shop. So much of it, in between the cheese and the milk and the baked beans. The white floor is marked by the greenest grass, tracing my pathway around the convenience food, and the carrots are wrapped in plastic. I try to pretend it's another mother, but the wheels of the pram are coated in it. The staff get out the mops and the brooms.

They are not here to clean, and they are angry. I'm embarrassed. I pay and leave as quickly as I can. On the way to nursery, I keep thinking about what a great way it would be to protest, to cover the wheels in something—earth, grass, oil, petrol, paint. About mothers everywhere pushing prams that leave trails in a daily attempt to disrupt, dissent, make trouble, all while their babies sleep and snuggle and graze on snacks.

Clare: Jodie, I think it was me who couldn't stop imagining what it would be like to run with Hamish in his buggy if there was a panic in a crowd in Paris. In the days immediately after the attack on the November 13, I saw video clips of people panicking in Paris, often simply because of loud noises. I was really frightened by their fear. Those attacks changed the collective assessment on the street of what could happen and of what was likely to happen. This makes me think about the mental impacts of climate change and our assessment of what can happen. We're not able to imagine what it would look like at street level and what it would mean. It is already happening, but where it's happening is too far away for us to panic or change. Our challenge is to find a way to bring it to our buggies—to make it apparent in our everyday lives.

You've made me think about buggies as "hyperobjects" in such a brilliant way—an item that is "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1). I have loved my current buggy, but it is now very old and battered. A second-hand, ex-display, Mama and Papa's Armadillo that would have cost £300 but only cost £60 because of a super-generous friend. Hamish has been so happy in it. When we were staying at a friend's house and he felt homesick, he crawled into its familiarity for a quiet moment of comfort. It also allowed him to sleep at home, as I could rock him in it. I didn't have to push it around the Meadows every day, which is what I did with the previous tank of a "travel system," which was what it was actually called! We had to keep the travel system in our car because it was too heavy and difficult to haul up the stairs to our flat, especially as I was on my own with Hamish most of the time for the first year. My partner ran a shop sixty hours a week!

God, my arms ache just thinking about the desperate circling of the Meadows in the rain, trying to get him to nap in the afternoon. I always remember it as raining and the way, even in the best rainwear, eventually the drips found their way through at the zips, joins, and hood. The way they started to run around my neck and down my back. How brutal exhaustion transformed into a sodden, hysterical consumption of chocolate, often followed with a barely controlled weep in the back room of my partner's shop before going home to feed him again. Ahh.

It was having Hamish and a row that I had with my mother about her climate change scepticism (denial) that brought me to FAN. The letter I wrote

to you that year of his birth was a milestone for me. It was a moment when I joined the dots between feeding him with my body, my mother feeding me, and the world supporting us all. I had just read *Hyperobjects* by Timothy Morton and was just starting to own up to my own denial about denial. After all, I brought Hamish into a world that I think might die before the end of his lifetime due to the ecological cost of capitalism. But I don't really think that because if I did, I wouldn't have had Hamish. Would I? I can't help but be optimistic. "The Blue Puzzle," which I wrote for Climate Change Theatre Action, ends with a super optimistic idea: There will be solutions, and they won't only save our planet but save our lonely, oily-selves as well.

I am optimistic that the solutions will involve us all being kinder, less individualistic, and less anthropocentric overall. We'll need to share our resources more and make more from less, which will require more cooperation with more people, including those you may not like. I hope that letting go of some of the value we invest in "me-ness" will make us kinder and less selfish. I think it's a great idea to use buggies to draw some new lines across the everyday routes of our denials and our ways of hiding climate change from ourselves. Let's do it.

Anna: Activism and political discussion are not the right path for me to engage with global change. I have found I can work more effectively behind the scenes by connecting with spiritual realms and helping to direct light where it is needed—what I call "light work."

I have been building a daily practice of meditation and connection. Sitting on a chair with feet on the ground, I call Guardian and Guides to draw closer:

> "Creator, Angel, guides and unseen worlds,
> Please help me to do this work for the highest good,
> And always in the love and light."

My Guardian is just above my left shoulder; my Guides arc in front of me.

Light Children by Anna Townley (2018)

Through doing this light work, I have come to understand that light can grow if nurtured. Working with your immediate surroundings—yourself, those around you and others who come towards you—will build light that begins to radiate out and join a network of light and energy across the globe.

This work, both subtle and deep, has given me a different perspective on global and domestic politics, climate change, and humanity in general. I feel more empowered and more positive that change is possible. Expressing some of what I see and receive during meditation through drawings and paintings is a way to deepen my understanding of light work.

Jennifer: I am trapped currently between the different ways that I am writing and also a certain amount of darkness around the current rise of the far right. I am spending too much time thinking about religiously framed violence, what causes it, and what makes people willing to risk their life for what they feel to be a sacred value.

But I am here at the fringes of FAN!

Zoë: Climate change has started to suffuse my six-year-old son's imaginary play. He bowls along the street inventing things to combat and generally pretends he is an avatar in a video game a lot of the time. This has now extended to him inventing artificial sharks to eat the plastic in the oceans (with the strain of bacteria that can eat plastic) or a carbon-dioxide sucking-up machine that is going to go around and "destroy" (his word) all the power stations. For him, it is all heroes and villains, a zero-sum game, us versus them. In my mind, this replicates competitive (often masculine) identity production—as though destruction were all that was needed to solve whatever the problem might be. Transformation does, of course, involve the ending of things, but I am uncomfortable with my son's emphasis on destruction because it isn't in and of itself generative. It is so much easier to focus on the ending of things than it is to imagine the beginning of new things —yet that's what we so urgently need.

I went to a conference—Under Her Eye: Women and Climate Change—on June 1 2018. The UN chief negotiator for the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, Christiana Figueres, gave a keynote. One of her first actions when she started in 2010 was to insist such words as "fight," "battle," and "combat" were replaced with such words as "address" and "respond to."

Moving away from the language of war enabled her to start to shift the debate beyond antagonism and blame to a future-orientated invitation to come to a decision on what is to be done. It was part of her ideology of "emergent leadership" (in contrast to "directional leadership"). It involves a practice of listening before imposing and recognizing historic harm (and the need for reparation) while pushing forwards for fundamental change. Although the Paris Agreement, of course, does not go nearly far enough, the achievement of bringing almost every country in the world to agreement, even when not legally binding—one that includes the recognition that 1.5 degrees is critical to the survival of peoples and environment—is astonishing in the current political (and planetary) climate. What needs continued attack is the inaction of governments and all complicities and allowances granted to the fossil fuel industries. However, climate change itself is not something you can run at waving a sword. Be alert to human impacts and their ramifications, explore and live the complexities of how we can contribute to altering our fossil fuel dependent culture's ruinous relationship with nature, and make the worlds we want to live in. Donna J. Haraway talks of "staying with the trouble" (4). I think that's what we are doing here, in the context of the maternal—living with the contradictions, making peace with what often gets described as hypocritical. That is, the painful gap between how we would like to be able to do things with and for our children in relation to their environment and

what feels possible in the UK context at present.

I think of the vocabulary for dealing with the threat that my six- and two-year-old boys are growing up with. There are a couple of cartoons that are a bit more discovery orientated, but they are still largely built around the idea of predator, risk, and hero. Our children are being rehearsed by the culture for the survivalist narrative, of surviving as winning, and winner takes all.

I feel a little helpless, having let this violent, battle-led world into his mental space already. I've been far too slack, I think, about his cultural environment. I've not thought enough about the violence in the hero narratives, which are everywhere. But you cannot keep children completely isolated from the experiences of their peers. Instead, I am attempting to cultivate in him a critical awareness of what is going on in these narratives.

But we also need to model a different narrative, a different kind of network of responsibility and collaboration—a different sense of self. The UN conference did suggest that some of that might come from traits I associate with mothering: listening, non-judgement, acceptance of the situation and then moving on to find new solutions, clarity, and integrity—what Figueres called "emergent" rather than "directional" leadership.

A glimmer of hope: My son is also planning with a friend to help endangered animals. The plan is to raise money to buy food for the animals; it is something they've come up with themselves (in the school playground). Although, once again, there's the challenge of working out how to support him—how to channel the energy without taking over their project and how to enable him to see his plan through without dampening it by pointing out its child's-eye-view impracticalities

But what all this comes down to is how climate conversations are an everyday part of our lives, which I am grateful to FAN for, because it makes it part of his life. He will have always had the challenges we are facing in his sphere of attention rather than something that comes upon him with a terrible shock. It is also developing his political imagination.

Paula: It was so heartening to see the UN conference take place last week in London. The role of women in addressing climate change is crucial at all levels. For me, when mothering small children, any form of what might be considered "activism" happens in mostly small ways as part of everyday mothering and mostly in the domestic realm. In those mundane, repetitious, and magical moments of parenting, I think there can be moments of transformation for the mother, or other parent and child—like the everyday encounters shared in previous emails, the caring for children, and through the decisions we make on a daily basis. These might constitute microactions. It might be that these encounters afford opportunities for us to think and talk about, for example, capitalism or consumerism.

Becoming vegan has been an important example of everyday activism in our entangled lives. Central to this process of becoming vegan is opening up to more expanded thinking about human and more than human relations, about the dominance of human life and the tyranny of human exceptionalism, and about using creative ways to consider a possible world where species coexist differently.

In recognition of the importance of the everyday in terms of this idea of family activism, my partner and four children set up the art collective: a place of their own.[1] Through the collective, we have engaged in a range of art encounters, such as occupying empty buildings, performing on the UK border with the Irish Republic, creating a performance about human-nonhuman entanglements, and becoming members of FAN. We try to get to grips—in a messy, entangled and embodied way—with what it means to live in ways that resist human exceptionalism. In doing so, the hope is that our children discover that this is an option for their futures. For example, we went to La ZAD last year in Nantes.[2] These were moments of doing everyday things differently.

There is another layer that I think is important and weaves through all our life (living together, the art practice, and so on). That is the importance of the aforementioned intrauterine. My entry point to this thinking is the feminist theorist and artist Bracha Ettinger and her matrixial theory, which she explains in *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Through a feminist and psychoanalytical lens, and as an artist, Ettinger explores the significance of the intrauterine for all postnatal human and nonhuman relations. Specifically, the intrauterine encounter during late pregnancy between the mother and the unborn fetus as having a lasting legacy that can be later accessed (Ettinger, *The Matrixial* 219) and how tuning into this original encounter might help us to foster what Ettinger and others refer to as "response-ability" for others (Ettinger, "Fragilization").

This thinking has been a great influence on how I have come to think of the maternal—the experience of mothering, but more broadly the maternal-feminine. This theory helped me to make sense of what the maternal-feminine does and what it could do—not only in terms of carrying another or caring for my own children, but in how to rethink what it means to be human by thinking with the intrauterine. I guess I am interested in the radical potentiality of the maternal-feminine in this expanded sense, as a set of concerns from which to think differently, such as providing access to alternative modes of living and connecting with others, which is so urgently needed.

Jodie: I've been thinking a lot about risk and distraction.

Last week, Jude dropped a can of chickpeas on his foot. It completely ripped off his toenail. Pete took him to the hospital and waited hours and hours to

have his foot X-rayed to see if it was broken (it wasn't). I stayed at home and mopped up the blood. It was sort of my fault because I left him downstairs while Pete was distracted cooking. I went upstairs to put the washing away from a trip we had been on. It was sort of my fault because I lazily put the tins on a very low shelf because we bought too much stuff from the shop, and the cupboards were already full of half opened stuff. It was sort of my fault because I'm his mum.

After telling my mum about the toe, she remarked that he seems accident prone, always in the wars. I said yes, although a part of me wondered if my parenting is just a bit worse third time around. We haven't got a stair gate; we haven't got those little covers that go in the plug sockets, and I'm always a bit too tired, distracted, busy. He can manage… yikes.

Even as I began to write this, I found him under a fallen chair, in between the vacuum cleaner and a fallen scooter. Crying, but not really crying. He has no understanding of what is dangerous; he is wild. He loves to bounce and throw himself around on the trampoline. The older two have ripped down all of the netting on the sides. They hang off it like chimpanzees. The little one's in the middle, constantly on the edge of it, just about to fall out, over the edge. I remember when Ruby was in the hospital with a broken arm. The rows of beds with children with broken limbs, from either a trampoline or a bouncy castle—it seemed comical. I remembered how lucky they are to be in hospital beds due to bouncy fun and not some other unimaginable horror. The baby thinks it's funny when I shout and run to save him. It drives him wilder. He likes to fall right near the edge now. To see my panic, to delight in it. It's easier to give him what he wants, to let him go on there.

My mother has given me bad cholesterol; it's inherited. The sticky kind. I might have given it to my children. All without knowing. They will need to be tested when they are teenagers, the doctor says. I have more risk of having a heart attack or a stroke. Where are the dangerous things? Inside us, already living in our bodies? In the kitchen cupboard? In the garden? How do we protect them from the inescapable, hero narratives dominating children's TV programs? How do we protect them from rising floods and electric storms and extreme heat? How do we protect them?

I don't fully understand the medical terminology from the doctor. The baby speaks in grunts and mumbles, but I understand him fully. I feel like his interpreter. A slight difference in pitch or tone tells me exactly what he wants and needs. Last week, I was distracted from writing this because I was in the studio working on our new show about climate change, *Storm*. While we were working, the baby slipped on some water. That night, I dreamt the baby died when I wasn't looking. I woke in the night crying. That hasn't happened for a long time. We've been reading Tim Morton. The end of the world has already happened, he says (Morton, *Being*). I wasn't listening to the talk we, as FAN,

had in Scotland about James Watt and the start of the Anthropocene. I was distracted by my son's sick bug. I regret it now.

The baby wants a real fork, not a plastic one. He wants to eat his food himself with a big, spiky, metal, sharp fork, and if he doesn't get it, he will cry. I give in. I'm tired. I hope he doesn't lose an eye.

The rabbit died shortly after the baby's birth. The plants from Paris are nearly dead. The nonhuman things are the worst looked after in our house. Jude destroys the plants in the garden. He tramples over the sprouting weeds and planted flowers, unaware.

Leah: This is not so much an answer to the thread but to ease any guilt. Those electric socket covers are supposed to be more dangerous than not using anything, as UK sockets have the third prong for safety. Plus, they're plastic. Double win for lackadaisical parenting! Hope Jude's toenail grows back fast.

Zoë: I think how much they fall about, or run away, is down to character, not parenting. But I recognize what you describe. It does feel all about scale—how near or far to think, look, and feel. I'd love to come and see your piece. I'm trying to get to grips with writing for mine. It is so difficult. There are so many barriers, in my mind as well as in terms of time, and so on.

Jodie: Yes, it's a weird time to be alive. It all sort of feels really funny and really sad to me. I like Morton's description of this feeling as "uncanny" and "weird." Inside the "hyperobject," you are aware of it but are unable to really see it or imagine it. Yet we are always aware of it in everything we now do: getting in the car, eating a cucumber wrapped in plastic, turning the light off, chatting about the weather. Everything changed by our knowledge of climate change. We can't unknow it, can't do anything about it. Stuck. And everything is interconnected, everything.

Clare: For a moment yesterday, on the train, on the way to the preview of *The Reason I Jump* at the National Theatre of Scotland in Glasgow, that image of the drowned Syrian refugee toddler on the Turkish beach came into my head. I realized I was on the edge of howling. I was able to mentally walk back from the image, to creep back up that beach, turn the other way, and stop myself seeing that little body. But I know it's there. All day today, I've been aware of that body. Smaller than Hamish's body, but when I first saw it, it was exactly the same as his would have been if it had been him.

I'm too busy to put Hamish to bed for two nights this week, which is fine, isn't it? Of course it is. I have to be able to work. I have to pay for the food, bed, home, and everything. But the image of that toddler makes me think about never being able to put him to bed again.

Everything is connected.

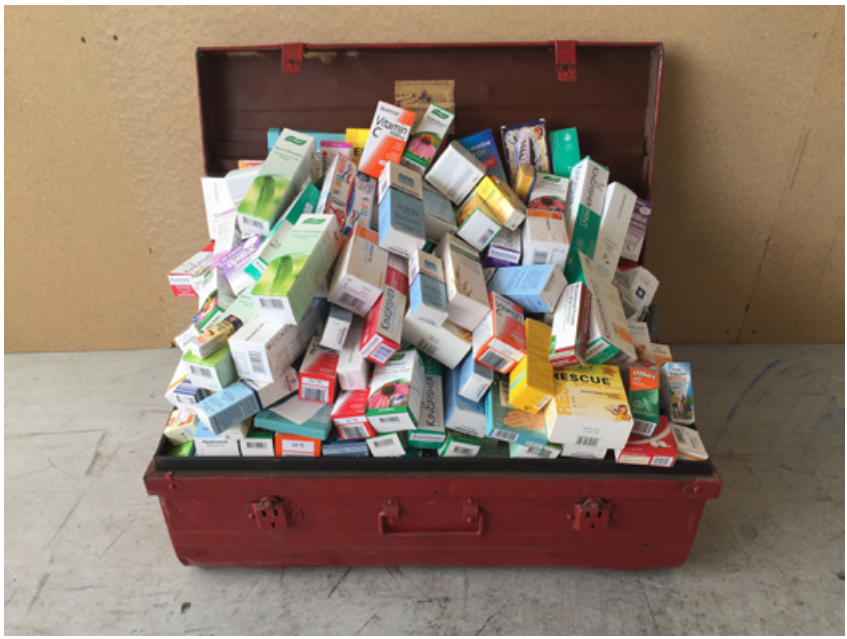
In *The Reason I Jump*, you are told by a young nonverbal autistic boy to enter the labyrinth with a question. I'm going tonight again. So what question shall I ask?

Anna: I just saw two wrens in the garden.

Clare: On a happier note, Hamish can wee standing up this week. Does being a gay mum make you worry about this more?

Jodie: Anna, I just had to Google "wren" to see a picture. Britain's most common breeding bird, but their small size and reliance on insects means they perish easily during prolonged periods of cold weather. A common breeder.

Anna: Eight years of medicines, toiletries, and health supplements:



Eight Years of Medicines, Toiletries and Health Products by Anna Townley (2018)

Lena: This is getting too much. Maternal activism overwhelms. The email threads. The sheer number of people, bodies, exchanges, mothers, and children involved. This is spilling beyond me. Climate change escapes each time. I can't quite grasp it. I try. I speak up in difficult situations, in political meetings. I bring it forwards into the public space of discussion. I open it up. People get

reminded of the existential threat. Then we move onto something else. Some other pressing problem—austerity, poverty, public services cuts knocking upon our doors.

I regret saying I will compile all these emails. I regret saying I will engage in the edit. The clean up feels like something beyond me. I have no time. There's no clean energy. There's lack of resources and time. If only we would shift our priorities. If only I could shift my priorities.

In our mother-artist reading group, someone said how depressing it is to live in this time of crisis, austerity, and climate change. We talked about Jacqueline Rose's book *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (2018). Rose writes, "Because mothers are seen as our point of entry into the world, there is nothing easier than to make social deterioration look like something that is the sacred duty of mothers to prevent" (Rose 27). Blame the mother. Similarly, it's easy to argue that excessive reproduction of children and the growth of population cause climate change. It's easy to side-line our addiction to consumption, fossil fuel dependency, and the unequal distribution of resources. Blame the mother. The mother/reader in our reading group who was complaining, saying the world is too cruel and desperate, had small children. I said, "I felt okay for the future." Weirdly, I felt better, more hopeful. I remembered my teenagers and felt elated. They are embarking upon the world; they are here to change it. I felt fine because they are a new generation that I am in contact with daily. All of them are capable of a new beginning, of freedom. Recalling the work of philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt, Rose writes: "In Arendt's view freedom is identical with the capacity to begin" (79). This sentence gave me a burst of energy in relation to the new generation. This is what I remembered from the book.

Picking up that energy, I better trawl through all the correspondence and create a document. Archive the emails. Clean up. Create something new myself.

Endnotes

1. A place, of their own is an Irish/English art collective, working between art, research and critical spatial practice. It was founded in 2010 by Paula McCloskey, Sam Vardy, and their four children.
2. La ZAD (Zone-to-defend) is located in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France. It is a four-thousand acre commune of wetlands and forests, home to farmers, activists, naturalists, and squatters.

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FARAH MAHRUKH COOMI SHROFF

Embracing the F-Word Together: My Mom and Me Swearing by Feminism[1]

Activism—a playful, joyful form of activism—has been a central feature of my life, partly because of the way in which my mom and I grew as activists together. Feminism, antiracism, and decolonial forms of activism are foundational in my scholarly work and my daily life. In this piece, I take a light-hearted approach to the ways in which my mom and I took up feminism.

The Parsi community emanates from Persia and has been in South Asia for hundreds of years. In this narrative, I tell stories about my mom, Mahrookh, and me, as we learned about feminism together, on the West Coast of Turtle Island (North America). My mom grew up in India, the youngest with four brothers. Her dad, Nariman Munshi, was so keen to have a daughter that, despite my Granny's insistence on having only two kids, they kept trying until they got a girl! So she was named Rani—Queen—and she was treated like a precious gift by her parents. Tragically, her father was murdered when she was only twelve years old, irrevocably disrupting everything, forever. Her brothers became tougher than her dad had ever been. When she received an invitation from her aunt in Nairobi, Kenya, to help take care of the family while Masi (mom's sister) was convalescing from surgery, Mom jumped on the boat to escape. She had a lovely time in Nairobi and ended up married to Hoshang Shroff, my dad, within a few years, partly because her Masa (Masi's husband) thought it'd be a great way to keep her in Nairobi. Marrying at age seventeen was far too early, and my Granny was furious! She slapped Masa with a whopping strike! My mom and me had a feminist Granny, who inspired us. Moving to the lands of the Coast Salish Nations, where this narrative begins, provided us with even more opportunities to evolve as feminists. (Please see the accompanying video, which forms part of this narrative: https://zxxresearch.med.ubc.ca/resources/.)

My mother taught me so much about speaking out, standing my ground, and having fun while doing it. Our community, the Parsis, is well known for its eccentricities. She fit in very well! This story is about my mom and me, within the context of our family, community, and her health status—in relationship to her role in my work as an antiracism feminist activist and scholar. The F-words—"fu#k," "feminism," and "fun"—are emblematic of our frolicking mother-daughter bond. This feminist journey with my mother has taught me to love myself as a woman and that feminism is, in part, about loving women.

Born in Kenya, I was raised on the lands of the Coast Salish Nations on the West Coast of Turtle Island (North America). Mom was born in India. My mom taught me about sex and reproduction when I was four years old. By the time I was eight, I decided that I would change my middle name to mother's first name. Up until then, my name was Farah Hoshang Shroff, following Parsi tradition of taking my dad's first name as my middle name. My parents lovingly accepted my decision as I declared, "Since both of you made me, it makes sense to have both of your names in my name!"

My mother was a graduate student while I was a pre-teen. We were at a red light in the car, singing loudly to "I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman" (Helen Reddy), and she deftly unhooked her bra, then slipped it off, and waved it around (remaining otherwise fully clothed), before the light turned green! She had a knack for stunts like this. We laughed through them all.

We grew as feminists together, especially after I took my first women's studies course and chatted her up with my newfound learnings. The course, taught by Dr. Alena Heitlinger, taught me to understand the widespread nature of patriarchy and how it manifested itself in horrible forms, such as violence against women, sexual harassment, wage discrepancies, and lack of access to abortion.

My mom and I discussed how difficult it was for many women to get abortions. We also talked about the abortion she had when she was twenty-nine due to her illness and the medications she was taking. Her doctors told her that she had to abort her fetus to protect her health. My mom told me that she thought about her baby boy every day and how sad she was to have to lose that pregnancy. Yet her mother, my Granny, wanted to have an abortion, but in colonial India, her Catholic physician denied her. These two generations of abortion stories are both gut wrenching.

Having a theoretical framework to think about feminist issues really helped us both understand our own lives and the lives of women in our family before us. We both felt fortunate to live in an era where we had a relatively high degree of freedom, and we celebrated this freedom in many ways, whether it was travelling together or assessing cute guys at a distance. My mom's childhood had been marred by a great deal of sexual repression, especially in the Catholic school she attended in India. Her sense of freedom as an adult

came partly from her joy at being released from the restraints of her childhood.

My mother was comfortable with who she was. Once when I was a teenager, I asked my mom why she was folding her hands inside her upper thighs, even though in other people's eyes, it might have looked improper if her hands got too close to her private parts. With her Anglo-Indian accent, she exclaimed, "Who cares!?!!" Thanks to her, I learned from a young age not to care too much about gossiping, backbiting, and the patriarchal norms that are used to judge women. I never heard her worry about what other people thought about her.

She was also very expressive with her words and used colourful language. This started when I came home from first-year university, having discovered the fun of swearing like a student, peppering every few sentences with four letter words:

> Farah: "Women don't need to shave our legs and armpits! That's fu*#ing patriarchal"!
>
> Mom: "Fu$%! ya!"

Both of us laughed uproariously! She thought this latest university gimmick was the best one yet, and she never let go of it! This not only helped her express herself in a slightly rebellious fashion but also served her during times of hardship. The F-word was liberating for both of us as we learned that we did not need to be ladylike in order to be full-fledged women.

When she was about twenty-five and I was about five, she was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness: systemic lupus erythematosus. She was hospitalized countless times. Her physicians were certain that her flame would soon be extinguished. She made it to her early seventies (we don't know the exact year of her birth—funny thing about record keeping in those days) and defied all predictions. Many times, she was dubbed a "medical miracle." Her survival is due to her indomitable spirit and boundless family support (see Shroff, "Canada 127/150: Rani Mahrookh Shroff"). Her incredible courage, love, and sense of fun have inspired me and others to take risks, laugh at ourselves, and live freely. She also inspired me to create an oral history insider participatory action, feminist research project about the lives of women in our community, the ZXX Study: zxxresearch.med.ubc.ca

Giggling
Whispering
Speaking wordlessly
Mom and me had
Lots of fun
She was nineteen when I was born
So we grew up together
Fully embracing feminism
Speaking out for change
Long live strong (Parsi) women!

It was also because of her that I was exposed to queer culture at an early age. While she was at a bus stop en route to the University of British Columbia where she was a master of social work student, she met a new friend; let's call him Behram. He happened to be a gay Parsi man. Our community is typically tightknit, so they became fast friends, and Behram became a fixture in our home. Behram's nickname for me was Boom Boom and we loved to talk about cute guys, clothing, shoes, makeup, hair, and other fashion fun. When I was twelve, we were having dinner and talking about anal sex. I asked Behram about the specifics of penile penetration of the anus, and we had a somewhat light-hearted discussion about anatomical parts and their amazing versatility. Behram was very patient with us. Having Behram around taught me to love our friends and community, celebrating all of life's creative expressions.

Throughout my university education, right until I was a doctoral student in an antiracist, feminist, and progressive sociology program, my mom was supportive of my activist politics, within and outside academia. At dinner table conversations, she and I would battle other family members, supporting human rights, Indigenous land stewardship, abortion justice, and more. When my Iranian partner, Roozbeh, joined the family, he too was on our side.

My mom constantly told me: "Roozbeh is such a good find. He's such a good dad, such a loving husband, and such a good cook!" My mom was spot on. Roozbeh and I have shared equitably in household duties, child-raising, and all other aspects of being a family. The strong women in his family are wonderful role models. It's so interesting when people find out that my life partner is of Iranian heritage as he breaks their stereotypical ideas.

Roozbeh and I take great pains to expose our sons, Zubin and Arman, to the power, beauty, and resilience of women and gender nonconforming people. My hope for their generation is that they grow up respecting women and seeing them as bright classmates, able athletes, and capable leaders, as this will

allow them to fully express their masculinities in vulnerable ways, breaking through the toxic straitjackets of manhood. In their future, I envision a world in which girls, women, and gender nonconforming folks are able to live their lives to their full potential. My mother's laughter, strength, and insight have inspired me to work towards such possibilities. Together, we embraced feminism, four letter words, and fun!

Endnotes

1. This written piece is accompanied by an audio-visual piece: "The F Word: Dr Shroff talks about her Mom and Grandmother." Please see the accompanying video, which forms part of this narrative: https://zxxresearch.med.ubc.ca/resources/

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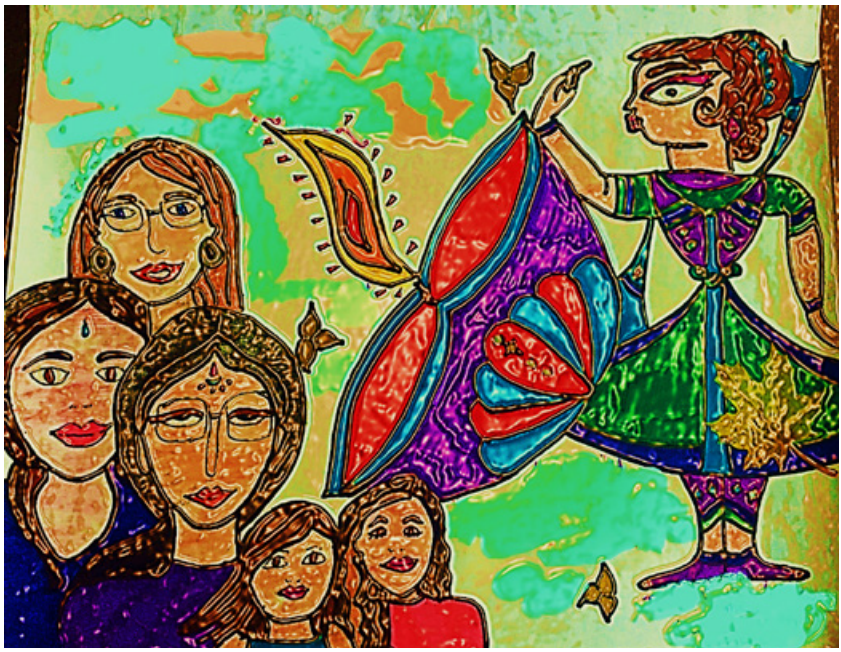
JINNY MENON

Brown Bodies, Brown Worlds: Creating Cadence and Crafting Karma

Seeking to trouble monolithic (and at times pejorative) constructions of South Asian girls and females, as part of my doctoral research I engaged in a long term multiperspectival narrative inquiry (Clandinin) into the storied experiences of two girls, their mothers and teacher over the span of several years. My research puzzles were shaped and contoured by the experiences I embody as a woman of colour, a South Asian daughter born, raised, educated, and living in Canada. In the unfolding of this research, in ethical relationship with co-learners, we narratively inquired into our experiences of identity-making and identity-living as crafting an artistry of our lives by shifting away from more traditional and presupposed understandings of academic research. In doing so, this study illuminated and honoured different artful and feminist ways of knowing, being, and learning (Menon, An Artful Narrative Inquiry) infused within a narrative understanding of social justice (Caine et al.). To invite these multifarious ways of knowing and living, I deliberately invoked artwork spaces to create, think, and muse personally and collectively. I came to call this type of engagement heart-full work (Menon, A Story Cloth).

Within this relational space of this piece, selected heart-full musings paired with poetry are brought forward to highlight the nuanced experiences of South Asian girls and women, as daughters and mothers who are empowered (O'Reilly, Outlaw(ing) Motherhood, 20) creative, agentic, and artistic architects of our respective coloured worlds (Menon, An Artful Narrative Inquiry).

Keywords: Artful, Daughters, Imagery, Maternal Activism, Mothers, Narrative Inquiry, People of Colour, Poetry, Racialized, Resistance, Stories, and South Asian



Lighting Diyas of Hope

A long (research) journey unfolds,
Unearthed and unexpected, the treasure
Of friendships reveal hues of gold…
Diyas lit and fanned within those measures,
Flickering flames of hope—oh so bold!

Contouring Context

Demographically speaking, the number of South Asian***s***[1] residing in Canada has grown significantly over the years. Census data drawn from Canada's National Household Survey (NHS), reported 1,963,330 people of South Asian origins and of those individuals, 969,735 were females as of 2016 (Statistics Canada). Given the increasingly diverse composition of Canada's population, it is crucial to recognize South Asian girl students may arrive in schools embodying complex notions of culture and identity which shape in profound ways *who they are and who they wish to be (*Menon, *An Artful Narrative Inquiry).* At the same time, it is important to understand that South Asian girls and their mothers live in interconnected, overlapping, and conflicting familial, cultural, and institutional narratives (Gill and Mitra-Khan 687-693; Kallivayalil 807-808). Clandinin et al. pointed to conflicts that teachers, children, and families experience when co-composing curriculum within Canadian schools (17-39). These points of tension can be exacerbated for children of colour. Insofar as South Asian females are concerned, it is vital to consider how multifarious narratives imbue their identity-making and what shapes their life-in-the making as racialized individuals who carry the weight of intergenerational stories of colonization and violence. Compounding these embodied experiences are the cultural and sometimes, familial stories of South Asian girlhood and womanhood that restrict choice and agency. Thus, what is taught and learned within the (brown) worlds South Asian girls and women, mothers and daughters live and travel to and within (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin 105-117; Lugones 3-19; Menon, *A Story Cloth),* proffers opportunities for growth and challenges which need to be negotiated. Yet little is known about these lived experiences.

Rendering Visible What Is Often Left Invisible

Recognizing this paucity in academic literature, school practice, and elsewhere, I found myself wanting to actively hear, listen, and amplify the stories of brown girls and brown women especially. To trouble simplistic renderings of what it means to be a racialized South Asian female, I also wished to make more visible the plotlines lived by brown girls and brown women across and within multifarious worlds of experiences. As such, for my doctoral work I engaged in a multiperspectival narrative inquiry over a span of several years alongside two South Asian girls, their mothers, and teachers (Clandinin, 21-33; Clandinin and Connelly, 34-48; Menon, *Making Masala* 70-87). Positioned as a daughter, learner, a teacher, and a researcher (amidst other plotlines), engaging in this nuanced work, I held close my storied understandings as a woman of colour, a South Asian female born, raised, educated,

and living in Canada. My research is especially concerned with the identity-making experiences of South Asian daughters alongside their mothers and teachers as they shifted between worlds of home, school, and other community places. To help think with(in) these stories of experience, I found myself gravitating towards imagery and metaphor. In particular, the conceptualization of a collaged composition. A collage refers to both the technique of assembling or compiling different materials in order to create a new form. In my work alongside research friends, the experiences we shared as well as the stories that emerged in conversation with one another and in moments of reflection, assumed novel form(s) in my musings. Collaged upon the canvas of this narrative inquiry, a vibrant palette of stories emerged when in conversation with one another and additionally, through the living artistry of our lives.

As co-learners[2] and research friends, we narratively inquired into our personal stories of experiences within and across a multihued *carto*graphy of home, school, community, and geographical worlds. Multiperspectival narrative inquiry understands that *both* researchers and participants are irrevocably shaped by and through the inquiry. By narratively inquiring into our (diverse) life experiences, querying and complicating commonplace notions of what it means to be a mother, a daughter, and a good Indian woman (amongst many other prescriptive plotlines)—various stories of strength and challenge were told, lived, and shared amongst us (Menon, *An Artful Narrative Inquiry*; Menon, "Making Masala" 70-87).

Maternal Activism as Ways of Being and Living

In coming alongside the two mothers in this work, I am drawn close to O'Reilly who illuminates, "I am suggesting that any understanding of mothers' lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming and being a mother shape a woman's sense of self and how she sees and lives in the world" ("Matricentric Feminism" 14). Both Vam[3] and Barb[4], the two mothers who made the deliberate choice to be part of this nuanced work, work which we deemed as necessary and evoking both heart and mind connections, demonstrated time and time again their resistance to imposed pejorative characterizations of who they were and who they were becoming. Turning once more to O'Reilly, it is important to recognize: "The term "motherhood" refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood, which is male defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, whereas the word "mothering" refers to women's experiences of mothering and is female defined and potentially empowering to women" ("Matricentric Feminism" 22). Upholding this profound distinction, I came to appreciate the intensely personal ways in which these two South Asian women were taking up mothering. In particular, their experiences as Indian mothers strongly defy monolithic representations

of motherhood, thereby refuting the simplistic tropes depicted in stereotypical narratives or single stories[5] (Adichie; Menon and Saleh 53-64). For instance, while both mothers strongly emphasized the significance of their daughters being educated well, they differed in the educational plotlines envisioned for their children. By passionately advocating for their children and themselves in their everyday lives, these women embody distinctive representations of maternal activism and "maternal empowerment" (O'Reilly, "Outlaw(ing) Motherhood" 20). This understanding imbued the lives of the mother-daughter pairs who joined me in this research and aligns with the "governing principles and aims" of matricentric feminism outlined by O'Reilly ("Matricentric Feminism" 18). For the purposes of this piece, the point which is especially significant to the work taken up and shared here, is the following aim: "commits to social change and social justice, and regards mothering as a socially engaged enterprise and a site of power, wherein mothers can and do create social change through childrearing and activism" ("Matricentric Feminism" 18).

Highlighting that maternal activism can take place at home and outside of the home, O' Reilly, moreover, directs attention to the import of change:

> Such maternal activism—in rendering the personal political, blurring the boundaries between the private and the public and in inverting traditional gender roles—both disrupts and dislodges the gender essentialism (the naturalized opposition between the masculine-feminine, the private-public) that grounds and structures modern patriarchy. ("Matricentric Feminism as Activism" 129-130).

I have further come to understand that the girls, too, assumed unique mothering roles with their younger siblings and also, friends when they felt it was necessary. As O'Reilly makes clear, "mothering is not limited to biological mothers but to anyone who does the work of mothering as a central part of their life" ("Matricentric Feminism" 14). Frequently, in Deepika's[6] and Katrina's[7] told stories of their siblings and close friends, love and care in their countless gradations, shaded their narrations. Over time, sfumato-like and less gradually, immersing myself in this deeply personal research endeavour, I also found myself dwelling in the stories that colour(ed) my relationship with my mother. I reflected upon how our responsibilities with one another have shifted as we contoured one another's lives over time in different ways.

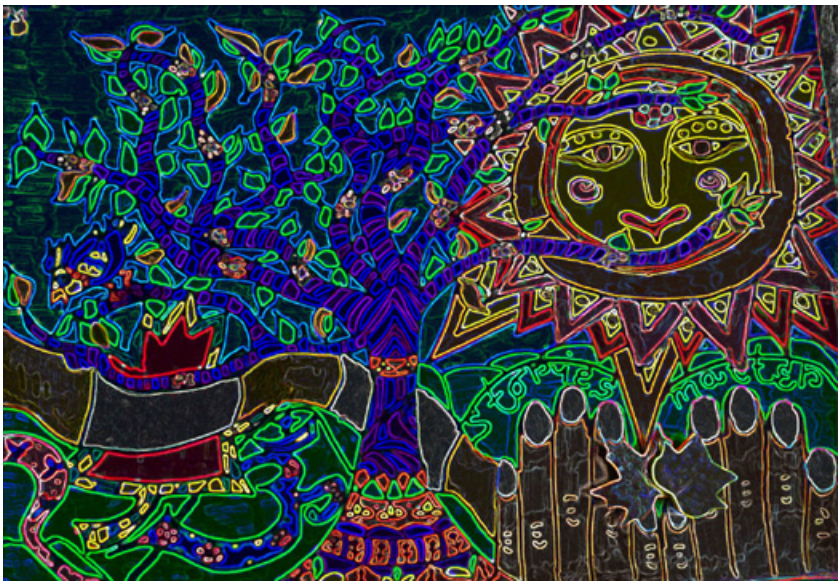
Through experiences shared, lived, and told, I was also better able to appreciate how each girl, (each daughter), each mother, and I were artistically seeking and finding our own cadence. We did so by performing, individually crafting, and keeping our karma while simultaneously resisting pre-set images of dharma (duties or rather, expectations of what is deemed appropriate for Indian girls and women as daughters and mothers).

Keeping Karma

I entitled this section, *Keeping Karma,* but what do I mean by karma? Karma has been appropriated in Western popular culture to casually mean one's actions, typically assuming karma in the form of bad deeds will eventually catch up to a person. To put it another way, if you behave negatively, your negative actions will rebound on you in negative ways. However, I do not employ karma in this rudimentary Western conventional manner. I adopt the more cultural and Hindu faith-based understandings of Karma. Karma is dynamic and involves the recognition of one's thoughts, inclinations, and actions in terms of the past, present, and future. Each of these qualities—weighed in of themselves and weighed against one another—can help to build one's path(s) in what has already happened (in the past), is happening (now), and is going to happen (in the future). In this way, we (research friends and myself) troubled predetermined, predestined, and foregone understandings of what we cannot do and what we can do. Instead, continuously reimagining our karma as ever evolving and in constant flux, as opposed to merely accepting one's karma as a consequence of our dharma (often depicted as unmalleable and insurmountable), empowered us in unique ways.

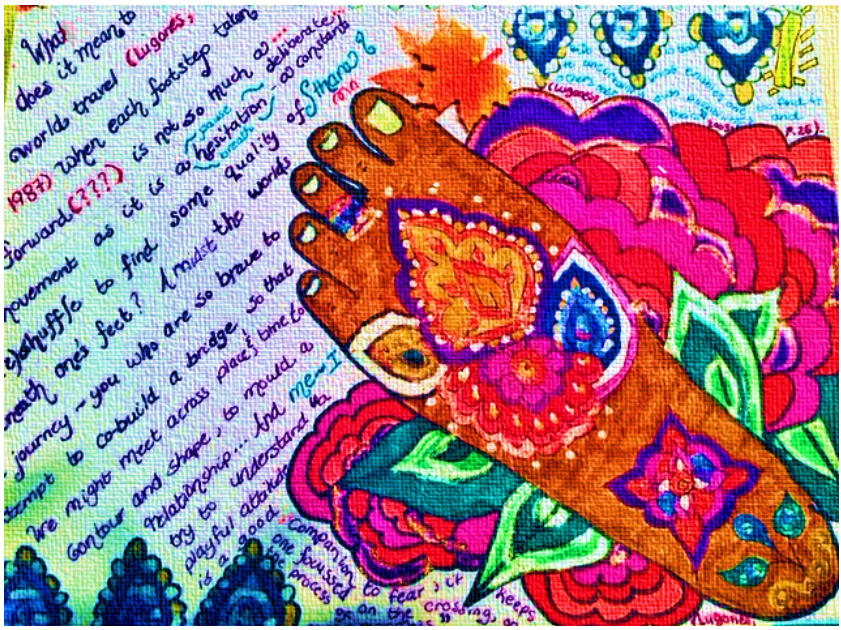
He*art*-full Work Within and Amidst our Storied Worlds

My narrative inquiry is informed and infused with art. To invite heterogenous ways of knowing and living, I deliberately invoked artwork spaces to personally and collectively create, think, and muse. I came to call this type of engagement he*art*-full work *(*Menon, *A Story Cloth* 92-110). These are the courageous stories of the heart, contoured by art which emerged in (research) conversations and within my own personal musings. Some of these stories brought to light the incandescence of wisdoms passed from mother to daughter and daughter to mother, revealing the bright luminosity of their special relationships. Subsequently, many of my research notes assumed the form of painted and/or coloured drawings, as well as illustrated considerations. In this piece, I present several he*art*-full renderings accompanied with poetic musings to create conversational spaces between us. I imagine this space as one being actively collaged. That is, being layered and juxtaposed by each of us (you the reader, and me alongside research friends) in this moment now and expectantly, later upon deeper reflection. Likewise, I do this as a means of drawing forward our stories as South Asian daughters and mothers creating the many-hued multiplicity of our experiences.



Story Matters

Stories matter,
They might scoff,
But we know better.
Night swallows day,
Day births night.
We live our lives, *breaking* out
From confining categories
Refuting to be i/m/p/r/i/s/o/n/e/d
Stories matter,
We whisper first
And then
Grow more **bold**



Dancing within and across Storied Worlds

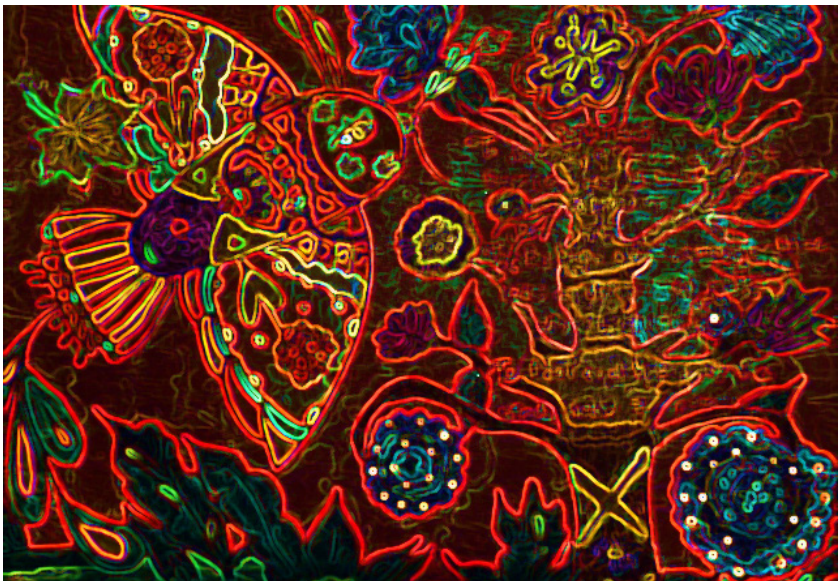
Taking tentative steps into storied worlds, a delicate dance
of whirling, swirling

Swooping, stirring movements—

South Asian mothers share their wisdoms, daughters take their leads,
stamping their feet:

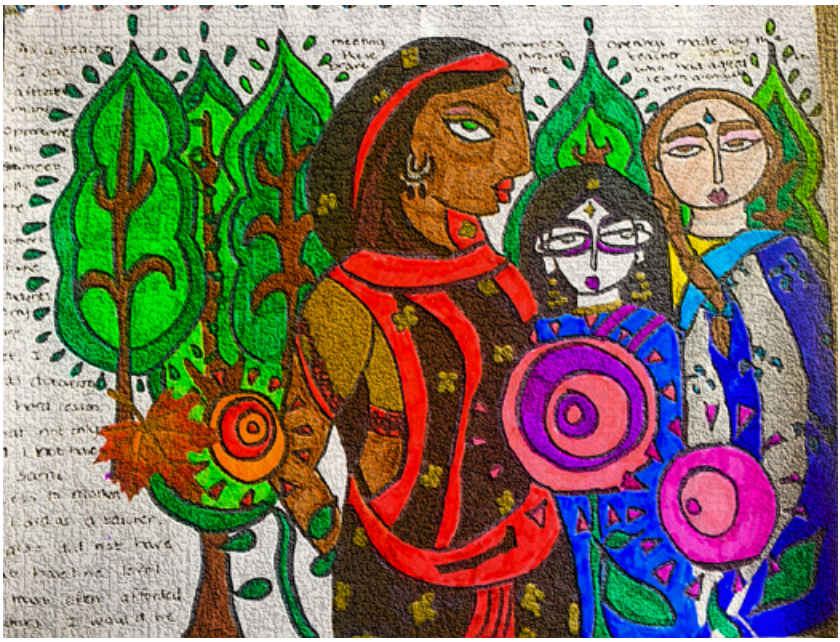
Thi thi thittee thi, Thi thi thittee thi

Choreographing, blazing plotlines of Indian female power.



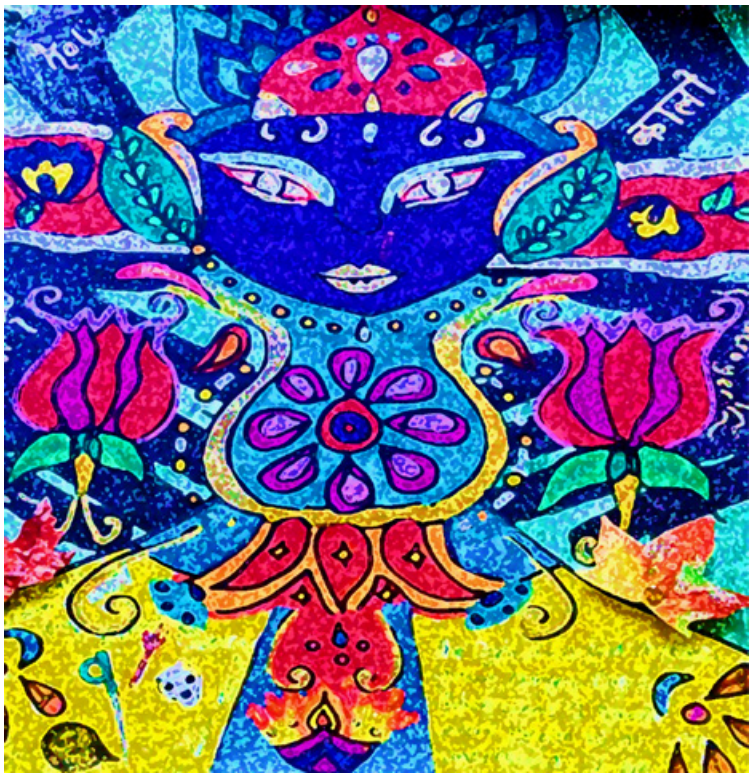
Upon Wings Words Do Soar

Once upon a time,
When I was young, my Amma urged me to hold my tongue
In this inquiry, I see moms *PUSH* their daughters to speak
I see the girls open their mouths…
Their songs—a complicated symphony of knowing
and (be)longing
I said, Amma, come listen along with me
Slowly she came, but came she did
She opened her eyes, she opened her ears
She opened her mouth
Daughter, she cried, your tongue is your strength
Use your voice to write, to draw, to speak
Once upon a time,
When I was older, my Amma urged me to unleash my tongue.



Mothers. Daughters. Sisters.

Our stories punctuate the spaces between us…
Our eyes are aflame with our sacred wisdom.
Draw close to our burnished flames,
See that we burn with fire.
Fire needs to be respected,
Don't get burnt.



Mother Kali

Destroyer of evil, Amma vanquishes our fears,
Let our stories ring out as never before.
Let our lives not be flattened through the silencing of ignorant others.
Let our experiences remind all that we too are people,
Deserving of respect and dignity.
Let our narratives be storied images of hope,
For cherished ones and new friends.
Let us be brave in the ways we paint our lives.

Sunbeams and Starlight

We clamour for the sun that shines so bright—
Courting shadows in novel ways,
We hunger for the moon that climbs such heights—
Imploring luminance to linger…
We dream of hopes and possibilities,
We dream of sunbeams and starlight.

Endnotes

1. In my doctoral work, to refute the tractability of a singular identity and to encourage border-crossings, I employ the names *Indian, Indo-Canadian, Asian Indian*, and *South Asian* interchangeably to refer to those who self-identify as such and/or who reside in Canada and can trace part or all of their ancestry to South Asia. For the purposes of this piece, I use the terms *South Asian* and *Indian* as these are the names that my research friends most often defaulted to in speech.
2. I use the terms *co-learners* and *research friends* to encompass the people (mothers, daughters, and teachers) who have helped to compose this multiperspectival narrative inquiry.
3. *Vam* is a self-chosen pseudonym for one of the mother co-participants in this research.
4. *Barb* is a self-chosen pseudonym for one of the mother co-participants in this research.
5. *Adichie*, in her famous 2009 TED Talk, spoke at length for the need to look beyond negative stories that tend to emphasize a singular experience. She noted, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." The mothers in this narrative inquiry refract a kaleidoscope of experiences, thus troubling static stories of Indian mothers and Indian mothering.
6. *Deepika* is a self-chosen pseudonym for one of the young South Asian girl co-participants in this research. She is the daughter of Vam.
7. *Katrina* is a self-chosen pseudonym for one of the young South Asian girl co-participants in this research. She is the daughter of Barb.

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ABHA SOOD

The Queen Mothers of Ghana: Maternal Activists of the Twenty-First Century

The instating of the queen mothers of Ghana—an ancient tradition in the region, much documented by researchers and highly valued for its equitable political influence—was discontinued during colonial times. It was revived recently, and as a traditional and contemporized practice, it embodies the "politics of care" (Stein) exhibited by maternal groups in challenging situations through its proactive interactions with several Ghanaian communities. This article examines the effective deployment of this tradition in a particular region of Ghana where these women leaders are working selflessly and systematically to care for vulnerable people at every level. The transformational leadership style of the queen mothers shows great concern for people and relationships and, thus, has a more interactive, nurturing, and democratic style (Hassan and Silong 363). The queen mothers challenge the male-oriented leadership style that has become prevalent in postcolonial Africa while contesting the essentialization of motherhood based solely on patriarchal interpretations of and assumptions about the female role in families (O'Reilly 14). As the case of the Manya Krobo Queen Mothers Association (MKQMA)—which has 370 queen mothers as members (Steegstra 110)—shows, when women get together and care for a community, they can achieve great things: caring for children, providing nutrition, education, social connections, and safety nets, and enhancing visibility for the causes vital to communities, to name just a few. Hence, this article attempts to catalog and evaluate the radical maternal frame of the initiatives taken by the queen mothers in Ghana and their growing local and regional influence.

Introduction

This article argues that the local and regional impact of the queen mothers of Ghana—who have been actively engaged at the grassroots level in supporting and empowering women to alleviate the impact of neglect and apathy from

men and government agencies and to seek greater political representation—has become central in fighting for not only the survival of women and children in the region but also gender equity. The local influence of the queen mothers exceeds even that of much publicized agencies, such as those of the UN, by virtue of their strong engagement and commitment. This is evident in the modernization of this practice through the installation of new queen mothers in various localities due to their outstanding abilities and public standing in various regions of Ghana and neighbouring countries. For instance, in the Akan region (Ghana) of Manya Krobo, the queen mothers have taken over the significant task of caring for orphans and abandoned children. In essence, with support from various illustrious women leaders, this traditional institution has seen a revival that will change the condition of women and their role in politics and childcare in West Africa forever.

Problematizing Motherhood

In her book *Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality and Activism*, Rachel Stein posits "a "politics of care"—in which mothers and others strive for cultural survival by working to assure the viability of future generations" (16). Women, especially mothers, then, work not only to fulfill a biological imperative but also a significant sociocultural role. When this role is taken up by a collective of women, it becomes simultaneously maternal and political. The reinstating of the queen mothers in Ghana—a tradition that was discontinued during colonial times and only revived in the past decade—embodies that principle through the actions of the mothers.

The revitalization of the age-old institution of the queen mothers from the Akan region of Ghana has positively affected communities in West Africa. The queen mothers, now numbering over ten thousand (Mistiaen), have taken charge of development issues in communities at the grassroots level (Mensah, Antwi, and Suleman 206-07). They are involved in numerous social work activities, such as opposing child marriage, HIV/AIDS prevention, fighting against female genital mutilation (FGM), supporting the care of orphans and abandoned women, fighting poverty and land fragmentation, extending credit to market women, and striving for equitable political representation in the House of Chiefs, among other civic issues. The active involvement of women in "planning and development of communities has been recognized as a key contribution to sustainable development of communities" which is affirmed by the United Nations' Agenda 21 (2012) (Hassan and Silong 363).

The work of the contemporary queen mothers is a testament to the fact that caring and mothering are communal public acts. Whereas biological mothers offer physical and emotional care to their children, the queen mothers provide access to resources and support that the state has consistently failed to provide

since several African nations achieved independence in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, the reconfiguration of traditional female authority in the institution of queen mothers has been an empowering force, as it establishes the notion of caring as a civic activity that moves beyond domestic boundaries by extending care to all disempowered and neglected people in need.

Although the queen mothers' gender provides them with the title of "mother," the scope and extent of their work challenge the narrow definition of motherhood as instinctive and limited to the home and disputes the patriarchal correlation between womanhood and motherhood (O'Reilly 14). The fact that their work and outreach lead them out into their communities, regions, and to the larger political arena of the national House of Chiefs—not to mention the new practice of installing queen mothers from different professions (e.g., journalists, doctors, and nurses) beyond the traditional royal lineage—highlights the strength and scope of their abilities as change makers in several spheres as well as leaders and advocates who happen to be women.

Queen mothers effectively fill a crucial gap in the existing infrastructure and help to negate the effects of patriarchy that are manifest in the Ghanaian context. They aim to help populations that have been subject to erasure and abandonment by the state. Their work resists neglect and apathy—it is a willed political act that resists the reductive effects of male-centred politics and industry. Their work's parallel to motherhood is clear, as the queen mothers devote their energies to their "children" at great personal cost—time, energy, and money—which they expend selflessly and unconditionally. Whereas the government has directed its finances and energies towards developing industry, the development at the grassroots level is largely ignored, and community leaders like the queen mothers are left to do the significant task of caring for the marginalized populace in small villages and towns.

Origins and History

The queen mothers are a part of the indigenous political system of the Akan region, where every town or paramount region has a chief (or ohene) and a queen mother (ohemma) (Obeng and Stoeltje 25). The women in these traditionally inherited positions are called the Paramount queen mothers. The name queen mother is a derivation of the Twi term "ohemma" (Steegstra 105). Queen mothers were traditionally installed along with chiefs and exercised authority in matters related to the selection of new chiefs by "validating a king's royal ancestry" and in ensuring "harmony and consensus" in a formal culture (Gilbert 2). The queen mother is viewed as the spiritual head of the community, and since it is a matrilineal system, she is the repository of genealogical knowledge and knows who is qualified to be the next chief or "to occupy the stool" (Obeng and Stoeltje 26). The "stool" is an actual physical

object that symbolizes the chief's authority and person. Although the queen mothers may have lost some power and actual authority due to the impact of colonialism (Mistiaen; "The Queens of Ghana"), their traditional authority is almost sacrosanct. Yet much of this authority and privilege rests on tradition and the consent of the males in the community (Obeng and Stoeltje 26). In cases of political and financial importance chiefs often try to "overstep their political and legal boundaries" and challenge the queen mothers' authority (Obeng and Stoeltje 26).

Queen Mothers: Appearance

In visual terms, queen mothers are outstanding and are recognized by their stately appearance and slow, dignified gait, which they are trained to maintain in public to establish their presence and command respect. They wear traditional kente cloth wrapped in a traditional manner (Gilbert 6); two pieces of cloth are wrapped around the woman's body, leaving her shoulders bare, and a third cloth is draped over her shoulder (Steegstra 114). The Akan royal queen mothers wear gold ornaments, while other queen mothers wear their traditional gear; for instance, the Krobo queen mothers wear traditional glass beads (Steegstra 114).

All queen mothers must follow strict rules for social conduct; for instance, they cannot eat or drink in public and must cover their hair while in public (Steegstra 113). They swear an oath of allegiance to the paramount queen mothers and chiefs upon installation. While the queen mothers do not yet have access to the House of Chiefs, which limits their political reach and their financial authority (Gilbert 6; Mistiaen; Obeng and Stoeltje 26), they traditionally take the lead in social rituals and in settling local, domestic disputes expeditiously and economically (Obeng and Stoeltje 26). Their authority in court matters is unquestionable; no one can challenge their opinions or decisions in public. In effect, the institution of queen mothers continues to function within the more contemporary political and judicial system and fulfils the needs of local and individual constituents, especially those subject to marginalization and neglect, including women and children.

Selection

The selection of queen mothers is also a matter of great significance, as was evident upon the death of Asantehemma Nana Afia Kobe Serwaa Ampem II ("Queen Mother of Ghana") in 2016, when the deliberations for the selection of her successor (Timah) took several days. A candidate's lineage, knowledge of tradition, reputation, ability to perform the right ritual duties, seniority to other qualified women, and ability to exercise political authority judiciously

are all taken into consideration during the selection process. The higher her status, especially if she will be the paramount queen mother for a region, the more scrutiny she will undergo. In comparison, lower-ranking queen mothers go through the process of election in a simpler fashion—they are identified for the entire community in public when elders smear white clay on their arm (Steegstra 113). Queen mothers willingly and consciously undertake their role as a civic obligation and duty, with a full understanding of the physical and emotional commitment entailed in advocating for those in need of protection, empowerment, and care without any expectation of financial compensation—a tradition that had been ingrained in the political system of Ghana for effective administration at the local, rural, and communal level (Steegstra 113-14). The institution has, in essence, challenged gender-based definitions of mothering for centuries of its existence as the queen mothers have been a recognized and crucial, functional part of Ghana's political system.

Significant Predecessors

Although queen mothers play a significant role in the political affairs of their region, in the absence of a male chief, their actions and work become even more crucial. Far from being mothers in the traditional sense, queen mothers are political leaders and organizers. As has been noted by various NGOs and researchers, in the Accra region the Ashanti had queen mothers who have managed their communities on their own; led their tribes into battle—such as the leader Nanny of the Maroons who fought against the British in the 1700s—and managed diplomatic negotiations with the British, such as Akyaawaa Oyiakwan in the 1800s and repatriated exile Ama Sewa and her female descendants, who ruled over the Asante people from 1838 onwards ("The Queens of Ghana").

As noted above, in the early years of colonization, queen mothers had always undertaken significantly active roles in Akan society. The most famous example is of the Asante Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa, who led the Ashanti people (Ashantehene) in the last major war against the British in the early twentieth century through her inspirational words and her active involvement in the actual battles (Otto 117-22; "Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa")—an event that challenges the idea that mothers (or women) do not perform political or combative roles. Their leadership roles give them the title of "mother," but their gender does not prevent them from performing the actions of fierce warriors and advocates for their people. As Susan Otto notes in her study of Yaa Asantewaa, she performed her role as a Queen and leader along with her role as a mother and wife with equal seriousness and dedication, and her example provides Asante women with a model for claiming agency as social activists (122). Interestingly, she also believed that home management

should be shared equally between husband and wife (Otto 122). Susan Otto cites the example of Yaa Asantewaa as "the African Indigenous episteme … that can emerge from anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogy" (123), which gives another powerful rationale for reviving the tradition of queen mothers.

Reviving the Tradition

Reviving this practice is essential in repowering the disadvantaged components of the population, but it is also a way for current generations of West Africans to reconnect with their cultural practices and concepts and to recognize the fact that the contemporary, postcolonial method of operation in their nations has caused problems of a different nature for women in the region. As Otto cites in her work (and this has been noted by numerous researchers and organizations) the Western model of feminism does not operate in the favour of local women in West Africa (124). According to research done in local communities in Kenya, "many of the problems of overwork now felt by female agriculturalists rests in the gradual erosion of traditional ways. Rather than improving women's lives, the …Western agenda has created a situation wherein men do less work" (Otto 124). The contradictions inherent in the clash between traditional and neocolonial influences is causing many of the economic issues evident in many African nations (Otto 125). Hence, the role of queen mothers as repositories of traditional wisdom and customs is crucial in returning power and balance to the people, especially women and children, at a very fundamental level. As soon as the governments realize the gap between the needs of their populace and the practices they have adopted from Western cultures by force or by necessity and recognize the value of the work the queen mothers are doing to fill the lacunae in the government-directed policies for sustainable development, the nations can perhaps alleviate the economic and social problems that have become endemic to the West Africa region.

The queen mothers' positions have been revived and revitalized because of the various larger issues that affect Ghanaian citizens: population displacement due to the building of dams, the industrialization of agrarian communities, urban migration, and unemployment. In addition, gendered oppression manifests itself in such issues as early/child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), lower education attainment opportunities, female poverty, and increased rates of HIV/AIDS—all of which needs to be addressed at the grassroots level. In fact, many Ghanaian districts report a high incidence of adults and children with HIV/AIDS (Addo-Fening; Lund and Agyei-Mensah 93-95). The role of queen mothers—and, thus, the need for their activism and labour—is evolving today due to the above-mentioned issues. Ghana's many queen mothers are now involved in various political and development-related

activities and activism, such as managing associations that run schools as well as monitoring local trade and running medical facilities. They actively advocate against child labour and child trafficking, mobilize discussions on harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage and FGM, and aid women and children in the form of employment, loans, food, and basic care (Lund and Agyei-Mensah; "The Queens of Ghana"). Furthermore, queen mothers are becoming adept at using technology in their advocacy to meet the demands of an evolving world (Drah).

Queen Mothers of Manya Krobo

Ragnhild Lund and Samuel Agyei-Mensah studied the impact of the presence of queen mothers in the Manya Krobo District of Ghana through observation and personal interviews with the queen mothers, local caregivers, and some of the orphaned children. Their study revealed that the involvement of queen mothers in the Manya Krobo District has had a beneficial impact on the lives of orphaned children through the activities of the Queen Mother's Association (QMA) in Odumase (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 95). Formed in 1998, the QMA consists of "the Paramount Queen Mother, her deputy, the six divisional Queen Mothers, Chief Market Queen Mother, and all other sub-divisional Queen Mothers" (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 97). Besides other culturally sensitive welfare and community-development activities, the QMA runs a school for orphaned children (which the researchers call "orphaned or vulnerable children"), which places orphaned children with relatives or families. The mothers provide for the children's physical and emotional needs through companionship, cover their financial needs, enroll them in classes during vacation periods, and arrange for recreational activities and vocational training opportunities (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 97, 98, and 104; Steegstra 115-17). Several external and larger agencies collaborate with the QMA, including the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana Health Service, the Ghana AIDS Commission, the Department of Social Welfare, and the District Assembly (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 97-98). Despite all their efforts, there are limitations to the care that queen mothers, in the absence of better funding and support, can provide (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 105; Mensah, Antwi and Suleman 218). As such, the queen mothers advocate for further support from governmental agencies and continued funding to improve the level of services they can provide, which is particularly important, as the care for orphaned children often falls on elderly, single women who are themselves without adequate family or resources (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 104). Although improving access to education, resources, and employment opportunities require support at multiple levels, the queen mothers of Krobo district have worked hard towards alleviating the burdens faced by the women in the

community, who have taken on the task of caring for orphaned (related and unrelated) children. Not only does this example prove that queen mothers have been resilient and self-motivated in supporting the welfare of children in their communities, but it also supports the basic fact that mothering is not necessarily only biological. The members of communities—the queen mothers, the widows, the teachers—all take on the role of mothering children; motherhood, thus, involves the giving of care, and as Otto has pointed out, men were equally involved in the giving of care in traditional indigenous communities both in Africa and the Americas (123). The queen mothers' actions provide a crucial intervention at the ground level, which government offices as well as international or even local agencies do not perform, even when funding and programs are available. The neoliberal state's withdrawal from providing services has let the burden of care fall on women, who are also often mothers (in this case, queen mothers). Mothering is then primarily a willed act directed at ensuring the survival of the next generation and providing empathetic care for those who cannot fend for themselves.

Evolving Roles

The queen mothers' role has evolved into attending to the pressing issues that their communities face, particularly those that disproportionately impact women and children, who are conveniently ignored in practice even as they are touted in government policies and rhetoric. The queen mothers' position in the traditional hierarchy of Akan or Ghanaian society also gives them more validity and acceptance in their communities as trusted advocates and agents. As noted above, several researchers have ascribed the particular success of queen mothers at the grassroots level to their close and continuous involvement with the population they support, as they intuitively and consciously use strategies that include and encourage the participation of the affected population (Mensah, Antwi, and Suleman 209).

Role in Politics

Besides working at the grassroots level in local communities, particularly in the past decade, the queen mothers have been advocating for increased political involvement in the nation's many political forums, including the House of Chiefs, which is primarily a male preserve (Fordjoe and Adogla-Bessa; Steegstra 118-19). They hope to rectify the gender imbalance in Ghanaian government at the national level (parliament) as well as the local one (the House of Chiefs), where men far outnumber women at four to one ("The Queens of Ghana"). Therefore, while their labour is explicitly political, there are political channels that queen mothers continue to be excluded from.

Yet they have been increasingly extending their reach towards addressing issues that disproportionately affect women and girls, as has been reported by numerous news agencies in the region, such as the Ghana News Agency, citifmonline.com, World Pulse, and Reuters.

Research shows that during the mid-to-late twentieth century, the significance of queen mothers in the political process and community planning diminished due to colonial influence (despite the stellar example of the Asante Queen Mother, Yaa Asantewaa, who fought on the battlefield against the British), resulting in the absence of women from the formal political sphere. This deficiency led to the active neglect of women's rights and issues in every community. As a result, the queen mothers have become increasingly vocal in national and local political affairs. This vociferousness is absolutely essential for the survival and health of the basic creators of life—the women and the children. Some part of this activism also derives from the initiative of the former first lady of Ghana, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, who started the 31 December Women's Movement in 1982 at the behest of several women organizers ("The Queens of Ghana"); this movement, along with other government agencies, actively organizes training workshops and provides technical support to local Queen Mother organizations ("Chiefs").

Divergence from Tradition

Traditionally queen mothers (especially paramount queen mothers, who are queen mothers for an entire region) are women of royal lineage with an unimpeachable reputation and vast experience, who fill the need for strong female leadership at the grassroots level in various communities and villages in Ghana. The trend in recent years, however, has been to appoint local queen mothers from among women of high character, education, and experience, who have shown great potential for social engagement and leadership. This practice works well, as all queen mothers must adhere to the rigorous codes of conduct and be exceptional leaders. The Manya Krobo Queen Mothers' Association (MKQMA), for instance, has 370 queen mothers as members. Although these queen mothers cannot appoint chiefs (Steegstra 110, 112), they are responsible for various aspects of public life and hold workshops and seminars to work on issues that disproportionately affect women (Steegstra 112). These new queen mothers have a great deal of public presence and authority; they fulfill their civic responsibilities with equal dignity and seriousness. For instance, Kate Abbam (1934–2016)—a noted regional journalist and activist who advocated for ending the abusive treatment of widows in Ghana—was selected as a queen mother in 1993 and continued her work to "[call] upon women to work for significant change" (Stoeltje 374).

Despite all the positives of this revived practice, the recently installed queen

mothers and their associations face various issues—the most serious being that they do not have any functional governmental authority in policymaking or execution at the state or local level. They also face resistance and manipulation from vested interests, such as local chiefs and elected officials (Timah 1). They also have limited involvement in the state-level planning process and do not receive a monetary allowance—unlike their male counterparts, the appointed chiefs—to finance their work and are therefore forced to fund their community work through personal resources (Steegstra 112; Lund and Agyei-Mensah; Mensah, Antwi, and Dauda 217-18). Their work, through personal enterprise, is another instance of women being required to perform unpaid labour (much like biological mothers' reproductive labour in the patriarchal schema) in the absence of the state's active economic and policy support.

Regional Impact

Although the queen mothers certainly face numerous challenges, their recognized position and visibility have given them the platform to advocate for more concerted action on behalf of their constituents by moving the House of Chiefs to include larger numbers of women among elected officials and to provide more economic and policy support for their work (Abdela; Owusu-Mensah; "Queen Mothers Call on Minister"). That the queen mothers and their work have made a strong impression on the younger population of the region is evident from the numerous blogs, tweets, and articles in local and national media outlets published about their activities. This is an indication that this tradition will continue to evolve and thrive in the future.

Despite all the hardships and hurdles the queen mothers of Ghana have faced, their effectiveness has inspired other regions to adopt this practice. In Uganda, for example, after the Harare Call of Action 2012, key organizations, such as the African Queens and Women Cultural Leaders Network (AQWCLN), have begun collaborating with the African Union, United Nations and other local institutions to improve the lives of women and children in Uganda and elsewhere ("Uganda"; Nkangi). For example, the chair of the AQWCLN, Nanahemaa Adjoa Awindor, called on the extremist group Boko Haram to release the Nigerian schoolgirls they had abducted in May 2014 through an open letter; she labelled the abduction not only a sexual violation but also a violation of their educational rights as girls (Awindor).

The age-old institution of queen mothers and their evolution in contemporary Ghanaian society at various levels suggests an understanding of mothering that goes beyond the limitation of patriarchal definitions of motherhood, which are confined to the single-family unit among blood relations and limited to the household, physically and symbolically. Their work and practices exhibit clearly that mothering (or nurturing) is a collective, communal practice, and a

very public act, which is crucial to maintaining the health of the community, especially its most vulnerable components—the women and children.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize the courage of these women in Africa, who in the absence of financial, procedural, logistical, and political support from the state have stepped up to provide outreach and actual support to individuals in communities, small and large. The intervention and aid provided by the queen mothers of Ghana through their labour of mothering is an expression of a radical and deeply political gesture, as they are social and political activists, who work towards addressing issues of disenfranchisement by empowering the weak and the neglected. In so doing, they oppose the tenets of patriarchal motherhood, which are willfully divisive and limit the power of women in communities.

Traditional patriarchy places limits on involvement, care, and attention to those it posits as the other—those placed outside the circle of people closely related to oneself whether by blood, colour, race, region, or religion—thereby creating hierarchies and positions of privilege. The institution of queen mothers brings parity to the human social experience, as they recognize, include, and embrace all who need help—they take on positions of power in order to include others and help them survive.

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TRINA GREENE BROWN

Ain't I a Mama?: A Black Revolutionary Mother in the Women's Rights Movement

In 1851, former slave Sojourner Truth gave a moving speech at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. Her speech reflected on the intersections of gender and racial inequality experienced by Black women. While white women were fighting for the right to be treated equal to white men, Black slave women were fighting for their right to be treated as a whole human being. While men used white women's fragility and gentleness as excuses to deny women equal rights, abolitionist Truth pointed out—over the cries of white women's rights activists—that as a Black former slave, she was expected to do the same work as men and received no such preferential treatment. She demanded answers and clarity to a double standard of womanhood by repeatedly asking, famously: "Ain't I a woman?"

Even though years of progress have passed, there is a long-standing critique of the women's rights movement for its lack of and limited application of an intersectional analysis and frame when it comes to Black and other women of colour. In her speech, Sojourner exclaimed: "I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" Today, as a long term activist in the women's rights movement, I ask: Ain't I a mama?

Through personal storytelling of experiences as a Black feminist mama working in the women's rights movement, this piece will reflect on the inequities and hypocrisies of the feminist movement and motherhood. When the day-to-day work of a feminist is to ensure that women's voices are heard, this Black feminist mama's personal experiences of being invisiblized, silenced, and denied access to privileges embolden her to raise the question harkening upon the ancestral spirit of Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a mama?

This article was originally printed in The Chicana M(other)work Anthology: *Porque Sin Madres No Hay Revolución*. Reprinted with permissions.

In 1851, former slave Sojourner Truth gave a moving speech at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. Her speech reflected on the intersections of gender and racial inequality experienced by Black women. While white women were fighting for the right to be treated equal to white men, Black slave women were fighting for their right to be treated as whole human beings. While men used white women's fragility and gentleness as excuses to deny women equal rights, abolitionist Truth pointed out—over the cries of white women's rights activists—that as a Black former slave, she was expected to do the same work as men and received no such preferential treatment. She demanded answers and clarity to a double standard of womanhood by repeatedly asking: "Ain't I a woman?"

Although the work of the women's rights movement in the United States (US) has made progress over the years (Rampton)—from the Voting Rights Act, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, Violence Against Women's Act, Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, as well as cultural shifts around gender norms—Black feminists and other feminists of colour have long critiqued the women's rights movement for its application of an intersectional analysis and frame when it comes to Black women and other women of colour (Smith). In her speech, Sojourner exclaimed: "I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" Today, over 150 years later, I echo Truth's words, as a long term Black mother-activist in the women's rights movement and ask: Ain't I a mama?

Through personal storytelling of my experiences birthing and caregiving while working in the women's rights movement, this article will reflect on the inequities and hypocrisies of the feminist movement in the US and motherhood. My experiences led to the conception of parenting for liberation, which was originally conceived through the idea that Black mothers, like myself, were suffering from a critical lack of support and suffering in silence. As Audre Lorde reflected: "My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences." These words reflected my experiences as well as those of the Black mothers and women in my life. I took Lorde's statements to heart and used them to guide me to these writings. This is not meant as a recrimination of white women and mothers but rather a challenge to #whitefeminism; it is to seek the intersections that bind us and to connect with and support mothers of colour. When the day-to-day work of a feminist is to ensure that women's voices are heard, this Black feminist mama's personal experiences of being silenced and denied access to privileges embolden me to raise the question harkening upon the ancestral spirit of Sojourner Truth:

"Ain't I a mama?"

Ain't I a Mama? Navigating Maternity Leave, Systemic Oppression, and the Birth of My Child

California was the first state to pass a paid Family Leave policy in 2002. The US feminist movement fights for paid family leave as a way to foster gender equity among working women and men to help support greater balance between work and family lives (Peck). As women disproportionately bear the brunt of the mothering or carework load, in addition to working outside the home, partial paid leave makes taking time off for care work accessible and affordable. So when I became pregnant in the feminist movement, I knew I'd be taken care of. Luckily, my nonprofit employer had a paid family leave policy to offset state disability pay. There was a stipulation to receive this privilege though time served. The privilege was only afforded to folks who worked at the organization for a year.

My son was born prematurely, as are lots of Black babies, which is a reproductive health crisis for Black mothers, who have the highest rate of premature births in the US. This is a result of systemic oppression in the area of reproductive health (Ross and Sollinger). He arrived two months shy of my one-year anniversary; therefore, I was denied access to employer paid family leave and instead found myself at the welfare office to supplement my income. Midway through my leave, I requested an extension in effort to access the pay benefit, and I was informed my position on staff may not be available that long. Worried that I would potentially be unemployed, on welfare, with an infant, I returned to work. This was the first of many times to come that I would seek access to a privilege and be rejected. I whispered and choked on my silent protest: "Ain't I a mama?"

Ain't I a Mama?: Back to Work, Back to Reality

Returning to work, I cried like a baby because my mind, body, and soul missed my baby. To add to the pain of leaving my beautiful three-month-old baby boy at home, I observed my white colleague who had a privileged arrangement to regularly bring her baby to the office. Beyond the emotional toil, the mere sound of her baby crying or the sight of her breastfeeding would make my breastmilk let down uncontrollably. I did not begrudge my white coworker's ability to bring her child to work. I benefitted from bringing my son to work with me for special occasions as well as if I had a family emergency or no other childcare; my arrangement was on a case-by-case basis—not an everyday arrangement—whereas my white colleague's was a permanent agreement. However, I wasn't the only one who had questions about this preferential,

inequitable treatment. There were other mamas of colour who'd been at the organization for over a decade with small children, and they didn't have this privilege. The US feminist movement has advocated for women getting equal access at work, by means of the Lily Ledbetter Act, to ensure equal pay for equal work while not penalizing women who parent and work, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, which protects pregnant women to maintain work. The ability to be both mother and staff was like a badge of honour. As women, we actually could have it all, right? Unfortunately, not all of us. Ain't I a mama?

Beyond the disparity with my white colleague's privilege of bringing her child to work, there was another layer that made the dynamics of mothering while white versus while Black more nuanced. She was able to bring her child and her Latinx caregiver. Picture a white woman with her child and a Latinx monolingual Spanish-speaking nanny to sit in her office with her, with a fellow staff of nearly 75 per cent Latinx women. I was taken aback to see a woman of colour serving a white woman's baby; it reminded me of my grandmother, who was a domestic worker and travelled weekly by bus to clean and care for a white family. I respect the profession. The issue is not with having a caregiver; the issue is with not having a conversation about the impact of a Latinx woman serving a white woman on a predominantly Latinx staff team. The avoidance of the truth was the elephant in the room, and it had a huge impact on folks. I was appalled, and some of my Latinx coworkers, who were also mothers with small children, were rightfully enraged. They were brought to tears, and they shouted the question: "Ain't I a Mama?" But no one heard them either.

Ain't I a Mama?: Lions, Gorillas, and Dogs. Oh My!

My identity is a mama who is raising a Black boy. A Black boy is a baby that wasn't meant to survive, a boy that's cute up until he's ten, and then he becomes a threat (Gumbs, Williams, and Martens; Goff et. al). Now, although I see the beauty, innocence, pain, joy, challenges, and triumphs of raising a Black boy, I never feel the same level of compassion, concern, happiness, or support that I feel my fellow white colleagues receive from one another about their children. This was most apparent when my son needed additional support at school and due to my commute, I didn't have time or space to support him. I put in a request to work remotely a couple days a week in an attempt to eliminate my daily three-hour commute. Instead of sitting in traffic, I planned to invest those three hours in my son. As before, I witnessed white colleagues working remotely and sought to access a similar privilege to that being offered to other colleagues. However, again, when I made the request, it was apparent the privilege was not applicable to me as my supervisor denied my request.

Although my supervisor said she understood, she demonstrated a lack of empathy and compassion in her actions by not offering me a similar privilege. Instead she recommended that I hire a nanny to support him. But I didn't want someone else to support my son through his trauma; I wanted to be there for him.

I spent months explaining the many reasons my son needed me; he transitioned to a school with few Black children and began showing signs of self-hate, such as telling me he wanted white skin. Eventually, I received a piecemeal offering of one day of telecommuting; however, the inequity and disregard for my son's plight became more apparent when months later, teammates shared stories about their traumatized pets who had special needs, and they received empathy, concern, and options to stay home to support their "fur babies."

Even more so, in the months to come, it became clear that an animal was more important than the life of my Black son and the lives of Black sons in general. My experience was triggered during the international uproar around the death of African animals. Folks called for punishment of the white man who hunted Cecil the Lion but victim blamed Sandra Bland, who was murdered within weeks of Cecil in July 2015 (Howard). Cecil was mourned, and Sandra was blamed (Baker). Similarly, when Harambe, an African gorilla at the Cincinnati Zoo was shot to save the life of a Black child, there was a huge outcry and victim blaming of the Black child's parents (Savali). Yet in Cincinnati, months prior to the Harambe incident, Samuel Dubose was murdered during a traffic stop, and there was absolutely no public shaming of the officer (Barajas). My blood boils when more people are distraught over the death of African animals yet care less about African American children. So when I felt that happening to my own son, I questioned whether or not my son's life mattered and whether the lives of all Black children mattered just as much as a dog, gorilla, or lion? Ain't I a mama?

Ain't I a Mama?: Black Children Matter

One wonders how a feminist movement with principles around equity and fair treatment for women has such a blind spot when it comes to race. Well, maybe that has to do with those who hold the most leadership positions of power—white women. According to research conducted by the Women of Color Network, for the last thirty years, white women have maintained positions of leadership within US feminist organizations and thus "the analysis and framing of the issue of violence against women as a gender issue [only] has remained intact" (Mason) without a strong intersectional analysis that looks at race.

Working in this movement, as a mother of a Black boy, I couldn't stomach

certain things anymore. Specifically, working in schools where Black and brown children filled the hallways and classrooms, I noticed the impacts of racism and poverty on their interpersonal relationships. My job was to advise girls to call the school police without acknowledging that those same school police officers at times also harass girls at school. According to my students, that advice was inviting more trauma and violence into their lives and not offering a real solution. The retraumatization and perpetuation of incarceration were at play. Raising my Black son, under those same circumstances, revealed the inconsistencies of my work in the feminist movement; my lived experience as a Black mama was taking a major toll on me, and I began to feel like I was a grenade whose pin was to be pulled.

And boom! I exploded, just as many other Black folks did in 2012, with the murder of Trayvon Martin and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Whereas many Black feminists could see the interconnectedness of gender and race in the Trayvon Martin case, many white feminists stood by silently. Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, expressed major disappointment in the white woman judge, as well as with the jury, which was well-populated with white mothers. Ms. Fulton felt the verdict of innocence for George Zimmerman in the trial of the murder of her son was a travesty, illustrating a complete lack of empathy towards her own pain and loss of her son. She believed all mothers had a solidarity between them, but she realized she was wrong. Ain't she a mama?

Did her son's life matter to non-Black mothers? This was not new, as Sojourner Truth raised in her speech in 1851: The gentleness, fragility, and the safety of white women have been used to justify not only their preferential treatment over Black women but also violence against Black bodies. Then President Barack Obama connected to and empathized with Trayvon Martin's parents. Shedding tears while speaking on the matter on national television, he said if he had a son, he would look like Trayvon. I waited for the white feminist movement I was part of to stand 1up in solidarity with Black mamas to fight not only sexism but also racism. Although some did, I sensed an overall lack of compassion from the feminist movement (Movement Makers). What Black mamas want is to be treated as equal and for our children's lives to matter. As the late great organizer Ella Baker said in the 1960s: "Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother's sons, we who believe in freedom cannot rest" (qtd. in Grant).

Like President Obama, my son "look[ed] like Travyon"; thus, I felt the pain and heartache that Sybrina Fulton experienced. I saw my son's face in photos of Trayvon, Tamir Rice, Jordan Davis, Michael Brown, and every other murdered Black boy. With all these modern day Emmett Tills, I fear that one day, I'll be a modern day Mamie Till crying over the body of my Black son

born from my womb. I am not alone in this feeling of fear, as many Black parents feel the same. Mother-author Karsonya Whitehead writes the following: "We are the parents of African American boys, and everyday that we leave the house, we know that we could become Trayvon Martin's parents" (Whitehead). Is that what it will take for me to be seen as a mama, and for my child's life to matter? Black Mothers of the Movement are only acknowledged after the loss of their children, as opposed to celebrated for our mothering (Sebastian). I'm not sure what's more critiqued, criminalized, surveilled, and punished: Black mamas and motherhood or Black children? Why can't our mothering be seen? Why is it intentionally and/or accidentally ignored? When I ask for equitable treatment or to access my employment benefits, why do I have to plead my case and prove my worth? Why do I have to petition to be seen as a mama? Why can't you see my children as you see your own? Ain't I a mama?

Ain't I a Mama?: Parenting for Liberation

I wrote this piece because my silence will not protect me (Lorde). Plus, white women's silence is not protecting me either. In fact, their silence has harmed me. I wrote this piece not to knock, judge, or critique white mothers. My challenge and invitation are for those white women who demand for their own mothering to be seen to not sit in silence when other mothers of colour make similar requests. White women who received special privileges watched me beg and plead, and they did nothing.

I request feminism to practice what they preach; for #whitewomensolidarity, if you are working and fighting for justice and equity in the world but allow injustice to occur, you are perpetuating systemic oppression. Justice doesn't begin in the streets; it begins in our homes, offices, and relationships. This is not only an ask for white women. As a Black feminist mama, I commit to partnering and supporting other mothers of colour by navigating workplace and structural policies. Inequitable internal policies contribute to a fragmented movement, so we must bridge the gap and create more equitable systems for all of us. This is one of the many reasons I founded Parenting for Liberation—a space for Black parents who are freedom fighting for our collective liberation to engage with one another and share how we operationalize liberation in our homes. In a world where Black boys and girls are set up to fail, parents can build up their children to do more than survive or thrive—but live liberated. Parenting for Liberation is for the incredibly passionate parent warriors who are fighting for liberation and freedom on multiple fronts—on the front lines of the movement and on our front porches. I do this to avenge the Black mama ancestors and create openings for future generations of Black mamas to come. I do this for Sojourner Truth who'd "seen almost all [of her children] sold off

to slavery, and when [she] cried out with [her] mother's grief, none but Jesus heard!" Until we have reconciliation around inequities within this fragmented movement and until we move towards eradicating racism within the feminist movement, we will always be held back, and the history and foundation our foremothers laid will not be honoured. I will continue to do this until the day when any and every Black mama no longer has to question: Ain't I a mama?

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RENÉE E. MAZINEGIIZHIGOOKWE BÉDARD

Anishinaabeg Maternal Activism: We Sing a Prayer for the Water

My Anishinaabeg maternal activism arises from the water songs of my ancestors and the women of my Anishinaabeg community. As Anishinaabeg women and mothers, our maternal activism around water and water rights is rooted in our interconnected relationship with the water as women and mothers. The traditional and modern rationale of maternal activism is rooted not only in treaty responsibilities but also in the nibi-dibaajimowinan, such as our sacred prayers and songs. Anishinaabeg mothers, women, and those LGBTTIQQ2S+ persons who identify on the female gender spectrum take up the of role of the water activists to honour and uphold their duties to the water. The activist role is really an extension of our traditional roles as carriers of the water (e.g., menstruation, pregnancy, or inside copper pails during our ceremonies) and keepers of the treaty rights of water. Activism for the water is not only like protecting a relative but also like protecting ourselves because we are not living well as human beings, Anishinaabeg, unless we care for the water that sustains us. Anishinaabeg maternal activism is born out of our water songs. In this article, I explore why Anishinaabeg mothers engage in activism for the water. I explore the traditional teachings that inform Anishinaabeg maternal relationships to water. I explain Anishinaabeg women's path to activism through the teachings of women's role in warriorship. Last, I share some traditional prayer songs for the water that have been publicly published and explain their importance to Anishinaabeg maternal activism in relation to activism for the sovereignty of Indigenous water rights, culture, health, and territory.

Water is our relative! Water is sacred! We fight for the water! I raise my daughters to be activists for the rights of water. My maternal activism arises from the water songs of my ancestors and the women of my Anishinaabeg[1] community. One morning several years ago, I lay in bed cuddling my daughter Juniper, humming a traditional water song. She asked me what I was humming,

so I taught her the words, one by one, until she could sing it with me. Juniper sang them out with a little voice and then asked to sing them to the water at the nearby lake. We talked about how important the water is to women and girls. I explained to her that this is why we bring our sacred semaa or tobacco to the waters of the nearby lake. We bring her semaa, talk to her, and visit with her like an auntie or grannie. Activism for the water is like protecting a relative but also protecting ourselves because we are not living well as human beings, Anishinaabeg, unless we care for the water that sustains us. Anishinaabeg maternal activism is born out of our water songs.

I learned from my Anishinaabeg women mentors that maternal activism has deep roots in our nibi-dibaajimowinan (water teachings; knowledge; stories), or women's teachings about responsibilities as women, or kwewag to the land and water. Women, mothers, and grandmothers are charged to protect, preserve, and pray for the water. It is for this reason that many of our Anishinaabeg women stand at the front of protest lines or marches (e.g., Water Walks) singing prayers for the water. As Anishinaabeg women and mothers, our maternal activism around water and water rights is rooted in our interconnected relationship with the water as women and mothers. The traditional and modern rationale of maternal activism is rooted in not only treaty responsibilities but also the nibi-dibaajimowinan, such as our sacred prayers and songs. Anishinaabeg mothers, women, and those LGBTTIQQ2S+ persons who identify on the female gender spectrum take up the of role of the water activist to honour and uphold their duties to the water. The activist role is really an extension of our traditional roles as carriers of the water (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy, or inside copper pails during our ceremonies) and keepers of the treaty rights of water. No matter the reason, we are those that guard the sovereignty of the water and the territorial waters of our nation.

In this article, I first explore why Anishinaabeg mothers engage in activism for the water. I examine the traditional teachings that inform Anishinaabeg maternal relationships to water. Second, I explain the Anishinaabeg women path to activism through the teachings of women's role in warriorship. And, third, I share some traditional prayer songs for the water that have been publicly published and explain their importance to Anishinaabeg maternal activism in relation to activism for the sovereignty of Indigenous water rights, culture, health, and territory.

Maternal Treaty Responsibilities for the Water

From a young age, Anishinaabeg learn that water is an ancient ally to the Earth and to human beings. We are taught that all Gizhew-Manidoo (Creator; Great Spirit; Great Mystery; Kind Spirit) asked the water to join her sister in creation, the Earth, to create the human beings (Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*

12; Benton-Banai, "Anishinaabe Creation Story" 27). Furthermore, the water, the land, and all life on Earth accepted the responsibility to nurture and provide sustenance, shelter, and protection to human beings because they were helpless without them (Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* 12). Water agreed, and as part of that agreement, human beings agreed to live in accordance with the Creator's Great Laws (Gizhew-Manidoo Gchi-Inaakonigewinan) (Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* 12) and, specifically, those referring to the water were called the Gchi-Nibi Inaakonigewinan or Great Water Laws. These are what are called our original treaty responsibilities or legal responsibilities. Human treaty responsibilities with the water are set out to protect the purity of the water, to preserve it as it was first created, and to offer thankful prayers not only to honour that close relationship but also to think of that water as a relative - a sister and auntie to us all.

The first treaty responsibilities we are introduced to are with the water. As biological females, we form our eggs while we are inside our mothers when they were themselves unborn babies nestled inside the wombs of our grandmothers. Water is there before we are even conceived. Each egg contains cells filled with water. When we begin our monthly cycles of menstruation at puberty, each egg is bathed in water as it is released into the fallopian tube and travels down to the uterus to await fertilization. If no fertilization takes pace, the waters of menstruation wash out the unfertilized egg from the woman's body. The womb is replenished with new waters for the next month and then awaits the new egg's arrival. At conception, the sperm arrives to the fluids of the woman's womb and joins the egg to create life. The new cells of the fetus are surrounded in a protective sack of water, which will deliver the baby on a wave of water into the world. Once born, the baby's first food is the colostrum waters of the mother, which arrives before the milk. The milk then hydrates and sustains the child. The first treaty every human being has is with the maternal waters or mide-waaboo (sacred water) of their mother.

My treaty responsibilities also extend to those treaties with the Canadian government. My Anishinaabe-Ojibwe and Nibisiing ancestors on my mother's maternal side have always lived along the waters of Lake Nipissing, Trout Lake, and the French River. I am a member of Dokis First Nation on the island of Okikendawt. My relationship and ancestral connections to those waterways is embedded in the written words of the 1850 Robinson Huron Treaty signed by my great, great, great grandfather Michel Eagle Dokis, whose Spirit name was Petawachuan. According to Norm Dokis Jr., Petawachuan translates to "I hear the rapids far away," and Dokis was actually his nickname that got turned into his legal last name (Becking). The Treaty created the present boundaries of Dokis First Nation. By signing the Treaty, Petawachuan sought to protect past, present, and future legal rights to exist on the waterways and lands of the French River. Under the stress of westward

colonial expansion and threats to his people's territorial resources, particularly lumber, hunting rights, and territorial waterways, Petawachuan did what he knew would protect their resources for his people. By signing the treaty, he knew he was saying goodbye to a lot of his ancestral territorial lands, but he was also under immense pressure to protect the sacred grounds of Okikendawt. The place where our ancestors went to honour the sacred phenomenon of the cauldrons or kettlepots where the little spirits of the memegwesiwag dwelled. Okikendawt would have been a sacred location for the Anishinaabeg to conduct Midewiwin ceremonies to gain knowledge, medicines, and travel to the Spirit World under the tutelage and watchful eye of the memegwesiwag (Conway 124-26).

While the entire Treaty process was and still is highly problematic as a mechanism for the colonization of the Anishinaabe peoples of Northern Ontario, I am still very thankful for the foresight of Petawachuan in seeing to the preservation of those traditional territorial waterways and land that we still have today. I still bring my tobacco to the river waters, and I have had the privilege to leave tobacco at the cauldrons with the aid of my cousin and nature guide Clayton Dokis. Performing those small ceremonies and rituals honours not only the traditional rites of Anishinaabeg women and mothers to our responsibilities to the water but also the treaty signed by Petawachuan. My maternal activism resides in those duties and responsibilities to the waterways of my ancestors.

Nibi (Water): The Sovereignty of Anishinaabe Women

Traditional maternal roles and responsibilities are the roots of contemporary maternal thinking and what drives current maternal activism related to environmental advocacy, activism, protest, resistance, and cultural resurgence. Indigenous matricentric governance roles are rooted in perceptions of water as relative/relation, as an embodiment of female identity, and as mothers. In the not too distant past, my female relatives understood their bodies in terms of the governance of it by the Earth, moon, and water cycles. Women are taught that water controls their menstrual cycles, our ability to carry a viable pregnancy. It is present during our miscarriages to cleanse our bodies and acts as a wave of water to usher in the new life of our children. And when our menstrual cycles leave us as menopause, water stays with us as a familiar companion to walk with us on the final stage of life. Matricentric laws are bound within these physical, spiritual, and emotional connections to the water that resides, controls, and guides our female and maternal bodies throughout our life path (miikana-bimaadiziwin).

Mohawk Elder and midwife Katsi (Tekatsitsiakawa) Cook writes as follows:

> It is important to begin at the beginning. In everything the People do, they start at the beginning. When I asked, "How do we teach the young about birth?" I was told, "Begin with the story of the first birth." So, we turn to our origins to understand women's ways. The Creation stories, the cosmologies, contain the worldview and values of Indigenous peoples. They are the spiritual foundation of traditional communities, and an important place to start when we need to understand how to deal with the problems we face here and now today. (80)

According to Cook, Indigenous Creation (or maternal Creation stories) provides Indigenous women with "perceptions about life" in relation to the water as women: mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, aunties, and LGBTTIQQ2S+ (Cook 81). She notes that it is from those original stories that we find that "the entire universe is a family, and we learn that the greatest good is harmony. We learn the responsibilities and original instructions that all Creation has in maintaining this harmony" (Cook 81). Cook advises us that to know about birth, motherhood, and womanhood, we must look at the story of the first birth and the role of water; likewise, to understand maternal roles and responsibilities towards the water, we must look to the teachings of the first woman, the first mother, Aki or Ashkaakamigokwe (Mother Earth), and her sister Nibi, the water.

Complementary to this point is the teaching on first woman offered by esteemed Anishinaabe Elder Bawdwaywidun Bensaise Edward Benton-Banai-ba[2] who writes in his seminal 1988 book *The Mishomis Book* the following: "*The Earth is said to be a woman*. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from Her come all living things. Water is Her life blood. It flows through Her, nourishes Her, and purifies Her" (Benton-Banai 2). Benton-Banai explains to his readers Anishinaabe understandings on Creation and the order of life on Earth. This brief passage presents several significant teachings. First, he teaches that before all else came Kwe, a woman in the form of Mother Earth. The Earth itself was mother to all of Gzhe-Mnidoo's Creations on the planet, feeding all life with her body and offering medicines, shelter, clothing, protection, companionship, and education. Additionally, Benton-Banai makes the connection between women, mothers, and water. He notes that women have a reciprocal and unique relationship with the waters of the Earth. Among the Anishinaabe people, it is believed that our women in particular share a sacred connection to the spirit of water through their role as child bearers and have particular responsibilities to protect those same aspects in water.

Second, Benton-Banai highlights the importance of water in the order of Creation. Along with woman, water was placed on the Earth before humans.

Anishinaabe Elder Peter Akinson from Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation clarifies this idea further: "There are four levels above the Earth too. The third is water. It is said that a spirit hit the Earth when the Earth was only water, and it took water up to the third level. It's said that water will always flow and always be beautiful" (qtd. in Craft 25). Anishinaabeg further holds the following:

> This family is basis of all creation in the universe. This family was created by Gitchi Manitou, the Creator. Earth is said to be a woman. She preceded man and her name is Mother Earth because all living things live from her gifts. Water is her life blood. It flows through her, nourishes her, and purifies her.
>
> [Gaa-zhi-nwendiwaad gowenwag n'swi, mii gaa-wnjiimgak kina gegoon maawndi kiing. Mii we gaa-zhitood Gzhe-mnidoo. Kwewid we Mzakmig-kwe kidnaanwan. Jibwaa-wzhichgaaznid ninwan, gii-bi-yaa ntam we Mzakmig-kwe. Kina gaa-bmaadziwaad wgashktoon-aawaa wii-bmaadziwaad Mzakmig-kwewan wnji. Wdoo-mskwiim, mii gaa-aawang nbi. Aabjijwan dash Mzakmig-kweng ji-bmaadzid gye wiin miinwaa ji-biinaabaawnind.] (Pukaskwa National Park)

Both Elders Atkinson and Benton-Banai teach that water comes from the actual physical body of the Earth; water has life, has Spirit or Manidoo, and is protected by powerful spirits that live in her and around her (Craft 25; Benton-Banai 2). All life requires water, even the Earth itself needs it to continue to be life sustaining. *Nibi,* water, is important for our individual and community survival, health, wellbeing, and sustainability as well as for ecological integrity and function.

Water plays an important role in Anishinaabe maternal ceremonies, especially in puberty rites, pregnancy, and birth ceremonies, along with breastfeeding rituals. It is a fundamental part of how we come into this world as human beings and are sustained through breastmilk. Mide-waaboo (the sacred water of the womb; amniotic fluid; fluid in our cells) is present to usher our eggs through to the fallopian tube to the uterus, at conception, and carries us through the gestation period until it announces our birth to Creation on a literal wave of water (or gentle bath as in the case of my babies birthed via c-section). For this reason, water is prioritized in many of the Creation stories of Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (North America). Girls and women are taught that throughout our lives "we carry the life for the people" (qtd. in Gursoz) when we carry water either in our bodies or during ceremonies. In Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language), women, mothers, and grandmothers are given the title of Nibi-Mide-Ogichidaakwewag (medicine warriors for the Spirit of the water) because they protect the rights of the water, they speak the prayers for the water, sing the songs for the water, dance

for the water, and fight for the rights of water to be honoured. The sovereignty of the water is closely aligned to the sovereignty, leadership and agency of our maternal rights and those of our Indigenous nations.

Mohawk Elder and midwife Katsi Cook stresses the following:

> Control over production and the reproduction of human beings and all our relations is integral to sovereignty. It is this area of sovereignty which falls primarily in the domain of the female universe and ecompasses the balances and forces which promote the harmony and well-being of the People. Women are the base of the generations. They are carriers of the culture. (Cook 5)

Women are leaders in the governance of the sovereignty of our Indigenous nations territories, cultures, and intellectual traditions. As a people, we often use the saying, "Anishinaabe women birth the nation." Similarly, Mi'kmaq Elder and artist Shirley Bear says that Indigenous "women are powerful because they birth the whole world" (qtd. in Anderson 164). One of my own cultural mentors, Anishinaabe Elder Edna Manitowabi, describes women as a "sacred lifegiver" (qtd. in Anderson 194). Indigenous women Elders—like Cook, Bear, Manitowabi, as well as Mohawk herbalist Jan Longboat—speak about revering the sacredness of our female bodies, especially during puberty, pregnancy, birth, and menopause. Longboat shares that her mother used to talk about preparing the body to give life: "She was very conscious about keeping healthy to give life" (qtd. in Anderson 195). For our Indigenous ancestors, awareness of the body worked to inspire healthy eating, planting medicines, and mental preparedness; additionally, it contributed to how they viewed themselves as a sacred part of the wider cycle of life on Earth and the Creator's plan for human beings (Anderson 195; Solomon, 34; Child 16). Anishinaabe Midwife Carol Couchie describes the care of the female body in relation to the woman's responsibility to look after the water that she carries and protects within her body (Anderson 195). Additionally, according to Anishinaabeg scholar Brenda Child, for the Anishinaabeg, water both in the female body and those on her territorial lands are a "gendered space," where the women hold personal and legal water rights (29-30).

Cook writes that maternal rights can be understood through the concept of the "women's community," which she says teaches women and those among the LGBTTIQQ2S+ who identify along the female gender spectrum to "comprehend our physical and spiritual powers as women" and as maternal figures (Cook 5). Anishinaabe women learn their identities through the support, guidance, and education offered by the company of other women, if not through immediate families, then through their alternative families of community members, friends, and Elders. Women teach the girls, youth, and other women their responsibilities in terms of production and reproduction,

which include our sacred responsibilities to water. Cook asks: "What threatens the sovereignty of women: of the women's community? What threatens the self-sufficiency of women in matters of production and reproduction, not just of human beings, but of all our relations upon which we depend for a healthy life?" (85). First, there is a threat to our waters in our environmental ecosystems and territorial waterways. These threats include problems with pollution to the land, access to water, interference or altering of the traditional movement of water due to dams, mining, pipelines, or industrial development, which affect the viability of traditional hunting and gathering food sourses. Second, Cook offers the following:

> With the development of new and dangerous technologies affecting the control of women's cycles and female mechanical means of reproduction, it is more important now than ever to perceive what meanings lie in our existence as human beings and as Native women.
>
> Everywhere we look, the measure of suffering for female life is the same. Reproduction for human beings and many of our relations is hardly a natural process. Chemicals, instruments, machines and distorted values sap the foundations of women's ways….Chemical contamination of our bodies and our environments is known to be the leading cause of high rates of cancer, genetic mutation, and disease. (85)

What threatens the women's community and women's legal rights is the threat to the sacred feminine relationship to water—physically, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually.

What are we doing as mothers to teach our daughters and LGBTTIQQ2S+ children about their relationship with water in order to raise them to be warriors for water rights? We teach them to understand and connect to the water or spirit of the water, to understand their treaty responsibilities to the water, and to know that they are protectors of the water, which does not have the ability to protect itself from the threats of the contemporary world. I teach my daughters that the "water has a spirit and is looked after by spirits" (Craft 25). As women, it is our traditional and sacred duty to act as water protectors.

"We are the voice for the water" is the rallying call stated by the *Anishinaabe* women's grass roots group Akii Kwe, from Bkejwanong Territory (Walpole Island Unceded First Nation) (Akii Kwe 1). Akii Kwe acted as a community of women to protest water pollution on their territory by industrial and chemical development by Imperial Chemical Industries. This group of women explains as follows: "We view our fight for water as a spiritual journey. It is part of our collective and individual growth as people" (Akii Kwe 1). Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, who interviewed the women of Akii Kwe states the following:

> For many years, Indigenous women in the Bkejwanong territory have noticed changes in water quality, particularly because they have a close and special relationship to the water. It is part of the Anishnaabe-Kwe tradition that women speak for the water. In the process of rediscovery, revitalization, and healing, the Anishnaabe-Kwe of Bkejwanong Territory organized themselves to speak for the water. Akii Kwe members state that in Bkejwanong, nature provides the foundation of the Anishnaabe culture and the ways in which the people conduct themselves (systems of governance). It is because of this that people have a responsibility to act on behalf of the water. (McGregor 139)

Anishinaabe women's role is the carriers of the knowledge of water governance or Anishinaabe-kwewag nibi inaakonigewin. As the Kwewag within Anishinaabe society, it is our kinship responsibility to act on behalf of not only the people and their rights to water but also the rights of the water itself.

The Anishinaabe women are respected for this deep connection to the Spirit of water and are provided the leadership title of "Water Carriers." This is our sacred inheritance and our sovereign duty to be the voice and physical representation of water. Thus, the responsibilities of the Water Carriers lie in making decisions and taking up responsibilities for the ceremonies and teachings related to maintaining harmonious relations with water (Nibi). Our daughters are trained in the knowledge, ceremonies, and leadership duties of the water carriers. According to Nibi dibaajimowin (Water Teachings), there are four types of waters that the women as Water Carriers are responsible for protecting: the waters that flow from the sky to nourish and cleanse the Mother Earth; the waters that flow through the trees and give us medicines to heal us; the waters found in the lakes, rivers, and streams that form the lifeblood of Mother Earth; and the waters that flow within all of us, nourish us, and nurture our babies. Of particular significance for my discussion here is the last responsibility mentioned involving the waters that flow within our bodies as women and more specifically our wombs. With the rise in pollutants in the environments that threaten the health and wellbeing of mothers, their unborn children women, and the health of the generations to come, women Water Carriers are rising up as warriors of the water, with their songs, to meet the obligations they hold to protect Mother Earth and her sister, the water.

Ogichidaa-Niimi'idiwin-Kwe (Anishinaabeg The Woman's War Dance)

> My brothers! My sisters! My totem and my family and I have been given a great injury. Indeed, the tribe itself has suffered harm. We all suffer equally when a member of the tribe dies. There is one brother less in our family and in our totem; there is one member lost to the

> tribe. My sister … our sister … was killed in the village of our tribal brothers in our own land. Not only has the enemy injured my family - but it has scorned our tribe by attacking a village of our brothers and sisters in our own land.
>
> "Are we to let this bloodshed stand? No, my brothers! We must not allow the enemy to enter our territory in order to beset our brothers and sisters and wave their war clubs in our faces. They will regard the Anishnabeg as no more than crows who are cowed by every small bird in the sky. Our safety is threatened! Our courage is at stake! I, for one, will not allow a member of my totem or of my tribe to be harmed without redress.… I am a peaceful man - but I am not afraid of war! For you and for our children I have risked my life in the past. I now risk it again" (Johnston, *Ojibwe Ceremonies* 66)

This speech is spoken by Bebon-Waushih (Flying-in-Winter), a character in the traditional aadizookaan (traditional story) written down by Anishinaabe Elder, scholar, linguist, and ethnologist Basil Johnston-ba2 about the Baunindobindidowin (the Path to War) (Johnston, *Ojibwe Ceremonies* 57, 59). For me, I see the teachings of Baunindobindidowin reflected in modern contemporary maternal activism because it roots itself in duty to the land, the culture, the people, and the nation.

In the story of Bebon-Waushih, he and his community members dance the war dances as an act of defiance against an invader's devastating actions. Colonization has forced our Indigenous women, especially the mothers and the grandmothers, to walk the Path of the Warrior or Ogichidaakwe. We sing and dance the warrior songs of the water, land, and women. Traditionally, our people were primarily directed towards peaceful interaction and living a lifestyle that embodied peace, tempered thoughts, passions, words, and deeds (Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies* 135). As Johnston-ba states, "We are to be peaceful.… All this is hard to achieve. But we must strive for peace of heart in this life and peace of soul in the next" (*Ojibway Ceremonies* 135). These are some of our tenets of Anishinaabeg ethics related to Anishinaabeg mino-bimaadiziwin (Anishinaabeg way to live a good life; live well as a human being), which act as moral imperatives to maintain not only bizaanenindiwin (the way of peaceful living) but also agoozo miinawaa gikinootaadiwin (balance and harmony) (DesJarlait). Thus, both women and men were judged to be worthy human beings based on their generosity and adeptness of skills, not the amount of bloodshed (Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies* 59). The Path to War was never entered into lightly and was only sought out after all alternatives were exhausted and to primarily avenge an injury, whether real or imaginary, to oneself or to one's relations (e.g., family, community, clan, or nation) (Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies* 59).

Historically, Baunindobindidowin was not regularly performed by Anishinaabeg women. Rather, men and Two-Spirited warriors took up the bagamaagan (war club), the miigaadiwin-mashkikiwan (war medicines), and performed the ogichidaa-niimi'idiwin (war dance) (Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies* 59). But modern activists are seeking out the stories of the Path to War in order to learn the embedded teachings, philosophy, and ethics as a foundation for contemporary mobilization, cultural resurgence, and decolonization. The spirit of Baunindobindidowin acts as a defiant strategy against those forces that further impose colonization, globalization, industrialization, hetero-normative-sexist culture, environmental degradation, and the extinction of traditional resources land bases. Colonization has altered our ways of life so irreparably that it forces the women to be zoongide'e (brave) and have mangide'e (courage) to embody the ogichidaa (warrior) spirit in our hearts to become modern sacred protectors for the rights of our children and those future generations yet to come.

Therefore, modern Indigenous warriors find decolonization through Baunindobindidowin, which is both a philosophy and a ceremony of the people. Baunindobindidowin requires Indigenous people to return to their cultural roots, tools, and ways of communication in order to find the appropriate approaches for a modern warrior creed that can rebuild and cause a resurgence of agency. Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake explains the following:

> The journey is a living commitment to meaningful change in our lives and to transforming society by recreating our existences, regenerating our cultures, and surging against the forces that keep us bound to our colonial past. It is the path of struggle laid out by those who have come before us; now it is our turn, we who choose to turn away from the legacies of colonialism and take on the challenge of creating a new reality for ourselves and for our people. (qtd. in Alfred 19)

Therefore, just as Bebon-Waushih and his community members perform the war dances as an act of defiance against an invader's devastating actions, they also give lessons to the mothers who are now singing the prayer songs as warrior songs to root their activism in the ancient traditions of their ancestors.

Anamewin Nagamowinan: The Water Songs of Maternal Activism

Due to the fact that water and watersheds are under constant assault by corporate extractions, pipelines, and pollution, Anishinaabeg women are turning to their songs as their mechanism to fight, protest, speak out, and to sound the alarm. Water songs communicate our worldview, our intentions, and assert our identities as Indigenous peoples to Turtle Island. Furthermore, our songs signal to our people, our allies, the offenders, and the land that Indigenous mothers are assembling to protest the violence perpetuated against

the water or our water rights. The songs are our way to call out to the land that it is not standing alone and that we will fight for the rights of the water as a Spirit Being and those Spirit beings, creatures, plants, and the land that require it to exist. The water songs are a statement of thanks and territorial land acknowledgement.

Each song to the water is essentially a prayer. Furthermore, the sounds and vibrations awaken the land and cause the listeners to hear the message, emotions, and powers the singer is trying to evoke. These prayers are different with similar themes and intentions. For instance, there are specific water songs of thankfulness, such as the one written by Doreen Day, titled "Nibi Nagamowin: Water Song." It goes as follows:

> Nibi, Gizaagi'igo
> Water, we love you
>
> Gimiigwechiwenimigo
> We thank you
>
> Gizhawenimigo
> We respect you. (qtd. in Lorimer)

Teachings on miigwechiwendan or thankfulness for something are grounded in the teachings of dibasediziwin, meaning humility in Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language). Humility in Anishinaabeg contexts refers to acknowledging yourself as part of the natural scheme of Creation. In Anishinaabeg culture, "Humility is represented by the wolf. The wolf lives for his pack and the ultimate shame is to be an outcast" (Seven Generations Institute). Saying a prayer or singing a prayerful song, such as Day's song, is an act of recognition that the water allows us to live, that it sacrifices itself so that we might survive, that we must cherish the water as precious, and that we respect that water for all the many gifts that it brings us. "Dabas" means "lowering" oneself before someone or something. We are offering our thanks by lowering ourselves, showing that we are not better than the water but equal in the eyes of Creation. We sing thankful songs like this to tell the water we prioritize it, speak for it with good intentions, and serve it as it serves us—with humility, compassion, and patience.

Another theme within the prayers is acknowledging the interconnectivity and relationality between the water and other beings that depend, protect, support, and require the water to ensure the natural balance of Creation. When Anishinaabeg women sing these songs, we are invoking these beings, spirits, and creatures to aid in our activism. They are witness to our work and our calls for help. The following song, titled "Nibi Water Song" and sung by Zoongi Gabowi Ozawa Kinew Ikwe (Strong Standing Golden Eagle Woman) demonstrates these fundamentals. Zoongi Gabowi received this song in a dream, and it goes as follows:

Way ya hey ya
Way ya hey ya yo
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo.

Miigwech Kzhe-Manito. Thank you, Great Spirit/Creator.
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo.

Way ya hey ya
Way ya hey ya yo
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo.

Miigwech ikwe miia nibi kinagajitowin. Thank you, woman for taking care of the water.
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya hey ha yo.

Way ya hey ya
Way ya hey ya yo
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo.

Miigwech Pinasiak (or Animikiig). Thank you, Thunderbirds.
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo.

Miigwech Nookomis. Thank you, Grandmother moon.
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo.

Way ya hey ya
Way ya hey ya yo
Way ya way ha yo
Way ya way ha yo. (Turtle Lodge)

Finally, the last song I will share is called "Nibi Waaboo" and in Omàmiwininiwag (Algonquin), the water song is also called the "Algonquin Water Song: Nibi Waaboo." The significance of this song as a site of activism is that it calls on women and the people of the nation to remember that the Earth is our First Mother in Creation and that water keeps the Earth alive. Water nourishes everything on Earth like mother's breastmilk does for babies.

The song goes like this:

Nibi waaboo endaayang, aki miskwi nibi-waaboo
Hey ya hey ya hey ya hey
Hey ya hey ya hey ya ho.

Nibi waaboo endaayang, aki miskwi nibi-waaboo
Hey ya hey ya hey ya hey
Hey ya hey ya hey ya ho.

Nibi waaboo endaayang, aki miskwi nibi-waaboo
Hey ya hey ya hey ya hey
Hey ya hey ya hey ya ho (Womensworlds2011; S Ramsey)

The main song lyric "Nibi waaboo endaayang, aki miskwi nibi-waaboo," translates to 'The Water that I carry is the blood of Mother Earth' (Anishinabe Grandmother's Sacred Circle). Songs like this one would be used on the activist Water Walks around the Canadian Great Lakes region, which was first created by the late Anishinaabeg Elder Josephine Mandamin-ba to raise awareness for the pollution, neglect, and abuse of the waters of Canada's Great Lakes region, along with all lakes and rivers of Anishinaabeg territory. The water songs become activist prayers of protest along with a prayer acknowledging the sacred role of women as the carriers and keepers of the water. Furthermore, Elder Mandamin acknowledged that these water songs belong to the water itself and came from the water through dreams and visions, and thus they are sacred (qtd. in Gursoz). The teachings embedded in the songs' words are found in the teachings of Elder Mandamin-ba, who states the following: "The water of Mother Earth, she carries life to us, and as women we carry life through our bodies. We as women are life-givers, protectors of the water, and that's why we are very inclined to give mother Earth the respect that she needs for the water" (qtd. in Gursoz). For Mandamin-ba and many other Anishinaabeg women who carry on her message of activism for the water, water has to live: "It can hear, it can sense what we're saying, it can really, really, speak to us. Some songs come to us through the water. We have to understand that water is very precious" (qtd. in Gursoz). As Anishinaabeg activist mothers, we sing the water songs back to the water and to the Earth so that they might hear that we appreciate all that comes from both. Furthermore, we tell them that we are willing to sacrifice our lives as they give of their lives. Elder Mandamin informs all who need to hear it that when we carry the water and sing our songs, we are telling people that we will do whatever it takes to protect the water: "We'll probably even give our lives for the water if we have to. We may at some point have to die for the water" (qtd. in Gursoz). Maternal activism arises from the warrior's teachings, maternal teaching, women's teachings, and the songs water gifted us. In order to fulfill these teachings, we must ensure that these exist for future generations.

Concluding Thoughts

I come from a place that has swirling waters with rapids and fast-moving water. I have learned many lessons about life from the waters of the French River. I want to share one last water song by Anishinaabeg singer Brook Medicine Eagle, who received the song in a dream. Here it is:

"Swirling River Song"

Witchita, doo yaa, doo yaa, doo yaa
Witchita, doo yaa, doo yaa, hey
Witchita, doo yaa, doo yaa, doo yaa
Witchita, doo yaa, doo yaa, hey.

Witchita, neh yaa, hey yaa, hey yaa
Witchita, neh yaa, hey yaa, hey
Witchita, neh yaa, hey yaa, hey yaa
Witchita, neh yaa, hey yaa, hey. (Andrea G)

The words honour the swirling, moving, and often dangerous river waters and those river waters that are full in the springtime when the Earth is overflowing and full like a mother coming into her first milk after she gives birth to new life. The song captures the power of water to nourish the life of the land and informs us of our strong connections to the land. Activism is often defined in Western contexts as aggressive actions, but sometimes it is gentle like a song that stirs the heart and soul to listen; it is call for change or reminds us of what is important. Activism can be as loving as a mother's arms and as simple as teaching a daughter how to sing to the water. Maternal activism is found in remembering our responsibilities as women, mothers, life-givers, creators, nurturers, caretakers, and guardians for the next generation and those seven generations yet to come.

Endnotes

1. "Anishinaabeg" is the word for those "nations" rooted in the same linguistic dialect, cultural teachings, and intellectual traditions. Those who describe themselves as Anishinaabe (meaning human being) include the following nations: Anishiniwag (Oji-Cree), Ojibweg, Odaawaag, Bodéwadmik, Odishkwaamagiig (Nipissing), Misizaagiwininiwag (Mississaugas), Omàmiwininiwak (Algonquin), and Leni Lenape (Delaware). The Anishinaabeg inhabit the Great Lakes region in both Canada and the United States. In Anishinaabemowin (the Anishinaabeg language), Anishinaabeg means the original human beings. See Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*; and "Anishinaabe" in *The Ojibway People's Dictionary*.

2. -Ba or -ban is the *Anishinaabe* way of respectfully acknowledging an Anishinaabe individual who has passed away.

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JOSEPHINE L. SAVARESE

"Angry ...and Hurt and ... Just Messed Up" and Still Fighting: Analyzing the Mothering Activism of Vivian Tuccaro, Mother of Amber Tuccaro

> Protest … occupation? We have also understood these actions as presencing … witnessing. Thinking through these times, encircling their consciousness—ever since receiving the location codes to the cypher. They carry on, glyphed into cosmogonies tracing futures. An embodied slipstream of future kinning.
>
> —Karyn Recollet, "Choreo" 29

This article contributes to the growing body of research on grieving mothers who have turned to activism to publicize the loss of a loved one, to raise awareness, and to advocate for justice (Baydar and İvegen; Bejarano; Burchianti; Karaman; Savarese). In publicizing their grief, the mothers stressed that their loved ones were persons whose loss was deeply felt. Mothering scholars and advocates have demonstrated how the women effectively used their collective suffering as a basis for social change (e.g., Karaman).

This article analyzes Alberta-based mother, Vivian Tuccaro, who has advocated for justice on behalf of her daughter, Amber Tuccaro, since she disappeared over a decade ago. In this article, Vivian Tuccaro's advocacy, supported by her son, Paul, and her community, is scrutinized for its lessons on the promotion of justice in the aftermath of a daughter's disappearance. This article highlights the Tuccaro family's grief as, tragically, one of many families affected by the loss of a murdered daughter. It also stresses their work to commemorate Amber's life. As the article discusses, the Tuccaro family's advocacy has taken many forms, including participating in news conferences and news stories, filing a complaint regarding law enforcement failings, establishing Facebook pages, testifying before national forums, and hosting memorial

round dances, which is a particular focus of this paper. The memorial dances are a demonstration of decolonial grief that remaps mourning into spaces, thereby unsettling some of the dominant ordering and indifference that propels violence. As Karyn Recollet states "Indigenous round dances that produce spatial tags are symbologies of Indigenous motion. As such, they become tremendously meaningful as filling rupturous spaces with love" ("Glyphing" 136).

Article Overview

This article begins by summarizing some of the literature that informed this examination of mothering activism from a geographical perspective. It draws attention to the fact that Amber Tucarro's death is one of the many disappearances of Indigenous women in the Edmonton region, thereby presenting space and place as central analytical factors that influence safety. The article also investigates the memorial round dances held from 2014 to 2017 as a ceremonial form of bodily, space-claiming activism that steps into what we may label the future present. The article concludes by considering the ways geographies conspire with violence and horror as well as the potential of spatial resistance or "spatial tagging," as described by Indigenous scholar Karyn Recollet, to aid in land reclamation. Along with other writers, Recollet's work provides insight into mothering activists, such as Vivian Tuccaro, who simultaneously perform the work of outrage, grief, mourning, survivance, and love.

Vivian Tuccaro's anger towards the dominant society's indifference to Indigenous deaths and the disinterest shown to Amber's disappearance is presented here as an important example of mothering activism. In the words of Daniel Møller Ølgaard, Vivian Tuccaro might be seen as engaging in an "ethics of resistance" (122)—a concept that he develops based on his understanding of various theorists, most notably Foucault, who used the term "games of truth" to describe challenges to power (123). Møller Ølgaard's claim that advocates resist and recreate dominant truths seems to be realized in Vivian Tuccaro's work. At a press conference in July 2019, for example, Tuccaro asserted that persons withholding information had "blood on their hands." To the assailant, she said: "You will be caught. You will. I don't care how long it takes." She also stated "We are not going away. We will keep searching until you are caught". (qtd. in Narine, "Mother") (Omstead).

Literature Review: The Fast Violence of Homicide

Vivian's advocacy helps to shed more light on the implications and erasures connected to the utilization of space as well as the importance of securitizing Indigenous land to promote safety for women and marginalized populations. Mothers like Vivian Tuccaro demand safety. They seem to protest the

differentiation between "safe and dangerous, legal and illegal, inside and outside," which made their daughters and loved ones vulnerable to violent victimization to the point of homicide (Amoore and Hall 94). This article is situated within "a wider geographical literature concerning the power relations" inherent in geographical ways to honour the dead or "the spatiality of funerary and memorial practices" (Hunter 259). Geographer Edward Soja is a leading proponent of the view that justice is possessed of a "consequential geography, a spatial expression" that extends beyond merely operating as "a background reflection or set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped" (1). Soja sees spatial justice primarily as an analytical framework that stresses the role of space—whether actual or ideological—in creating justice and injustice.

By theorizing Vivian Tuccaro's mothering advocacy from a geographical lens, this article contributes to the scholarship on what critical geographer Noam Leshem calls "spatial activism," or an advocacy related to the use of space ("Profile"). Drawing from Leshem, Tuccaro's efforts are analyzed as "necrogeographical activism," a term he uses to describe Palestinian activism about retaining their burial spaces ("Over" 42). As Leshem points out, burial grounds have played an important role in affirming communal identity for marginalized, racialized communities who are struggling against land dispossession (35). Although scholarly language may seem clinical in the sorrow-laden context of a mother's grief, it also provides theoretical insights into the spaces of mothering advocacy. For Leshem, the importance of placing resistance under scrutiny can be partially attributed to the fact that these actions occur in ghostly, unsettled places, or what he labels the "ambiguous position (literally) between the living and the dead" (36). Using explicit language, Leshem invites us to ponder what role "the *dead body*, in its corporeal form [and] through its spatial and material representations" might play in the "everyday order of power" (36). His work helps expose the structures that Vivian Tucarro challenges and disrupts by affirming her daughter's worthiness.

This discussion of the danger of remote areas highlights "the political role of death *places*," thereby drawing attention to "extensive patterns of oppression" that undergird their existence ("Over" 42). This article brings attention to the "resilient layers of political and cultural activism that stand against their perpetuation" (42). In contrast to "larger scales of operation," these contested sites bring into greater focus "the agency of the occupied," the activism of Indigenous women, as well as "the alliances built through a shared experience of place," experienced by allies working against violence (42). As Leshem makes clear, the "critical 'placing'" this article explores may mobilize the "more radical conceptualization of necrogeographical politics and contestation," which seem to ground women's and mothers' activism (42). This article carefully reads Vivian Tuccaro's story to uncover revelations regarding what

Leshem has labelled "the lived experience of deathscapes" ("Over" 36) —the close proximity to sites where deaths have occurred.

Because Leshem underscores the importance of microresistance to geo-, necro- and biopolitical governance and power, his work is particularly helpful to this analysis of mothering activism. Mothers also work to oppose the deathly, macro- and microstructures Leshem discusses. Mothers act by mobilizing public outrage against the political forces that have transformed Indigenous lands into dangerous and deathly spaces. Mothers have helped us see the human consequences of what scholars have labelled the "slow violence" of environmental degradation (Sandlos and Keeling), housing dispossession (Pain), or what I label, the "fast violence of homicide" given the speed in which a criminal fatality may occur.

Overview: Some Aspects of Amber's Story

The case and Amber Tuccaro's life story have received considerable news coverage. As a result, it is well known that Amber disappeared and was killed near Edmonton. The young mother of one travelled to Nisku, Alberta, in August 2010 with a friend and with her then infant son, Jacob. She was last seen in the early evening leaving the motel room to travel to Edmonton with an unknown male. Although the family believed Amber would be located alive, their hopes were destroyed when some of her remains were found two years later in a field in rural Leduc Country, thirty-five kilometres south of Edmonton. At the time of this writing, the case remains unsolved.

Given the family's strong bonds, it is not surprising that Amber was reported missing shortly after she was last seen. Her mother, Vivian, reported she began to worry when her daughter failed to maintain regular contact with her through texting and Facebook. Although Vivian's fears about her daughter's safety proved accurate, the RCMP members who answered the original calls doubted Amber was in danger. They informed the family that Amber would return home and that it was policy not to place an individual onto a missing persons list until they were gone for twenty four hours. Eventually, Amber was placed on the list. Her name remained on the list until an informant incorrectly claimed to have seen her in Edmonton.

During the period after Amber's disappearance, her possessions were taken by law enforcement from the Nisku Inn where she had deposited them prior to her departure. In a complaint regarding the RCMP's treatment, the family stated that a photograph of Amber's possessions was emailed to Vivian Tuccaro, in violation of policy and respectful practice. Amber's mother reported that she felt "disturbed and traumatized" by this approach ("Complaint of Ms. Vivian Tuccaro" qtd. in Moshuk). She described the decision not to present the photographs to her in person as "uncaring"

("Complaint"). Regardless of their preciousness as remnants of Amber's life as well as their value as clues, the items were destroyed. This decision might have hampered the investigation by eliminating real evidence regarding Amber's last moments. Amber's oldest brother, Paul Tuccaro, informed the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls that his mother longed for her daughter's possessions. The family had personally requested a public apology from the RCMP, but the request was declined (Weber, "Murdered"). No consequences or sanctions resulted from the destruction of the evidence, even though the officers' actions impeded an investigation into a serious crime.

Amber's case has been highly publicized, partly due to the flawed investigation (Dykstra). The RCMP's Project KARE, a unit based in Edmonton that handles cases of murdered or missing people in Alberta, eventually took over the investigation. To aid the homicide investigation, billboards featuring Amber's picture and name were posted near her home in Alberta. The billboards showed a picture of Amber and asked the public to visit the RCMP's Project Kare website to see if they recognized a particular voice that can be overheard on it. Amber's last cell phone conversation was with her brother. The brother was incarcerated at the time of the call, therefore the conversation was recorded by the institution. The audio recording that the police made public highlighted a verbal exchange between Amber Tuccaro and the driver, who is believed to be the perpetrator of the homicide.

Amber's mother, Vivian Tuccaro has also acknowledged that she will serve as "Amber's voice" for the duration of her lifetime (Narine, "Final Memorial"). The knowledge that her actions matter to other families is a prime motivation for her continued advocacy. It gives her strength to help another family (Narine, "Final Memorial"). In recent interviews, the family has described their ongoing disappointment that the homicide remains unresolved, especially given the 2018 finding that the police investigation was inadequate. Amber's family has presented her death as an example of indifference and cruelty, not as a by-product of Amber's so-called risky lifestyle—since the killer has not been identified and the settler state agents failed to vigorously investigate her disappearance. Emma W. Laurie and Ian G.R. Shaw remind us that "In many instances, death through structural violence is the result of a series of social and political processes that can make life killable *prior* to any act" (9).

An Apology for the Investigation into the Death of Amber Tuccaro

In 2014, the family filed a complaint with the Chair of the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP, arguing that the investigation was insensitive and poorly handled (Cook). Following the complaint, the Commission issued a report in August 2018. It concluded that the police force's investigation was deficient and held that certain officers failed to follow

policies, procedures, and guidelines (Cook). The Commission was also concerned that four months had passed before the RCMP interviewed Tuccaro about the disappearance of her daughter. The Commission recognized that this oversight was "unreasonable and unexplained" (Omstead).

The report also included seventeen recommendations aimed at improving the RCMP's responsiveness to missing person's cases. One call was for a public apology to the Tuccaro family for the mistakes made in response to Amber's disappearance. Amber's oldest brother, Paul, said the family was relieved when the report was released. The report confirmed in "black and white" that "what should have been done wasn't done" (qtd. in Narine, "RCMP"). For Paul Tuccaro, an effective law enforcement response might have changed the outcome. It might have meant that his sister would have been "back at home taking her son to school and living out her life as God intended it to be" (qtd. in Narine, "RCMP").

On July 25, 2019, commanding officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) offered a public apology to Vivian Tuccaro and her family for their handling of the investigation into her daughter's disappearance and murder (Weber, "Not Our"). At the news conference, Alberta RCMP Deputy Commissioner Curtis Zablocki addressed the family on behalf of the RCMP and stated that he was "truly sorry" (Weber, "Not Our"). He affirmed that mistakes were made by law enforcement. Deputy Commissioner Zablocki fully acknowledged that the early days of the "investigation into Amber's disappearance … required a better sense of urgency and care" (Martens). In the days leading up to the RCMP's public statement, Vivian Tuccaro described the apology as an important step, but it needed to be followed by intensified efforts to investigate missing persons cases (Weber, "Not Our"). Although the apology was long anticipated, it was met with disappointment by the Tuccaro family. In fact, Tuccaro was outraged when the officers exited the premises immediately after their statements, citing previous commitments as the reason for their departure. Vivian Tucarro stated that she rejected the RCMP's expression of regret because a true apology needed to be "heartfelt, not just words" (qtd. in Narine, "RCMP"). She noted the irony in that even though the RCMP were the "ones apologizing," the officers could still "get up and walk away" as though they were blameless (qtd. in Narine, "RCMP").

Regarding the apology, Tuccaro made it clear that she was not willing to accept the apology issued by the RCMP. She described herself as "angry … and hurt and … just messed up" (qtd. in Narine, "Mother"). In a post on Facebook, Vivian further described her frustration and disappointment:

> Feeling very angry with all the f**k ups with the police and how they mishandled my daughter's case 😡 they think that the "APOLOGY" is supposed to justify this???

> I did not accept the apology because of the fact that they HAD to do it and not because they wanted to!! I think that the commissioner should have been the one to do the apology but she was busy elsewhere. someone needs to be held accountable for all this but is there going to be ??? 9 f****n years and still no answers as to who killed my baby girl, how the f**k is my family ever going to have peace of mind when he's still out there? ("Justice")

While frustrated, Vivian also expressed her hope to the Indigenous news magazine *Windspeaker* that the public apology and "her continued strength" would offer encouragement to family members of other murdered or missing Indigenous women and girls "to keep fighting to get answers" (qtd. in Narine, "Mother").

Connecting Mothering Activism and Human Geography

In this article, the family's resistant actions and activism are showcased from the perspectives of critical geographies and spatially related justice. Acting in a way that seems to correspond with Sarah Hagedorn VanSlette and Josh Boyd's description of the outlaw/trickster, Vivian Tuccaro has effectively undermined the discourses that minimized Amber's value (591-602). Tuccaro's work has challenged settler preoccupations with Indigenous blameworthiness. As a mother-activist, Tuccaro occupies a "unique social and historical persona" that parallels the trickster activist; as such, this figure has been granted the authority to "speak truth to power—even under domination" (Møller Ølgaard 132). In a 2017 news conference, for example, Tuccaro asserted that the families of missing and murdered women deserved respect (Narine, "Final Memorial"). She reminded readers that the persons lost to violence were "someone's daughter, someone's mother"; she ended by stating "We need answers" (qtd. in Narine, "Final Memorial").

This article focuses on mothering activism by examining recent literature on the geographies of violence (Bagelman and Wiebe; Leeuw; Laurie and Shaw; Leshem; Pain). Writing in 2016 in a special issue of *Political Geography*, Simon Springer and Phillippe Le Billon describe the difficulties making "sense of violence" because the idea "remains one of the most complex concepts that human beings have ever held" (1). At the same time, their assertion that views on violence are "necessarily spatial" is an insight of value to this article (1). Springer and Le Billon point out that geographers are "bringing greater attention to the constitution of violence through space" (1). Specifically, this article places mothering activism on behalf of missing and murdered Indigenous women in conversation with socio-legal, decolonial, and feminist writing that touches on justice as geographical and spatial, what Leshem refers to as "the study of space, memory and power" ("Staff").

Leshem's thought-provoking work seems to invite further studies like this one, especially given its dual focus on Indigenous women's precarious existence along with this article's curiosity about the ways activism and resistance are spatialized or empowered by lands and land use ("Over" 36). Leshem recognizes that "the physical and symbolic acts" by "powerful actors" that allow "matter and meaning" to be demarcated are central to human struggles ("Over" 36). However, he asserts that the actions of those "seeking to challenge their authority," including mothers, are equally important ("Over" 36).

Indigenous scholars, including Karyn Recollet, also theorize spatial considerations in the ongoing quest for decolonized justice ("Glyphing" 129-45). In "Glyphing Decolonial Love through Urban Flash Mobbing and Walking with Our Sisters," Recollet explores spatial tagging in the context of the two initiatives mentioned in the title of her work. She explains that this term "describes the function of visual and aural symbols actuated within Indigenous hip-hop culture and round dance revolutions" (130). Although her work on flash dances and urban protests has a somewhat lighter tone than Leshem's work on a cemetery, Recollet takes on the equally weighty ways that resistant actions spatially oppose the destruction of Indigenous life through settler occupation. Recollet's interest in the ways that spatial glyphing shapes patterns of "Indigenous resistance and Indigenous futurity" is inspiring to this text (130).

Portals into an Otherwise

For Recollet, the two movement-based actions she explores are forms of "symbolic, moving [critique]" ("Glyphing" 129). As such, the spatial tagging she examines disrupts "normative structures of settler colonialism" and creates openings for the emergence of what Recollet labels "radical decolonial love" (129). In the context of this article, about a mother's loss of her daughter, this tender state is accompanied by what I call "radical decolonial grief." Recollet's analysis of movement and the reclamation of space as forms of justice is an aid to theorizing Vivan's activism, especially in relation to the four memorial round dances held to honour Amber. In her 2018 work of science fiction, "Steel Trees, Fish Skins, and Futurity Cyphers," Recollet describes what activist mothers collectively imagine and strive for, even though the piece is creative: "It was the alleyways, the dark corners—and the lighting up of dark spaces through the technologies of coded colours—that created these portal spaces. Red ochres, indigos, coppers; spray cans by the dozen, ceremonial masking; contouring, resisting, and resurging precious moments—creating portals into an Otherwise" (26-27).

In *Everyday Exposure: Indigenous Mobilization and Environmental Justice in Canada's Chemical Valley*, Sarah Marie Wiebe highlights the importance of

understanding Indigenous mobilizations against environmental degradation. She supports the "feminist geopolitical lens" that allows us to scale from the "global to the intimate" (30). This lens permits us to link an examination of what has been labelled a genocide, given the high numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, to a mother's grief at her kitchen table. Wiebe suggests that we explore the "impact of macro-level policy assemblages on individual bodies as they encounter these situated, places ensembles of political forces" (30)—a directive taken up in this article.

Over the Dead Bodies of Indigenous Women

Leshem's concepts help to expose the importance of the mother advocate who brings attention to the existence of the deathly space and to the destruction of human life within spatial confines. He analyzes territorial conflicts between Israeli authorities and Palestinian campaigners and explores the intersections between "the particularities of conflict in late modernity and the challenges they pose for political and geo-political action" and what he labels the "nuanced assemblages of death-places" ("Over" 34). Leshem describes his goal as providing a "more complete analysis of spatial power and politics"—an aim that aligns with this analysis of a mother's activism ("Over" 34). With Nesham and other writers, I explore the ways that mother-activists draw from fierce grief to resist settler sovereignty and its bio- and necropolitical reach.

This analysis of a mother's outrage and grief seems to align with the call by Sarah de Leeuw. Her view that sites of "ongoing colonial violence" need further analysis along with more theorizing on "Indigenous resistance" informs this article (21). Leeuw, along with mothering advocates, are demanding that settler societies acknowledge that violence is not something that exists 'out there' rather it is "an ever-present presence that all settler colonists are implicated in" (14). To avoid furthering "Indigenous erasure," Leeuw recommends that "geographic theorizations of violence," such as the one this article attempts, integrate "the messy, the everyday, and the lived nature of colonialism," thereby ending the more traditional focus on maps, treaty negotiations, and legal proceedings (21-22). The seemingly mundane sites she identifies as worthy of scholarly attention are the town halls, community centres, and family homes, where women activists and their supporters are most likely to congregate.

In the words of Leshem, this article is also dedicated to "realizing emancipatory spatial practices" by showcasing advocacy strategies that seek safety for Indigenous women and girls ("Over", Leshem, Abstract 34). This article focuses on one form of a place-based commemoration, namely the four memorial dances held to commemorate Amber Tuccaro, an annual event that ended on February 11, 2017. Leshem's assertion, albeit in the context of

Palestinian resistance, that there is a need for a "critical necropolitical agenda" that avoids the predominant "politics of despair" seems to capture some of what Vivian and other mothers are offering to the world through ceremonial dancing and by celebrating their loved one's value ("Over" 35). Jen Bagelman and Sarah Marie Wiebe share Leshem's interest in undermining a preoccupation with hopelessness. Their text, "Intimacies of Global Toxins: Exposure & Resistance in 'Chemical Valley,'" on the geopolitics associated with the Ontario Aamjiwnaang First Nation's reserve, a site of toxic contamination, is a case in point (76-85). In findings that parallel the plight of missing and murdered Indigenous women, Bagelman and Wiebe describe it as troubling that "the intimate and everyday affects of toxic exposure" are both "largely invisibilized" and "rendered highly spectacular" (76). Inspired by their text, this article's focus on struggle and celebration works to trouble against their finding—that the efforts by Indigenous women to "creatively [respond]" to the concentration of "toxic landscapes" in their homelands were often "overshadowed by stories of suffering" (76).

Embodied Acts of Resistance

In the context of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, the struggle for justice has been simultaneously minimized and sensationalized. Over the last decades, advocates have challenged the tendency to view Indigenous women with a damage-centred lens that amplifies risky lifestyles and dysfunction. Propelled by this logic, Bagelman and Wiebe offer tools to "challenge dangerously limited dualistic framings" of Indigenous spaces, such as the Ontario reserve they examined as an example of toxic injustice (76). Their aim is to make plain the "layered processes" that ensure that the reserve space of Aamjiwnaang and, by inference, the dangerous spaces of northern Alberta, are deadly and "toxic" (76). At the same time, it is important to see how these spaces create openings for the "creative solidarity movements" that defy narrow categorization (76).

While exploring environmental injustice, Bagelman and Wiebe affirm the importance of "embodied acts of resistance," which could include the memorial round dances held to commemorate Amber Tuccaro (77). The dances are expressive as well as fully engaged, wholistic efforts that have significant impact as expressive acts that are "oriented towards solidarity and political change" (77). In seeming support of the article's position on memorial round dances, Bagelman and Wiebe reference the 2011 work of Indigenous scholar, poet, and activist Leanne Simpson. As a settler scholar, I am interested in her emphasis on the importance of research methods that "completely employ our bodies" (qtd. in Bagelman and Wiebe, 79). Through "feminist geographical literature," which emphasizes "situated knowledges" and through a Nishnaabeg

worldview, Leanne Simpson explains that embodied knowledge draws from awareness of "our physical beings, our emotional I, spiritual energy and our intellect" (qtd. in Bagelman and Wiebe 79). With my best effort to follow her guidance, I have sought to show some of the Tuccaros' story and to touch the magnitude of their loss in the small ways available to me. While I write without intimate closeness, I am affected by their grief and inspired by their activism. I am particularly moved by a video of the round dance shown on Facebook and by a recent picture of Amber's son seen fishing.

Analyzing the Edmonton Region as a Site of Injustice

In this section, the remote fields south and east of Edmonton, Alberta, where the remains of many Indigenous women, including Amber Tucarro, were found are analyzed as sites where injustice is linked to geography and space (Pain). The fields have been described as possibly "a lone killer's dumping ground" (Morin). In addition to Amber Tuccaro, the remains of three Indigenous women have been found near Leduc, Alberta: Edna Bernard, Katie Sylvia Ballantyne, and Delores Brower. It is important to this scholarship, and its focus on geography, that the Edmonton-based Stolen Sisters and Brothers Awareness Movement (SSBAM) has identified links between the cases. This organization has supported the victims' families and has worked to raise awareness to help resolve the murders. One of the SSBAM's concerns is that these women were devalued on racial lines. According to SSBAM organizer April Wiberg, there was a "racial element" involved in the killings (Morin). Wiberg questioned whether the women would still be alive if they had not been "visibly . . . Aboriginal" (Morin).

The joint advocacy by Tuccaro and the SSBAM has drawn attention to the racialized and spatialized factors that seemed to have propelled the homicides. In theoretical terms, their efforts seem to be an example of what Leshem calls "emancipatory tactics borne out of but not condemned by the place of death" (36). These tactics have the potential to illuminate a "broader conceptualization of necropolitics" (36). Following Leshem and other scholars, it is possible to argue that the remote fields where the women were possibly killed and then deposited are part of the chain of dangerous spaces that mother-activists work to resist and dismantle. Amber Tuccaro's death reminds us that like the mistreatment of asylum seekers, Indigenous women and girls are positioned as outcasts who exist at the limits of sovereign power. In their forlorn displays of grief, mothers vigorously oppose the "suspension" of their loved ones' political lives and "the reduction of their existence to the bare life", the figure Agamben refers to as *homo sacer* (Amoore and Hall 95). Mothers' protests reveal the absurdity of contemporary biopolitical formations, even while their actions are propelled by shattering losses rather than jest.

Rachel Pain's work helps us see how spaces become corroded and permeated by the steady onslaught of violent interactions. Her research was done in collaboration with local activists and artists in a small village in northeast England on the former East Durham coalfield (387). She connects scholarship on "slow violence" with trauma studies to expand on ways that "chronic urban trauma" becomes fixed and entrenched in place, facilitating "retraumatisation" (385). While threaded with violence, the spaces retain elements that allow for healing and transformation. One of Pain's central findings is that studying trauma brings further awareness to the "place-based as well as temporal aspects of slow violence" (397). She further explains that "cycles of fast and slow violence" are "practiced and legitimated in specific locales" (397). Although she explores housing dispossession rather than homicide, Pain's work helps us see the significance of the spot where Amber disappeared. This location is connected to the loss of many, largely Indigenous women in the Edmonton region, possibly due to a serial killer. Pain's work helps us see the blood and trauma embedded in the fields.

Even though a potential serial killer was at large, the mainstream Canadian press suggested that the women's assumption of risk were key factors in the disappearances in the Edmonton region. An example is the August 2015, the *Toronto Sun* article, titled "Serial Killer Fears Grow after Another Body Found Near Edmonton" (Postmedia Network). The article states that the human remains of Connie Ottenbreit were found on a property south of Edmonton in late July 2015. It reports that Connie Ottenbreit was last seen in Edmonton in May 2004. The article describes her as twenty-seven years old and as "a sex worker" who left her "husband and child to work the streets" on the evening of her last sighting. (Postmedia Network) The article explains that the RCMP identified Ottenbreit's remains with the aid of a hair sample she provided to the database created by the Edmonton-based KARE Unit. Ottenbreit was one of the over one thousand women in Alberta who registered their name, address, DNA sample, and a photograph with the police to ensure speedier detection if they ever went missing. The article describes the women who registered as persons with "high-risk lifestyles" (Postmedia Network) and states that law enfor-cement officials were pondering whether Connie's death was the work of a serial killer, given the number of bodies that had been found in the Edmonton region.

The names of several other women are listed at the end of the article to support the *Sun*'s argument that a serial killer is at work. The list is prefaced by a statement that the names are those of "some of the missing and murdered sex workers" that might be connected to the suspected serial killer operating in the Edmonton area (Postmedia Network). The last name on the list is Georgette Flint, whose remains were located on September 13, 1988. She is described as twenty years old and a prostitute (Postmedia Network). The

reader is informed that her "half-naked body" was found "just west of Elk Island Park" (Postmedia Network). Prurient details like these are used to describe many of the fifteen women listed, including twenty-year-old Melissa Munch, whose body was found in January 2003. The article describes her as a prostitute who "was known to steal from her johns" (Postmedia Network). Though never connected to sex work, Amber Tuccaro's name is the first one on the chronological list reprinted in the article. Her remains were the last to be found before Connie Ottenbreit was located.

The mistaken links made between Amber Tuccaro and sex work in the *Sun* article assign her a denigrated status. These grim intersections illustrate the importance of the grieving parent, Vivian Tuccaro. She is a vocal advocate who challenges the boundaries that cut off these spaces and who opposes the worthless stature assigned to a much loved daughter whose last living moments were spent in the fields. Given her insistence on state redress and remedy, Vivian Tuccaro may be said to inhabit the "uneasy and frequently dangerous position" regarding sovereign power, which Amoore and Hall link to trickster advocates who similarly challenge the sovereign power exercised at border points by calling into question exclusions and spatialized restrictions (102).

With these thoughts in mind, this article offers lessons on the ways that Vivian's advocacy work might lead to "ground-level necropolitical action." ("Over" 36) With Leshem's "place based approach," it seems possible to bring insight to what he calls "petty sovereign" acts while also focusing on examples in which "the blunt operation of necropolitics" is "exposed to the contingencies of lived space," which is interpreted to include ceremonial spaces where commemorations like round dances have been held ("Over" 34). Following Bagelman and Wiebe, we might see the ways that deathly spaces act "as a mirror, reflecting the vulnerability of all citizens" (83). Based on their logic, the "embodied acts of resistance" analyzed throughout this article through the story of Vivian Tuccaro denote "important openings to unsettle the intimate impacts of toxic exposure and perhaps also the settler imaginations that have been a part in producing such toxicity" (83).

In the next section, the memorial dances held to honour Amber Tuccaro are discussed as examples of the resistance Bagelman and Wiebe encourage.

Mothering Activist Reclaimers: Interrogating the Memorial Round Dances

In this section, the four memorial round dances organized to commemorate the death of Amber Tuccaro are examined to determine how they exemplify the ways that justice connects to space. Following Leshem, I suggest that the memorial round dances held in Amber's honour exemplify the "minor spatial practices that utilize geopolitical, material and cultural-discursive sensitivities" as a means to "reclaim necropolitical agency" in this period of "late modern

conflict" ("Over" 34). According to news articles, the dances showcased Amber as a young woman who was loved, honoured, and cherished and who will be forever missed; the dances commemorated and publicized Amber's death. The round dances spatially challenge colonial frames by undermining narrow settler narratives of feminized, Indigenous risk. Applying Leshem, the community spaces within an Indigenous nation hold importance as one of the "limited places still accessible and available for contesting political interventions" ("Over" 34).

The first Annual Amber Alyssa Tuccaro Memorial Round Dance was held in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, on January 4, 2014. Amber's mother, Vivian Tuccaro, explained the significance of the round dances, stating that it was "important to celebrate Amber's life, share stories, memories, just to get together with family and friends" (qtd. in Narine, "Final Memorial"). Though theorized here with the aid of varied texts and arts-based scholarship, the purpose of the round dances is clearly not to satisfy academic aims. Commentators stated they were organized to offer places to grieve for and commemorate Amber. The family described the gatherings as a way to remember Amber as well as "a healing ceremony for family and friends" (qtd. in Wilson). The round dance was a reminder Amber was loved. The crowds that attended confirmed that her death affected many in her remote community. Details on the fourth and final commemorative round dance held in the winter of 2017 show that the interest remained steady over the four years since her disappearance. According to community traditions, four ceremonial dances is the right number. On February 11, 2017, the last gathering among family, friends, and the community was held at the Memorial Hall in Fort Chipewyan to rejoice in the memories of Amber's life. A pipe ceremony, a traditional feast and a prayer chain for justice were planned for the event (Narine, "Final Memorial"). Although the family has commemorated and celebrated Amber's life, their sorrow remains inconsolable.

In her ongoing quest for justice, Vivian Tuccaro looks towards a future space of safety and care. The round dances for Amber Tuccaro have performative elements that shadow the serious play of the clown or the trickster figure (Higgins 51-72). In his examination of survivance in Indigenous science fiction writings of Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Dianne Glancy, David M. Higgins states that the apocalypse has already come about for Indigenous peoples because "[aliens] have invaded, conquered, and irreparably shattered the landscape" (70). For Higgins: "Survivance narratives in Indigenous science fictions thus imagine the future as a space of presence rather than as a landscape of destruction, and this intervention offers a desperately needed counterweight to the science fictional (and social) imaginings that dominate our present-day world" (70).

Higgins' work eliminates the literal/figurative binary, as it is described by Indigenous scholar and science fiction author, Gerald Vizenor. Collapsing rigid structures prompts readers to reflect on the possibility of a "very real resurrection" to result from the "reproduction of ideological values within bodies, minds, and institutions" (55). With these science fiction writers, Vivian Tuccaro's activism may be viewed as an important counterbalance to contemporary dystopian thinking that normalizes violence, particularly towards racialized and gendered bodies.

The Memorial Dances as "a Radical Pedagogy of Decolonial Love"

The 2015 text by Karyn Recollet, referred to in the introduction, is particularly instructive to this discussion even though the dances she studies were public performances that were organized as protests rather than for ceremonial reasons. Recollet explores the role of "spatial glyphing" in forming "patterns of Indigenous resistance and Indigenous futurity" ("Glyphing" 130). Notably, Recollet analyzes how the Idle No More urban flash mob round dance and the commemorative art installation *Walking with our Sisters* demonstrated "a radical pedagogy of decolonial love" that seems to find a parallel in Vivian Tuccaro's advocacy, which we might describe as teachings on decolonial love as well as grief ("Glyphing" 142). Thinking with Recollet, it seems possible to assert that the gathering and dancing were ways to similarly strain colonial order. The dancers worked against the violence that occurred on settler lands more generally as well as in the remote fields near Leduc, Alberta, where the remains of many Indigenous women, including Amber Tuccaro, were found. Paralleling some of the activism against the deathscapes described by Leshem and others, Recollet argues that spatial tagging relies on "wedging"—a practice that is regenerative because it works to "shift, unsettle and generate new futurisms for Indigenous peoples" ("Glyphing" 142).

The mother-activist figure of Vivian Tuccaro, occupies an "ambiguous position" that is simultaneously "celebrated and feared" (Amoore and Hall 102). As an advocate, Vivian Tuccaro reveals and jeers at sovereignty's dangerous excesses. Through her protests, she gestures towards a futurity that might realize greater justice for her daughter. She seems to offer transformative narratives that favour "survivance and *biskaabiiyang*" (Higgins 52). As Higgins states in his 2016 article, Grace Dillon explains that "biskaabiiyang," an Anishinaabemowin term, describes the process of Indigenous people's "returning to [themselves]" to manage in the "post-Native Apocalypse world" (qtd. in Higgins 53). The round dances transform the site of her home reserve into a space "where Indigenous peoples are not sitting idly by, but performing alternative futures" (Bagelman and Wiebe 82)

Conclusions: "They Danced for Us All, All of Our Ruptures, Our Love, Our Pain … Our Desires" (Recollet "Choreo Glyph" 30)

This article has argued that like the Palestinian activists Leshem studied, Vivian Tuccaro and her family are also involved in a struggle over the securitization of space. With other advocates, Vivian's family has worked to bring attention to the Indigenous women, including Amber, who were killed and abandoned in remote fields around Edmonton, Alberta. They have asserted claims to territory by protesting the ways that the spatial aspects of injustice and Indigenous displacement from traditional lands led to Amber's disappearance. Their outrage led to various actions, including the billboards calling for help to find Amber's killer. The memorial dances were a form of spatial tagging that grounds the family's grieving and activism on Indigenous land.

While acknowledging their ceremonial significance, I see the commemorative round dances as a creative example of mothering activism that gestures towards the creation of lifescapes. In her imaginings of this future, Karyn Recollet writes as follows:

> I will try to describe what I saw but you won't believe me. They were a being—a tall one, an ancient one. They were beautiful, tender, caring, love, compassion, courage, gentle, strong, angry, hungry, thoughtful, intelligence. They were calling, we were responding . . . hands were held like precious touch … songs were sung like they had never been sung before. They were the seer, the Celestial … mother, grandmother, uncle, water, fire, wind. And they danced for us all, all of our ruptures, our love, our pain … our desires … IDLE NO MORE—that was them. (Recollet, "Choreo Glyph" 30)

With Recollet and other writers, I assert that mother-activists, notably Vivian Tuccaro, resist settler sovereignty and its bio and necropolitical reach by speaking out and dancing new formulations that defy deathscapes and that lean into safer, more just, more decolonial, more lively, and more loving futurities.

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TIFFANY M. B. ANDERSON

Double-Consciousness Squared during Black Pride Movement: Self-Determination and Maternal Activism in Alice Walker's *Meridian*

Although the Black pride movement encouraged a singular identity, Alice Walker's novel Meridian, *recognizes the faultiness presented in singular identities. Black women were not able to identify fully with Black movements because these movements were male centric. Similarly, the feminist movements of the era were concerned primarily with issues of white women and did not address the issues of women of colour. Because of this lack of complete belonging to either movement, women of colour understood that their doubly marginalized identities depended on the success of both movements while not being able to expect personal progress from either. Walker explores how the movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought to differentiate themselves from the civil rights movement of the 1950s. The expressed questions "What does a movement require?" and "What should a movement do?" encourage Walker's protagonist, Meridian, to explore her own understanding of activism. Because there are no clear answers to these questions regarding the movement, Walker, by way of Meridian, is free to create a new understanding of activism, which becomes Meridian's sacrificial performance of maternal activism. And very similar to how she seeks to redefine activism, Meridian pursues a new concept of the maternal that pushes beyond the requirement and/or expectation of physical motherhood.*

> "Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness."
>
> —W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

"Double-consciousness"—a term introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1897 essay, "The Strivings of the Negro People," and later, more famously, in *The Souls of Black Folk*—is a complicated identity doubleness that Du Bois defined exclusively as an African American complex. Du Bois presents three parts of double-consciousness: (1) problems of self-definition beyond white American perspective; (2) the exclusion of African Americans from the mainstream United States (US); and (3) the warring identities of race and nationality. Du Bois is progressive in naming the phenomenon of double-consciousness, yet he never moves to the place that eliminates dependency on white perspective to determine identity. In fact, double-consciousness propels Black people into a type of consciousness slavery: White perspective becomes the master while Black perspective is slave to the white master perspective. Therefore, although Du Bois identifies the effects of the institution of American slavery on Black people's consciousness, he is clearly noting a continued slavery of consciousness.

According to Du Bois's narrative in *Souls*, we can identify the process of racial identity formations during the beginning of the twentieth century as follows: (1) One is made aware of one's race and/or made aware of racism; (2) one sees oneself from the perspective of white Americans and suffers from double-consciousness; and (3) one undoubtedly responds with self-hatred that manifests either as anger towards one's race, hatred of all things white, or sycophancy. Here is where Du Bois's process ends—stuck in the damning result of double-consciousness that leaves persons of colour essentially hopeless and dependent on the white majority to determine their identity. The race pride movements of the 1960s and 1970s radically changed the process of racial identity formations to include self-determination: (1) One is made aware of one's race and/or made aware of racism; (2) one sees oneself from the perspective of white Americans and suffers from double-consciousness; (3) one recognizes the control white Americans hold through double-consciousness; (4) one unites with members of their own race (and possibly other racialized and marginalized people, regardless of race); and (5) the group collectively self-determines their own racial identity. Therefore, I read the Black pride movement of the 1960s and 1970s as a focused attempt to undo double-consciousness and to self-determine a singular identity for the Black race.

However, as double minorities in the Black pride movement, African American women experienced moments of exclusion and abjection from both the mainstream US and their own group and movement. This fact highlights the second precept of double-consciousness: the exclusion of African Americans from the mainstream US. This article explores how this exclusion is comparable to the experience of women in the Black pride communities. Although the movement attempts to create a singular identity in response to double-consciousness, misogynous aspects of the movement then trap Black

women into a new type of double-consciousness. Similar to how Black communities feel ostracized by the US, the women in the movements of the 1960s and 1970s were excluded. Black women share the same concerns of racial progress with Black men, yet their concerns that are unique to their gendered experiences (such as sexual assault, birth control and abortion, motherhood, and physical abuse) are often issues created and reinforced by their male counterparts specifically and heteropatriarchal society in general. Moreover, the reassessment of double-consciousness I present in this article considers Du Bois's focus on manhood in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" and argues that the idea of double-consciousness is a male-centric complex. Furthermore, I consider how if we read double-consciousness as a gendered term, one might define a double-consciousness specific to Black women. As people excluded from society for being both of colour and female, it seems that Black women take on the weight of being liminal participants of both racial movement and feminist movements. Because of this double exclusion, or double-consciousness squared, the women are forced to self-determine their own identities separate from Black men and exclusive to female activists of colour.

Gendered Double-Consciousness

This article's epigraph presents one of the many moments in *The Souls of Black Folk* in which Du Bois speaks specifically to the distressed construction of Black "self-conscious manhood" in connection to double-consciousness (17). In fact, Du Bois generally writes without concern of lumping all Black people—men, women, and nonbinary folk—into Black mankind. Instead of talking about Black people, Du Bois speaks specifically about Black men. This, along with his concern with strength, weakness, and power—words that might define or undo a man's masculinity—suggests that Du Bois is in fact only speaking to Black men. Similar to what is demonstrated in this epigraph, there are several moments in *Souls* when Du Bois distinguishes between the Black man and a weaker, emasculated version of the Black man. In essence, Du Bois defines double-consciousness not only as a complication to Black identity formations but also as the US's refusal of Black masculinity.

Du Bois presents evidence of the US's repudiation of Black masculinity: "What need of education, since we must always cook and serve? And the Nation echoed and enforced this self-criticism, saying: Be content to be servants, and nothing more; what need of higher culture for half-men?" (21). Here there is a very clear connection between domestic work, "half-men," and emasculation. The quotation creates a conversation between Black men and the United States. While Black men long for educational and employment opportunity, they are rejected. In fact, Du Bois suggests that the power to

choose and move beyond the designated station of domestic work is a man's right, yet when Black men are refused this right, it is a clear disallowance of their masculinity. In extension, Du Bois seems to suggest that the domestic space, if not a space for men, is a space exclusively for women, a thought in keeping with the time of *Souls*' publication.

More alarming and shocking is Du Bois's reaction to the sexual violence enacted upon Black women as merely a threat to Black male paternity: "The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home" (20). This quotation takes the argument of double-consciousness into extreme androcentrism. When discussing the sexual violation of Black women, instead of acknowledging the very real and lasting trauma of rape, Du Bois only considers the effect miscegenation will have on Black men and, consequently, the entire race. Note the red stain he speaks of is not blood from the raped and abused women but rather the children without Black fathers. His perception highlights how Black men are publicly cuckold by the rape of Black women; their defilement and the children produced by such acts are further emasculations of Black men. Furthermore, Du Bois equates the plight of the Black man to the plight of the race, and this direct nexus between men and the race ignores the experiences of women.

So, what about the women? Generally, we see that there is no concern for women when considering the construction of a Black consciousness in *Souls*. Yet during the period I consider in this article, women are definitely present—combating racial oppression while combating gender oppression within their own movement. Although Alice Walker is only a single representation of women writing during these movements, she presents a unique protagonist, Meridian, who makes attempts at self-determination while transforming previous concepts of activism to better fit her perspective.

While the Black pride movement encouraged a singular identity, Meridian, while claiming the term identified in the movements (especially Black instead of "Negro" or "Coloured"), understands the faultiness presented in singular identities. Black women were not able to identify fully with Black movements because these movements were male centric. Similarly, the feminist movements of the era were concerned primarily with issues of white women and did not address the issues of women of colour. Because of this lack of complete belonging to either movement, women of colour especially understood that their doubly marginalized identities depended on the success of both movements, even though they could not expect personal progress from either. Meridian places emphasis on the success and wellbeing of her immediate community and interprets this racial identity movement, instead, as a personal quest for

selfhood. In other words, Meridian's individual identity requires the success of the civil rights movement as well as Black people's ability to thrive. Walker explores how the movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought to differentiate from the civil rights movement of the 1950s. The questions "What does a movement require?" and "What should a movement do?" encourage Meridian to explore her own understanding of activism. Because there are no clear answers to these questions regarding the movement, this article argues that Walker, by way of Meridian, is free to create a new understanding of activism that becomes Meridian's sacrificial performance of maternal activism. This article also argues that, very similarly to how she comes to maternal activism, Meridian pursues a new concept of the maternal that pushes beyond the requirements and/or expectations of physical motherhood. I interpret how literature represents sociological happenings of communities during the periods in which they are written. With this in mind, Walker's protagonist, while fictional, is a literary manifestation of the period, the women of the period, and their Black community.

Alice Walker's Conceptualization of the Maternal

The traditional understanding of maternal upholds gender expectations created by patriarchy. The term suggests nurture, a sense of belonging to child and family, and, in many instances, sacrificing the self for the sake of others. Scholarly contributors to maternal studies often challenge, critique, and redefine this notion of the maternal. Sara Ruddick, for example, coined the term "maternal thinking" and noted its "unity of reflection, judgement, and emotion" (348). Adrienne Rich argues in *Of Woman Born* that "the experience of maternity and the experience of sexuality have both been channeled to serve male interests" and critiques the notion that motherhood is a woman's "sacred calling." Through her body of work, Walker undoes the patriarchal definition of maternal by moving away from the biological understanding that requires parentage to a more conceptual notion. For Walker, the concept of maternal emphasizes creation and celebrates things traditionally assigned female by patriarchy because of female ingenuity and self-preservation.

In her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* Walker presents the first clear definition of her notion of womanism, which emphasizes a recreation of the notions of "female" and "woman":

> A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength…. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist…. Traditionally capable. Loves

> music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

With this definition of womanism, Walker encourages a paradigm shift of what patriarchy has previously defined as female. Whereas patriarchy identifies female emotion as irrational and erratic, Walker praises it as "flexible" and whereas patriarchy connects female emotional erraticism to menstruation, Walker demands the love of all things cyclical just as a womanist "loves the moon," and whereas patriarchy privileges things manufactured by men in factories, Walker prefers more folksy creations, which she identifies as "women's culture," including music, dancing, and food. So although most maternal scholars might cringe at the essentialism that reduces women's culture to things created by women in domestic spaces, Walker sees this as a point of female celebration, especially since for most of modern history, this was the space for Black female artists to thrive before the opportunity to create what many might call traditional art arose. The celebration of women's culture also places value on creations that patriarchy often chooses to devalue.

Walker carries this notion of women's culture and womanism over to her display of maternal activism in her 1976 novel *Meridian*. Although *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* was published after *Meridian*, it is important to note that the essays and other writings included in the collection go as far back as 1966, proving that Walker was formulating this womanist perspective prior to the publication of both *Meridian* and *In Search*. If part of Walker's ideology on repurposing the notion of women's culture relies on traditional gender roles dictated by patriarchy, then her concept of maternal activism conceptualized and demonstrated in *Meridian* continues this essentialized perspective of the maternal. If the traditional definition of maternal expects or requires the self-sacrifice of a mother for the salvation of her children, then the novel's protagonist, Meridian, exemplifies this maternal stereotype. The novel, for example, begins with Meridian staring down a tank in defense of a group of Black children's civil rights. However, Walker undoes the requirement of motherhood that mandates a child be born of one's body and, instead, generalizes that maternal instincts can come from sacrificial love beyond the traditional understanding of motherhood. For Meridian, her maternal obligation is to equality, and her bodily sacrifice will be for the progress of civil rights. With this in mind, for the purpose of this article, when I use language that genders actions, instincts, or behaviour, it is my attempt to honour Walker's lead of reclaiming female and maternal things from patriarchy as not only positive but also powerful. It also seems as if Walker, in her presentation of maternal activism, hopes to defend it against traditional, patriarchal, and mainstreamed understandings by presenting examples of maternal existence contrary to the typical narrative.

Alice Walker's *Meridian*

In her 1986 article "*Meridian*: Alice Walker's Critique of Revolution," Karen F. Stein argues that *Meridian* is a revision of her previous belief that the civil rights movement was valuable. Regarding Walker's first published essay titled "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" Stein states: "While [Walker] wrote of the Civil Rights Movement with unreserved approval in 1967, she would later contend that it continued to oppress women and so failed in its mission of human liberation. In *Meridian,* she rewrites her attitude toward '60s activism, and substitutes for the concept of revolution the more powerful ideal of transformation" (122). Although I agree with Stein that Walker "reaches for a new definition of revolution" in *Meridian*, I do not agree that she is redefining the civil rights movement (130). *Meridian* was published after the heights of both the civil rights and Black pride movements and considers the in-between periods of the two.

Meridian Hill begins her activism during the civil rights movement. However, as Stein points out, "Walker suggests that a primary reason for the Movement's failure was its lack of a sustained sociopolitical critique" (131). Moreover, Stein fails to more than mention a defining moment of the book, when Meridian comes face to face with a revolutionary group that employs violent tactics: "To join this group she must make a declaration of her willingness to die for the Revolution, which she had done. She must also answer the question 'Will you kill for the Revolution?' with a positive Yes. This, however, her tongue could not manage" (Walker 14). Meridian's inability to say "yes" haunts her throughout the book. Specifically, the fact that Meridian cannot completely commit to a part of the activism signals that this particular activism is not for her. In fact, this might be the reason for her unwavering commitment to nonviolence and, perhaps even more relevant, her frustration with a "society that kills the feeling of self, and most especially women's selfhood" (Stein 130). Additionally, her commitment to nonviolence demonstrates a need to belong to any activism before she fashions maternal activism.

Stein's point that the novel indicts "activists [who] merely turned political rhetoric to their own ends while continuing to repress spontaneous individuality" references the Black pride movement's dependency on a united self for the sake of a self-determined identity. By not dealing with this place of in-betweenness, Stein, much like other scholars, only acknowledges *Meridian* as a book critical of the civil rights movement and not critical of both the civil rights and Black pride movements. Yes, Meridian Hill seeks to create a new type of revolution, but this creation is based on the in-between space in which she lives.

In her essay "Remembering the Dream: Alice Walker, *Meridian* and the

Civil Rights Movement," Roberta M. Hendrickson considers this space briefly, although her article's focus is on the civil rights movement:

> With Meridian, Walker raises a difficult question, both political and philosophical, the question of how to create a just and peaceful or nonviolent society from one that is both unjust and violent. This question was raised but left unanswered by the Civil Rights Movement. By creating Meridian divided against herself on the question of nonviolence, Walker challenges the abandonment of nonviolence that followed the Civil Rights Movement. Though Meridian agrees with her friends that "nonviolence has failed" to free black people, she cannot, like them, proclaim herself ready to "kill for the Revolution."

Hendrickson notes that she is a divided self, stuck in between movements. Meridian is then forced to create an activist's perspective all her own—a perspective mostly created through her experiences as a woman in the movements and her commitment "to survival and wholeness of entire people" (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*).

Meridian is an especially interesting and progressive character. She becomes a pregnant teenager, bride, and then mother all while remaining quite uninterested in the roles she quickly takes up. She neglects these identifiers and ultimately gives up her child to become active in the civil rights movement and to attend a fictional university, Saxon College. In both situations, she is urged to simply become a part of a whole. The university hopes to shape her into a Saxon woman—"chaste and pure as the driven snow" (92)—a feat that is impossible considering her past marriage and motherhood. So although Meridian enjoyed being at Saxon her first year, she knew that she would never be a woman the school expected her to be—a woman accepted "as an equal because she knew and practiced all the proper social rules." Meridian knew that society refused her equality because of her Blackness and femaleness (94). Similarly, although she was fully committed to the work of the Civil Rights Movement, she began to explore a version of revolution all her own, maternal activism.

In order to better understand this concept of maternal activism, I would like to turn to Alan Nadel's essay, "Reading the Body: *Meridian* and the Archeology of Self." In it, Nadel first identifies the double-consciousness of the time: "It is not surprising … that in the fictional world Walker presents, Blacks as a result of this oppression often repress their desires and sublimate their frustrations in ways that enable them to accept the status quo and/or even adopt their oppressors' values" (55). We see this adoption of white perspective, for example, with Truman, a former lover of Meridian, and his marriage and sexual desire for white women as well as his exoticism of Black women through his art. Of course, Truman's rejection of Black women for his overwhelming

preference of white female ideals affects Meridian, but what affects her the most is how a white American perspective requires women to be wife and mother first and foremost. This frustration leads her to search for a new understanding of the maternal altogether.

The novel reaches all the way back to Meridian's great-grandmother, a maternal figure with whom Meridian especially connects. Her great-grandmother creates an identity outside of a white American perspective, appropriating American Indian spirituality and walking Native burial grounds nude in worship of the sun. Nadel comments on Meridian's great-grandmother's level of independence, which "was rarely found by black women because of their enslavement to men and to maternity" (58).

In acknowledging the freedom of her great-grandmother, Meridian begins to feel guilty for trapping her mother in maternal responsibility. For Nadel, maternal enslavement also includes Meridian's struggles as a mother and how motherhood does not give her the "capacity to be active in the emotional, intellectual, or physical world" (58). It becomes apparent that Meridian cannot be both mother and activist. Nadel argues that Meridian's decision to "relinquish her role as mother" allows her to recognize a difference between her and other women enlisted in this maternal history: "[Meridian] thought of her mother as being worthy of this maternal history, and she herself as belonging to an unworthy minority, for which there was no precedent and of which she was, as far as she knew, the only member" (58). So Meridian leaves her family in order to "[reconstitute] the existing fragments in a new context" (58). It is this gathering of the broken pieces of motherhood that allows Meridian to repurpose the drive to nurture a child to survive (the patriarchy's perspective of mothering) into a desire to nurture an entire people to survival. By choosing to mother members of her race instead of her own child, Meridian rejects the values of a white American perspective as her great-grandmother did years before. Moreover, this reconstruction of the notion of maternal guides her to maternal activism.

While Patricia Hill Collins notes the difference between "biological mothers, or bloodmothers, [who] are expected to care for their children" and "othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities," Meridian models a different type of mothering that does not require the biological and the traditional notion of mothering responsibilities in the traditional sense, for example feeding, bathing, and clothing. If, according to Barbara Christian, "the idea that mothers should live lives of sacrifice has come to be seen as the norm" (234), then Meridian's proclivity to sacrifice, and consequently to conceptually mother, is only for the Black and/or poor community.

Yet the guilt that Meridian carries for "stealing her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self" (43) combines with the guilt she feels

for abandoning her child and squandering her obligation to mother, which makes Meridian feel unworthy to live. Hendrickson argues that "[Meridian's] readiness to die is an expression of her suicidal impulses" (115). The abuse her body undergoes as an activist operates as penance for her rejecting motherhood and betraying her mother by choosing a college education and a life as an activist. She became "capable of inner gaiety, a sense of freedom, as she saw the [police's] clubs slashing down on her from above" (Walker 97). After being beaten unconscious, she awakes with a "feeling of yearning, of heartsick longing for forgiveness" (97). Her hope and commitment to the cause bleed into her guilt and desire for forgiveness. It is as if because she did leave her family to join the movement, both the movement and her guilt are intertwined.

The last section of *Meridian*, titled "Ending," marks the conclusion of the flashbacks and forces a resolution of Meridian's self-determined style of activism. Specifically, the section begins with the funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr. The mood is originally somber, respectful of the "great dead man" both inside the church, where dignitaries, politicians, and celebrities mourn, and outside the church, where "the pitiable crowd of nobodies" gather and "[clear] their throats repeatedly against their tears" (202). Here, Walker visually signals how quickly movements might die with actual, physical death, a point with which she begins the book through the addition of a Black Elk epigraph:

> I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now… I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream … the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

The funeral does not simply document the death of a movement; it also shows how quickly the mourners resume life upon the passing of both King and the movement. In many ways, King's death also signifies the death of a struggling movement and method. The death brings freedom not only to King but also to Meridian. She is now able to move past the shadow of the movement that grouped all members into one and is left to deal with remaining questions that emerge from the more revolutionary movement later in the book.

Meridian's refusal to kill for the revolution earlier in the book haunts her throughout the ten-year span from then until the end of the novel. Specifically, Meridian feels the heaviness of her position between the space and ideologies of both movements and confusion regarding her purpose as a woman in either movement. Meridian highlights not only the mistreatment of women activists

but also the overt disregard by the revolutionary movement for the maternal activism she has created—a female perspective that, as a carrier of life, refuses to take the life of anyone. Moreover, as a reflection of Walker's celebration of womanism and the notion that female identity is directly connected to creation, Meridian cannot resign herself to creation's opposite, destruction, until later in the novel.

Meridian's commitment to peace, life, and maternal activism is quite contrary to her lack of commitment to actual motherhood. Not only does she leave her child to be raised by his paternal grandmother, but she also aborts Truman's baby when she becomes pregnant and gets her tubes tied to assure that she will never birth any more children. She does all of this, arguably, because she will not allow motherhood to disrupt her maternal obligation to the race and movement. Because there is a connection between Meridian's inability to kill and her maternal activism, her question to Truman—"Is there no place in a revolution for a person who *cannot* kill?" (206)—might be interpreted as another question: Is there no place in a revolution for a mother?

Meridian's activism requires her to act alone throughout most of the novel. In contrast, revolutionary activism requires oneness with the fellow participants of the revolution. Perhaps Meridian was unable to commit murder for the revolution because she had yet to determine her own personhood and recognize the need for solidarity with other revolutionaries. Many scholars write about *Meridian*'s focus on individualization and how it is missing in the movements. This might explain why after struggling throughout the book, Meridian concludes that she could in fact kill. After watching a father suffer through the anniversary of his revolutionary son's death, Meridian recognizes a "communal spirit, togetherness, righteous convergence" (219) take place among the viewing church congregation. A genuine transformation happens to Meridian:

> She understood, finally, that the respect she owed her life was to continue, against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own. And that this existence extended beyond herself to those around her because, in fact, the years in America had created them One Life … she made a promise to the [father] herself: that yes, indeed she would kill, before she allowed anyone to murder his son again. (220)

In this moment, Meridian concludes two things—that she is worthy of life and that she will kill for others who are worthy. Moreover, Meridian's resignation to kill is in keeping with the expectation of motherhood: to sacrifice so that a child can thrive. Here, Meridian realizes that to murder is to sacrifice her moral commitment to honour life and creation; however, in the novel's end, she recognizes that this sacrifice for the life of a young person is in keeping with her maternal activism because of her assurance of preservation.

Meridian moves forwards aware of her personal transformation and renewed sense of maternal activism. Although Meridian is still registering voters at the novel's end, Walker focuses on Meridian's individualized attention to members of the community instead of generalizing her activism. Meridian touches one person at a time. And to emphasize Meridian's maternal activism, the final three stories all centre on women and their maternal identities. First, Truman and Meridian visit Agnes, a dying woman who prays to be buried on Mother's Day. Her husband, Johnny, registers the Monday after Mother's Day, presumably after she passes. Then they meet Miss Margaret Treasure, a woman of sixty-nine who believed, after a love affair with a younger man, she was pregnant. Finally, they visit a thirteen-year-old mother who is in prison for killing her daughter. Meeting this venomous child brings Meridian to tears, hoping to feel tenderness for her own son. However, "her heart refuses to beat faster, to warm, except for the girl, the child who killed her child" (235), demonstrating to whom she feels most motherly.

These final missions serve many purposes. First, we are given varied perspectives of motherhood that broaden the limiting biological notion of motherhood. Although we begin with the story of Agnes—a biological mother who, on her deathbed, chooses Mother's Day as her day of burial—the story demonstrates that her maternal identity is only a tiny piece of who she is. In fact, so much of Agnes's joy comes from gazing upon her husband instead of from any interaction with her son. Through the story of Miss Margaret Treasure, Walker introduces the caging narrative that equates sexual intercourse exclusively with procreation. The elderly Miss Treasure is so overwhelmed by the "hurting brightness" she experiences in her love affair that she is certain the pleasure is a "sin for which she would be punished," a punishment that initially seems will be pregnancy (232). Second, we see Meridian's performance of maternal activism. Although her and Truman's purpose is to register voters, their visits include moving furniture, rolling newspaper logs, bringing sacks of groceries, and orchestrating a visit to the doctor. These services are extended without the assurance of people registering to vote; they are immediately performed without second thought. Again, the level of sacrifice here, while in a space of activism, is maternal through its service.

Finally, the story about the girl who killed her child depicts the extreme contradictions that exist in motherhood. On the one hand, the girl has killed her child, and on the other, she equates her child as her heart and wonders: "Why am I alive, without my heart?" (234). Moreover, the peculiar case of this young mother emboldens Meridian's conceptualization of maternal activism into a space of understanding, benevolence, and forgiveness. As if penning a manifesto, Meridian writes a poem upon leaving the prison:

i want to put an end to guilt
i want to put an end to shame
whatever you have done my sister
(my brother)
know I wish to forgive you
love you
it is not the crystal stone
of our innocence
that circles us
not the tooth of our purity
that bites bloody our hearts. (235)

Meridian recognizes the physical separation that comes from guilt and shame and hopes to return the community together through forgiveness and love. It is only after Meridian forgives herself for her failed attempt at biological motherhood that she is able to create and perform maternal activism. She then alludes to biblical verse John 8:7—"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her"—by acknowledging that it is never the pure or innocent who chooses to condemn another person. Guilt and shame can destroy, whereas forgiveness and love can heal. Walker suggests by the juxtaposition that the method of destruction previously used by all by default (the prison system in the case with the child who kills her child and Mrs. Treasure's judgmental sister) contradicts the maternal's desire to heal and unite.

After Truman witnesses Meridian on her personal missions engaging mothers of varying kinds, he becomes like her—"intensely maternal"—and their realized method inspires a poem that praises individualization as a method "to heal and re-create" themselves (236). Truman's sudden urge to self-identify as maternal demonstrates the ways the concept is not attached to sex or gender, as Alice Walker intends though her conceptualization defined in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Instead, maternal honours the act of creation (beyond the notion of childbirth and rearing but rather innovation and folklore), preserves things created (folklore, including artifacts, stories, and Walker's notion of womanist existence), and heals one's people (as demonstrated through maternal activism). Of course, this thinking relates not only to Meridian and Truman but also to the revitalization and the freeing of Black and poor people alike.

Walker has written a female character who creates a personal identity in order to exist in her racial, androcentric world while trapped in a larger world controlled by a white American perspective. Meridian could easily subscribe to the requirements of her community to be a wife and mother, yet she isolates herself in order to create a more fitting identity that allows her to be a better

and more effective woman for her larger community. Ultimately, Walker wrote a perfect womanist text even before she published such an idea. Defined by Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* as "a black feminist, or feminist of color," womanism celebrates women and, essentially, identifies the unique position of women activists of colour and their need to create spaces that allow for their activism. Walker creates a protagonist that surpasses the gendered expectations placed on women and upends the negative connotation associated with traditional gender roles (especially concerning women) by celebrating, embracing, and recreating the strength of women's culture through the application of maternal activism in *Meridian*. Interestingly, Walker removes Meridian from her personal domestic space to apply those traditional gender roles on her community, which, in turn, becomes the early stages of maternal activism.

Endnotes

1. I use the term "minority" based on one's access to civil rights and one's representation in power systems, such as the political stage. In this sense, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, women, though more than half of the US population, were indeed minority voices.
2. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* considers the journeys of specific women through these movements.
3. To find more perspectives dealing with *Meridian* as a Civil Rights Movement novel, please see Barbara Christian's book *Black Women Novelists: the Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976;* Melissa Walker's book *Down from the Mountaintop;* Susan Danielson's essay "Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Feminism, and the 'Movement'"; and Norman Harris's book *Connecting Times: The Sixties in Afro-American Fiction.* Madhu Dubey considers the self-determination of Black women in the more patriarchal Black nationalist revolution in her book *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic.*
4. Valeria Harvell argues that the humanist position of African American activism comes from was instated by female activists. See "Afrocentric Humanism and African American Women's Humanizing Activism."
5. There are also several articles regarding *Meridian* and motherhood. See Barbara Christian's "An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*." Christian also discusses motherhood considerably in her essay "Novels for Everyday Use."
6. Anne Downey discusses the connection between this epigraph and *Meridian* in her essay "'A Broken and Bloody Hoop': The Intertextuality of *Black Elk Speaks* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*."

7. In his 1976 review of *Meridian*, published in *The New Yorker*, Greil Marcus connects the novel to *The Rebel* by Albert Camus. Marcus quotes at length from the final chapter of the book titled, "Thought at the Meridian," "For it is now a question of deciding if it is possible to kill someone, whose resemblance to ourselves we have at last recognized and whose identity we have just sanctified. When we have only just conquered solitude, must we then re-establish it definitively by legitimizing the act which isolates everything? To force solitude on a man who has just come to understand that he is not alone, is that not the definitive crime against man?" (qtd. in Marcus 11).

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Zoë Svendsen makes participatory performances and installations exploring ecological crisis and capitalism, including the cabaret show, *Love Letters to a Liveable Future* (Cambridge Junction/Season for Change commission); the sonic landscape work *Ness,* written by Robert Macfarlane (Metal/Estuary Festival); and *Factory of the Future* (Oslo Architecture Triennale). Zoë is an associate artist at the Donmar Warehouse, Cambridge Junction and the New Wolsey Theatre, and lectures on dramaturgy at the University of Cambridge, UK.

Anna Townley is a painter. Colour is fundamental to the way she understands her surroundings, relationships, and to how she paints. Townley's role as a parent is ever present alongside her practice as an artist. Her paintings record observations of the family, including frequent episodes of emotional intensity: moments of conflict or of joy.

Jennifer Verson's research draws together her work as a performance practitioner, with contextual theology and peace studies. Her work builds new understanding of the potential of performance for social repair, particularly in the long aftermaths of genocide, slavery, and colonialism. Jennifer completed her PhD at the Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations at Coventry University where she received a United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Studentship. She is founding member and Artistic Director of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid.

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