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CHIEF EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS: A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL STUDIES IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

Founded in 2017, Feminist Encounters is a journal committed to argument and debate, in the tradition of historical feminist movements.

In the wake of the growing rise of the Right across the world, openly neo-fascist national sentiments, and rising conservative populism, we feminists all over the world are needing to remobilise our energies to protect and advance gender rights.

Feminist Encounters provides a forum for feminist theorists, scholars, and activists to communicate with each other, to better educate ourselves on international issues and thus promote more global understanding, and to enhance our critical tools for fighting for human rights.

Feminism is an intellectual apparatus, a political agenda, and a programme for social change. Critical analysis of how gender discourses produce cultural identities and social practices within diverse lived realities is key to this change. We need to think more sharply in order to strategise well: as the discourses of conservatism renew and invigorate themselves, so we as feminist scholars need to be refining our amazonic swords in order not just to respond effectively but also to innovate our own ideas for equality and social justice.

We are, of course, committed to intersectionality, a vital lens through which to see the contours of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age/ability, and explore how gendered scripts get lived, and filtered through these specificities of cultural organisation. Lived experience is never codified in terms of gender alone, and so our research will always be sensitive to the nexus of lived oppressions.

The journal has a large editorial board and journal team, consisting of over forty scholars in twenty countries. This is deliberately inclusive in order that we can promote diversity and engage with different concerns from across the world. Our aim is not to simply talk to ourselves, reconfirming our localised assumptions, but to generate feminist encounters across regions, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. Globalisation has been a triumph of neoliberalism, but digital technologies have also flattened and reduced the distance between us in dramatic ways, so that now we can talk to each other with unanticipated ease.

This new access to each others' voices has also brought challenges to the way we think and do things, so that being a feminist today might be quite a different prospect to a person living in China, Iran, Norway, South Africa or the UK. Second Wave Feminism used the idea of 'sisterhood' to invoke solidarity between women. I've always rather liked Andrea Dworkin's claim, though, that: "Feminism is a political practice of fighting male supremacy in behalf of women as a class, including all the women you don't like, including all the women you don't want to be around, including all the women who used to be your best friends whom you don't want anything to do with anymore." The notion of sisterhood was challenged by Black feminists in the 1980s as being too conceptually white, thus bell hooks' trenchant critique that: "the idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality". In the 1990s and 2000s it has been fair to say that feminist theory and Feminist Studies since have engaged more intentionally and deliberately with intersectionality - though Jennifer Baumgardner did caution us that: "Sisterhood was never about everybody agreeing ....".

For our journal, sisterhood must expand and embrace our transgender allies and our men friends, reminding us that sibling relationships are rarely straightforward or inevitably blessed by golden moments of total affinity. Thus, **Feminist Encounters** welcomes the opportunity for new kinds of international discussions in the spirit of collaboration and critical intellectual enquiry. We hope for productive agreement and disagreement, and the shared struggle of fighting gender oppression, with our minds, hearts, and bodies, as the times demand.

Sally R Munt, University of Sussex
Founding Editor

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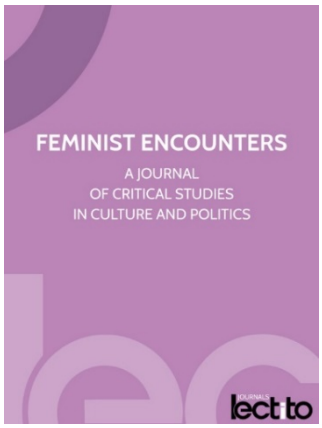

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Editorial

Motherhood and 21st Century Feminism: Reaching out Across the Divide

Charlotte Beyer [1]*

Published: September 10, 2019

There is a compelling need to address 21st century feminism's relationship to motherhood; however, this endeavour is complicated by decades of divisions within feminism in regards to mothers. The purpose of this special issue of *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* is to reach out across these divisions, in order to explore and reimagine the relationship between mothering and 21st century feminism.

The history of feminist encounters with motherhood and mothers is long and complicated, and the narrative about these encounters has often been framed in negative terms (O'Reilly, 2016:Ch.4). The subjects of mothers and motherhood have presented vital yet complex, even problematic issues for feminists and feminist theory alike (Hallstein, 2010: 280). From second-wave feminism through to the fourth wave, feminist debates on mothers and motherhood have shifted in emphasis and evolved over time but continue to cause disagreements and conflicts among feminist critics, as well as also produce new and compelling insights (Palmer, 1989; O'Reilly, 2016; Gibson, 2014). However, as Amber E. Kinser (2010: 161) states: 'the terrain of motherhood […] is still difficult ground for most women to navigate […] despite feminist effort and accomplishment, women still are largely thought of first in terms of maternal capacity' (see also Bueskens, 2018; Nelson and Robertson eds., 2019). One of the fundamental reasons for this is the enduring connection between mothering and lesser social status, according to critic Wendy Chavkin who has it that,

> motherhood is one of the most intimate and essential of human connections and therefore of concern to all; and female biological reproductive capacity and social assignment for childcaring and the maintenance of domestic life have been centrally connected with women's subordinate status across many cultures and historic eras. (Chavkin, 2010: 4)

For critics and scholars, further analysis of motherhood is crucial because of the connections between the creation of gender codes and intersecting categories of oppression such as race and class (Mack, 2018). The identification of motherhood with female biology has resulted in a degree of matrophobia which has contributed to a reluctance in feminist debates to engage thoroughly with mothering and mothers (Mack, 2018). Defined as the fear of becoming one's mother (Kinser, 2008:33), matrophobia has impeded feminist engagements with mothering and created damaging divisions within feminism itself. Amber E. Kinser explains how feminist daughters' anxieties over retaining the undesirable and oppressed aspects of their mothers and their mothers' lives have led to generational divisions. Thus, "a fear of becoming one's literal mother, or figurative 'mother', is […] a common theme in feminist living and writing" (Kinser, 2008:33). Lynn O'Brien Hallstein's book, *White Feminists and Contemporary Maternity* (2010) also presents a compelling investigation of the notion of matrophobia, its causes, and the damage this idea has caused to feminism's engagement with mothers and mothering, as well as the divisions matrophobia has generated within feminism itself. These divisions are further compounded by simplistic definitions and perceptions of motherhood as aligned with class- and social privilege, compulsory heterosexuality, and gender role conformity (see examples given in O'Reilly, 2016: Ch.4). Hallstein advocates a series of strategies for 'purging' feminism of matrophobia, thereby generating a fuller understanding of the relationship between feminism and mothering (Hallstein, 2010: 132). Extending these efforts, this special issue aims to shift the narrative of 21st century feminist encounters with motherhood to a more realistic and enabling account. The articles featured here participate in and contribute to these important attempts to move debates around feminism and motherhood on from matrophobia and notions of essentialism to a recognition of constructive diversity and common grounds.

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This special issue forms part of re-energised feminist efforts to engage with motherhood, mothers and mothering in both popular culture and academia.[1] In her article, "Looking Back 2018: Motherhood and Other Stories" for the online magazine Frieze, commentator Carmen Winant describes the rising preoccupation with motherhood and mothers' experiences in popular culture. She says of 2018 that it was, 'a remarkable year for texts on [motherhood], so long ghettoised by artists and writers alike' (Winant, 2018). Winant describes the significance of reading these books on mothers as a shock of recognition – 'like holding up a mirror to a face that didn't know it had a reflection' (Winant, 2018). Similarly, "Is Motherhood the Unfinished Work of Feminism?", Amy Westervelt's eloquent 2018 article in *The Guardian,* also highlights the currency of motherhood as a feminist issue. Westervelt argues that a dichotomy has arisen, between the proliferation of material on motherhood and mothers' experience, and the reluctance shown by some feminist critics to include examinations of motherhood in discussions of the fourth wave, leading to the perception that 'discussion of motherhood in feminist theory is […] *verboten*' (Westervelt, 2018). Westervelt's argument that motherhood is seen as such a problematic issue by some feminist critics that it is best avoided or glossed over in debates can be seen in some recent publications on fourth-wave feminism which minimise discussions of motherhood (see for example Cochrane, 2013; Frances-White, 2018). However, in affirming the validity of feminist engagement with motherhood, Westervelt adds that, "What some theorists forget […] is that ideas and expectations around mothering impact all women, whether they have children or not" (Westervelt, 2018). This point is central to discussions in this special issue; it marks a significant shift in thinking and takes the debate around motherhood beyond biological essence and heterosexual mothers, to suggest that all women are impacted by social and cultural constructions and expectations of mothers whether they are mothers or not, and whether they are cisgender or not. These important changes in critical emphasis have helped move debates around motherhood, and important shifts in motherhood studies are changing the focus of feminist debates 'from noun to verb' (O'Reilly, 2010: 379) (see also Rye et. al., 2017). These and other questions are examined in this special issue of *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, which is dedicated to the critical analysis of contemporary mothering and its glocal representations and manifestations. In this interdisciplinary special issue, critics and scholars from a wide range of academic fields contribute to these important debates through a series of feminist encounters with motherhood, offering original and compelling examinations of how we might rethink, revise and re-present mothers, mothering and feminism in the 21st century.

Several of the articles in this special issue explore topics or case studies related to, broadly speaking, the politics of feminist engagements with mothering, mothers and motherhood in popular culture and representation. In her 2014 book, *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, the critic Margaret Gibson argues that in order to engage with motherhood, feminist scholars and commentators have needed inclusive and wide-ranging critical approaches which break down the boundaries between popular culture and the academy. She puts it thus: "[i]n taking motherhood seriously, scholars of motherhood and mothering have already challenged the very divisions between 'high theory', 'low theory', and real life" (Gibson, 2018: 9). In this special issue, several articles examine the relationship between popular cultural representations of mothers and feminism. Lisa Tsaliki's article, "The Exoticisation of Motherhood: The Body Politics of Pregnant Femininity through the Lens of Celebrity Motherhood," reflects feminism's concern with popular cultural representations of mothers and motherhood. Using public figures such as Kim Kardashian and Beyoncé as case studies for her investigation into the politics of representation, Tsaliki contextualises their 'celebrity motherhood' within racial, sexual, and postfeminist critical discussions. Tsaliki argues that the public nature of these women's embodiment and experience of motherhood adds an educational and pedagogical dimension to their identities as mothers. In her article "Glocalised Motherhood: Sociality and Affect in Migrant Mothers' Online Communities," Leah Williams Veazey explores the important role and function of online communities for migrant mothers in Australia. Drawing on analysis of interviews with mothers from a range of ethnic groups and migrant communities, Veazey looks at the extent to which online communities can bridge the gap/rupture experienced by migrant mothers. These articles thus demonstrate how feminist analyses highlight intersecting categories of oppression in representations of mothers and motherhood in contemporary social media and popular culture.

Unsurprisingly, a number of articles in this special issue concern themselves with the politics of representation, and investigate the significance of feminist theory in analysing maternal portrayals in various art forms. This preoccupation with art and representation can also be seen in Adalgisa Giorgio, Gill Rye, Victoria Browne, Emily Jeremiah, and Abigail Lee Six's (2017) edited book *Motherhood in Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Europe* which examines recent debates and explorations of motherhood and its representation. The literary, filmic and artistic representations of mothers and mothering encountered in this issue's articles are multi-dimensional and complex, and open to a variety of meanings and interpretations (see also Rye et.al, 8). In their article, "Curating 'Creative Dystocia': Exhibiting the Relationship between Artists, Identity and Motherhood in Twenty-first Century Australian Art," Courtney Pedersen and Rachael Haynes explore the complexities and links between artists,

[1] These renewed efforts have also been noted by Rye et.al., in their insightful essay collection *Motherhood in Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Europe* (2017)

artwork, identities and motherhood. In their article, Pedersen and Haynes examine the relationship between 21st century feminism and motherhood, arguing that contemporary artists are keen to avoid the essentialism associated with some second-wave feminist art, instead opening the subject of mothering up to diverse and innovative investigations, representations and audiences. Examining visual and artistic representations of mothers and mothering, Clare Nicholson explores the impact of medical drawings and models on cultural understandings of mothers, maternal bodies, in light of social class and other life circumstances. Her article, "Speculative Obstetric Models: Remaking Historical Anatomical Models to Visualise Epigenetic Agency," explores the possibilities engendered through innovative representational strategies for challenging normative institutional constructions of motherhood and corporeality through new ways of visualisation. Feminist engagements with motherhood have also interrogated affective dimensions in relation to representation and cultural norms and expectations of mothers. On Mother's Day 2019 (31st March), BBC Radio4 offered a feature by historian Professor Emma Griffin, entitled An Alternative History of Mothering (Griffin, 2019). The programme explored the widely held notion that maternal love is natural. Relating the clichés regularly circulated on Mother's Day, Griffin turns to history to debunk what she calls 'the motherhood myth', a set of feelings and behaviours defined as essential to mothers and according to which all women are judged. These persistent ideas about and constructions of mothers continue to impact on women and 21stC feminism's engagement with motherhood, as several articles in this special issue illustrate. In her article, "Enacting Motherhood Online: How Facebook and Mommy Blogs Reinforce White Ideologies of the New Momism", Charity L. Gibson examines the opportunities provided by social media and blogs for mothers to express themselves, but also cautions against the reaffirmation of patriarchal ideology through such representations. Charity L. Gibson's article investigates the significance of the 'momosphere' in constructing maternal identities and modes of self-representation. Through analysis of the 'momosphere' and the mothering styles depicted through these channels, Gibson investigates the extent to which online identities have the potential to interrogate or deconstruct dominant ideological constructions of maternal identities. Amanda Konkle's article, "Mothering by the Book: Horror and Maternal Ambivalence in *The Babadook* (2014)," explores representations of horror and maternal ambivalence in the 2014 film *The Babadook*. Konkle's incisive reading of the film focuses on the harmful effects of the neoliberal ideology of 'intensive mothering' vis-à-vis the blurring of boundaries between mother and child in attachment parenting. These articles' discussions of the politics of representing mothers present compelling arguments for the necessity of reimagining motherhood.

Several articles in this special issue engage with important aspects of feminism and motherhood from global perspectives, challenging issues such as inequality between the West and the Global South and East, transnational surrogacy and adoption, race/ethnicity, migration, to name but a few. Black and postcolonial feminist critics have foregrounded the various inequities between the West and the Global South, arguing that, 'examining motherhood as if there is a universal maternal subject who is oppressed by the institution of motherhood in homogenous ways is problematic' (Mack, 2018). Amber E. Kinser (2010: 161) adds that: "Expectations for what mothering should look like also are often based on middle-class or upper-middle-class life for white people." Wendy Chavkin draws attention to the complications and complexities of global motherhood – 'a world in flux about the most intimate of human connections, a world wide open to a host of possibilities for reconfiguring family and parenthood, and perhaps of liberating women from the constraints of reproductive biology' (Chavkin, 2010: 3). Research on feminism and motherhood in relation to reproductive rights, gestational surrogacy and adoption problematised by transnational relations and global inequality is one of the subjects featured in this special issue. In their article, "The Role of Culture in Negotiating Reproductive Rights of Diaspora Heterosexual Nigerian Women," Ezinne Lynda Anizoba and Samantha Davis examine the contexts and relationships which maintain specific cultural practices cultural practices that shape and influence the reproductive rights of Nigerian women in Britain. The contradictions between Nigerian women's rights in Nigeria and those of Nigerian diaspora women are analysed, in order to interrogate the enduring gendered social hierarchy that continues to affect Nigerian women in Britain in regards to their reproductive rights. Through the analysis of written memoirs, Eva-Sabine Zehelein's article, ""India is our Twins' Motherland:" Transnational Cross-Racial Gestational Surrogacy and the Maternal Body in "IP Memoirs,"" investigates the systemic inequities and other issues associated with affluent women from the global north using gestational hosts (surrogate mothers) from the global south. Zehelein's study examines the postcolonial and feminist contexts for these representations of mothering identities and their problematic relationship to global inequity.

Investigations of global motherhood and crime furthermore challenge gender stereotypes and representations of criminality in relation to mothers as victims and perpetrators. In her article, "How Could a Mother Do That to Her Children?": Filicide and Maternal Ambivalence in Croatian Media and Online Discourse", Barbara Pleić Tomić investigates representations of filicide in Croatian popular print and online media such as internet forums. Through analysis of the contradictory representations of mothers in these texts, Tomić highlights the constructions of maternal monstrosity and otherness generated by those texts through her analysis of depictions of filicide, maternal agency and violence. The significance of popular culture in resisting and combatting racialised state violence against

marginalised groups in the USA is the topic of Michelle Hite's article "Beyoncé, Black Motherhood, and the Return of Wrenching Times." Hite explores Beyoncé's role in reclaiming black parenting and overcoming police violence against and killing of black children, thus recuperating and empowering black mothers. Such important interventions from global and culturally marginal feminisms draw attention to the ways in which the patriarchal institution of motherhood is used to underpin race and gender inequities, and the role and function of representation in resisting that dominance (Mack, 2018).

A focus on global motherhood draws attention to inequality in work and employment contexts, issues which are central to feminism. Critic Petra Bueskens argues that motherhood, rather than gender, is the key differentiating factor between men and women causing pay inequality, lack of opportunities, and lack of career progression (Bueskens, 2018). Several of the articles in this special issue explore connections between motherhood, class, race, global locations, inequity and work, through a feminist lens. Drawing on the findings from a 2016-7 research project undertaken by the Women's Studies and Development Centre, University of Delhi, India Ridhima Tewari and Manjeet Bhatia's article, "Mothers at the Malls: A Study of Glocal Aspirations and Mothering from Delhi," explores the class inequities and complexities confronting mothers who work and shop in the mall, and the contradictions between private domains and aspirational globalisation. These issues are vital to feminism, because, as Chavkin points out, 'the association of women with biologic and social reproduction remains the determinative factor underlying job segregation by gender and the gender wage gap in developed economies; and is still associated with female mortality and deprivation in developing ones' (Chavkin 2010:4). Dena Aufseeser's article, "Mothering in the Context of Poverty: Disciplining Peruvian Mothers through Children's Rights," examines Peruvian class contexts and discourses, and their implications for the construction and definition of motherhood and social class. Aufseeser focuses on the construction of the perception of 'bad' mothering caused by the cultural tradition of children working alongside adults. Gina Crivello, Jo Boyden and Alula Pankhurst's article "'Motherhood in Childhood': Generational Change in Ethiopia" provides a compelling analysis of the changing role and function of motherhood in the lives of girls and young women in Ethiopia, through a fifteen-year study of a group of young females living in poverty. Marriage and motherhood in childhood was regarded as the norm in previous generations, and the conflict between past expectations and present-day norms for girls continues to complicate the picture. This research gives a detailed insight into the changing priorities and options regarding motherhood for girls and women in the global south, demonstrating how motherhood scholarship can throw new light on important feminist questions regarding gender inequality and privilege.

Feminist debates around gender, sexuality and mothering are a vital point of engagement in several articles and features in this special issue, and have also been examined in the news media. Ashley Noel Mack defines the term motherhood as 'both a complex set of experiences individuals embody and a symbolic social institution that has been used to regulate human behavior through cultural norms and social scripts that are discursively struggled over across history' (2018, n.p.) (see also O'Reilly 2016; Bueskens, 2018). The difficulty of navigating the contradictions between these two points has been central to feminism's engagement with motherhood since the second wave, as is the continued questioning of social and cultural stereotypes in light of the experiences and realities of non-binary and lesbian mothers. This work is all the more important, since popular cultural constructions of mothering and motherwork remain stubbornly normative, as a recent example illustrates. In March 2019, the ITV television programme *Good Morning Britain* featured a discussion of whether men can be mothers with critic Amy Nickell. In the programme, Nickell was mocked by the presenter who insisted that mothering can only be done by women, whereas Nickell made the point that men can and do perform mothering work and assume mothering roles. The ensuing argument, and the reactionary attitudes espoused by the presenter during the argument, reflect Kinser's assertion that:

> An image of a heterosexual, two-parent household that is wholly financially independent and has one parent whose time and energy are available for home care and child rearing still shapes what "gets to count" as a family in social and institutional policy. (Kinser, 2010: 161)

The fact that the *Good Morning Britain* debate centred on essentialism versus social conditioning demonstrates why further critical work on decolonising mothers and motherhood is so pertinent for 21st century feminists. Recent feminist debates support these efforts. Scholar Andrea O'Reilly argues that the category of mother is distinct from the category of woman, and that the marginalisation and oppression mothers face is caused by their social and psychological work as mothers. In other words, feminist criticism needs to separate the experience and practice of mothering from the identity of the mother (O'Reilly, 2016).

Other recent aspects of popular debate highlight feminist problematisations of mothering, gender, and sexualities. In January 2019, American-based commentator and executive producer of the parenting podcast, The Longest Shortest Time, Hillary Frank, produced a list of what she considered to be the eight most pertinent and important books on motherhood. In compiling the list, Frank consulted journalist Amy Westervelt who commented on the need for feminist discussions of motherhood to expand parameters and question normative

assumptions. Westervelt argues that, 'like so much of feminism in general, discussions about motherhood in America far too often center straight, cis-gendered, white, middle-class women, a fact that […] perpetuates the marginalization of other types of mothers' (cited in Frank, 2019). The need to question and resist dominant constructions of motherhood and to explore multiple dimensions of mothering, including representations and experiences of non-binary and lesbian mothers, is examined in detail in this special issue. Mollie Ann Kervick's article, "Embracing Maternal Eroticism: Queer Experiences of Pleasure in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*," explores Maggie Nelson's 2015 novel *The Argonauts*, focusing on the erotics of motherhood, and the significance of sexualities for mothering and mothers. Drawing on Audre Lorde's discussions of the erotic, Kervick argues that, through its representations of maternal sexuality, *The Argonauts* seeks to transgress patriarchal containment of mothers to the private sphere. Margaret F. Gibson's 2014 book *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* explores the opportunities as well as challenges of opening up motherhood to disruption, thereby destabilising normative mainstream dominant discourses and social/cultural institutions. Gibson points out that a number of works have been published in recent years focusing on queer pregnancy, adoption and family-building – these works often straddle genres, between popular, literary, autoethnographical, academic – in order to explore alternate dimensions of mothering (2014: 7). She demonstrates that queering, rather than being an individual undertaking, also involves relationships, communities, and definitions, and that challenges to normativity can take a number of different forms. Gibson argues that motherhood as a term and a category can be profoundly destabilised and problematised by queering – 'pulled outside of expectation' (Gibson, 2014: 1-2). Thus, Gibson concludes, 'queering motherhood becomes a truly expansive project, an endeavor that might profoundly destabilise existing social relations, institutions, and discourses' (2014:2). I was delighted to have the opportunity to interview Róisín Ryan-Flood about her work on lesbian motherhood and concepts of kinship. Ryan-Flood's 2009 book *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship* argues for a new way of looking at lesbian motherhood which sees it as part of a continuum of kinship relations, rather than a transgression of heteronormative definitions and relationships. Using specific case studies and comparative analytical methods, Ryan-Flood's critical engagement with motherhood studies contributes new and important dimensions to feminist debates. This interview with Róisín Ryan-Flood explores her academic research into lesbian motherhood and issues around family construction and social/cultural change, taking her book as its starting-point for a discussion of diverse mothers, lesbian and non-binary mothers in the context of ideas about and discussions around kinship and its changing definitions. Gibson has made the important point that both political debates and academic literature frequently marginalise or leave out those whose lives do not conform to mainstream norms and expectations (Gibson, 2010:4). However, as we see in the articles presented in this special issue, popular culture and literature play a vital role in representing non-binary, lesbian and queer mothering.

In this special issue, the terms motherhood, mothering, and mother are used interchangeably, recognising the benefits of avoiding a single, potentially reductive term, and instead opening debates and investigations up to multi-dimensionality (see also Rye, G., Browne, V., Giorgio, A., Jeremiah, E., Six, A.E., 2017, who utilise a similar approach to motherhood terminology). As Andrea Liss (2004: 25) states,

> Feminists today no longer need to accommodate themselves to divisionist debates that create an either/or dogmatism between feminist and mother. Indeed, if the mother is no longer placed in opposition to feminism, that is, held in contempt of feminism, a redefined field of possibilities opens up to cultural theory, art history, art practice and the lived material experiences of women for rethinking the representation of motherhood as more than a sign of codified femininity or as a muted allegory.

The special issue thus presents a number of feminist encounters with mothering, motherhood, and mothers which refute the association of gender essentialism with mothering (O'Reilly, 2016) and underline the continued significance of scholarship on motherhood (Gibson, 2014: 7) as a "redefined field of possibilities" (Liss, 2004: 25). To echo Amy Westervelt's question as to whether motherhood is the unfinished work of feminism: the diversity of feminist voices and perspectives in this special issue suggest that, far from being *verboten*, the subjects of mothering and motherhood are compellingly and keenly engaged with. Reaching out across the divide, the investigations in this special issue engender constructive and productive encounters between 21st century feminism and motherhood.

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Interview

Interview with Róisín Ryan-Flood

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First of all, thank you, Róisín, for generously sharing your ideas and thoughts on the subject of 21st century feminism and lesbian motherhood.

Róisín is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Director of the Centre for Intimate and Sexual Citizenship (CISC) at the University of Essex. Her research interests include gender, sexuality, citizenship, kinship and migration and she has published widely in these areas. She also has a longstanding interest in feminist epistemology and methodology. Her book *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship* was published by Palgrave in 2009 and remains the only monograph to explore lesbian parenting in a comparative context. She is co-editor of *Silence and Secrecy in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections* (Routledge, 2009) and *Transnationalising Reproduction: Third Party Conception in a Globalised World* (Routledge, 2018). She has been co-editor of the journal *Sexualities: Studies in Culture and Society* (Sage) since 2012. She is currently working on a monograph about gender and intimacy in the digital era.

Motherhood has presented feminist critics and scholars with complex questions surrounding agency and identity. In her 2013 book, *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*, the critic Shelley M. Park comments on these questions, stating that,

> The family is a point at which the axes of feminism, postcolonialism and queer theory frequently diverge. During the 1970s and 1980s, feminists critiqued the family as a site of patriarchal oppression. In response, women of color and critical race theorists pointed out that families of color were a critically important site of resistance to racism and colonization. As feminism began to develop more intersectional analyses of gender as inflected by race, class, nation (and other variables), more nuanced analyses of the family slowly began to emerge, resulting in what is now a prolific field of motherhood studies that provides one important (if albeit still underdeveloped) point of contact for postcolonial and feminist theorists. (Park, 2013:17)

In this Feminist Encounters special issue, we are investigating the relationship between feminism and 21st Century motherhood. This includes examining diverse family configurations, evolving feminist positions, and discussions in relation to these important topics.

Charlotte Beyer: Róisín, I'd like to start by discussing your book on lesbian motherhood. It is a really compelling book which raises pertinent questions in relation to motherhood, parenthood and sexuality, some of which are echoed in the articles featured in this special issue.

What are the main themes and questions you investigated in your book *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship*?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: The book explored the experiences of lesbians who have children after coming out, in the context of an openly lesbian lifestyle. While lesbians have always been mothers, previous generations typically became mothers in the context of a heterosexual relationship or encounter and came out subsequently. There is now a well-established 'lesbian and gay baby boom' or 'gayby boom'. My book was one of the first monographs to look at this group. I have long been interested in questions of gender, sexuality and citizenship. Lesbian motherhood seemed like an interesting topic to explore those intersections and reflected my wider interests in gender, kinship and subjectivity. When I began reading on the topic, I was struck by how many studies focused on the children in these families, treating lesbian parents as a 'needs satisfying other', in a way that completely obscured

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lesbian parents' own subjectivities and experiences. I was curious about how this relatively new demographic – lesbians who have children after coming out – understand their experiences. How did they narrate their reproductive decision making, including choices about donors? What was it like to be a lesbian in fertility and maternity care contexts? Or at the school gate? How did lesbian parents navigate the everyday spaces of parenting? What about the experiences of couples who have children together – how is biological 'difference' understood? Was it a power imbalance in lesbian couples where one woman was the biological (and legal) mother and the other was not? How are these experiences mediated by sexual citizenship and state contexts? Finally, I was also interested in negotiations of shared care in these families and how this was navigated in same sex relationships.

The book was also the first to explore lesbian motherhood in a comparative context, drawing on my comparative research in two European countries, Sweden and Ireland. At the time they seemed to be very different in relation to LGBT rights. Sweden had a reputation for social progressiveness and was one of the first countries to introduce legal recognition of same sex partnerships in the form of registered partnerships in 1995. Yet that same legislation expressly prohibited all parenting possibilities for lesbian and gay people, including access to adoption, assisted reproduction and fostering. So you could have your relationship with your same sex partner recognised by law, but there were clear prohibitions on lesbian and gay parenting. This subsequently became a key terrain for queer equality rights and a high-profile issue in a Swedish context. In contrast, there was no public discussion of lesbian and gay parenting in Ireland or even same sex partnership rights. However, one private clinic advertised their donor insemination services to lesbian women. The invisibility of lesbian parents in Ireland meant that they were less regulated and the private sector could offer opportunities that were not available to their Swedish counterparts. Local health boards in Ireland also placed adverts for foster carers in LGBT publications. This was not because they were strong advocates of LGBT rights, but rather the chronic shortage of foster carers meant they had to expand their criteria. So, while the assumption was that lesbian parents would have an easier time in Sweden than in Ireland, the reality was more complex when you looked at the situation more closely. I was interested to see how these two contrasting social contexts affected lesbian women's reproductive choices and experiences.

I am a strong believer in and advocate of original research on queer lives in diverse geographical contexts. There is still so much that we don't know about queer histories and experiences. This is a source of constant frustration to me but also ignites my passion for my work. The lack of knowledge about so many queer lives is a reflection of its marginalisation by mainstream scholars and sends a message that queer lives don't matter, or matter less. At a time when we are seeing many positive changes in relation to sexual citizenship in many parts of the globe – including in relation to lesbian parenting – it is more imperative, not less, that we document queer lives. These histories risk being lost forever if they are not recorded.

Charlotte Beyer: I think these topics and problems that you've just outlined are incredibly important. They have rarely been looked at in this way before, particular with regards to the specific Irish and Swedish case studies you examine. As a Danish woman myself, I found your discussion of Swedish lesbian motherhood and Scandinavian contexts in general really fascinating. The feminist work of documenting lives and histories is an ongoing effort, and I think you are right to highlight the need for continued effort to research and discuss sexual citizenship.

What are the shortcomings and blind spots in feminist debates around mothers and parenthood as you see them?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: Well, firstly I think there is lots of amazing work on motherhood. Much early feminist work in this field was critical of the prevailing narratives of motherhood, which implied that women should seek sole satisfaction and subjecthood through mothering. (I would argue that to a considerable extent this remains a part of popular culture discourses of motherhood today!). Understandably, feminists rejected this narrative, which obscured women's frustrations around motherhood and limited their possibilities. However, feminists also highlighted the fact that although they loved their children, they hated the constraining circumstances of maternal roles that relegated women to the home. Black feminists and others importantly highlighted the significance of motherhood in terms of community and resistance. Later feminist work also pointed out the pleasures that women derived from maternity, without idealising it. So feminist debates about motherhood have always been situated within the context and history within which they take place. It has been difficult and ground-breaking for feminists to highlight the frustrations of conventional motherhood expectations.

The second key terrain of motherhood literature concerns rights regarding reproductive control but also the conditions within which motherhood takes place. It is still the case that state subsidised childcare is far from a reality in most countries for example. Feminists are still fighting for workplaces to treat care responsibilities as something that employers should accommodate rather than assume that they should behave as if they don't have any. I think much of today's work on motherhood still addresses many of the traditional concerns about managing

the balance of work and care. This is still seen as something that affects women more than men, because of the unequal division of care labour and because of sexist assumptions in the workplace about mothers as employees.

Both of these literatures reflect interconnecting concerns about the lived realities of parenting. I don't see this as a blind spot, but I do see it as a reflection of the fact that women have a long, long way to go to achieve equality! Here we are in 2019 and still arguing for basic rights like subsidised childcare and a degree of flexible working. The world has changed and women are now present in paid employment in ever greater numbers after having children. Yet the expectation is still that women should change, and not the workplace. It is still expected that both women and men should behave as if they are devoid of care responsibilities.

It is also the case that heterosexual women are often pitied if they do not have children, but also under pressure to conform to particular motherhood norms if they do. I would argue that openly lesbian women are under less pressure to have children. Until recently it was assumed that being lesbian meant that you wouldn't become a mother, but now that even Jodie Foster has come out as a lesbian mom it is no longer seen as a 'contradiction in terms', which is how someone described it when I told them my research topic many years ago. I think that lesbians have to both fight more to become mothers, but also face more acceptance if they choose *not* to, compared to heterosexual women.

The third area of motherhood literature addresses the physical realities of motherhood. Some of this work overlaps with the first two categories – breastfeeding in the workplace for example. It is still the case that women's bodies are treated as outside the norm and as problematic or offensive – witness our cultural silence around menstruation and menopause for example. Any discursive intervention that challenges that and addresses women's experiences, is therefore inherently valuable.

I particularly welcome some of the recent work on donor conception families that explores the experiences of donors, and donor conceived people and their parents. This is a fascinating field that continues to require more attention. It applies to many queer families, but not exclusively so – many heterosexual parent families are created through donor conception.

So on the one hand, I think that the emphasis on these areas in most motherhood research, is important and necessary. On the other hand, I think it would also be helpful to look beyond this in terms of social theory and empirical work. In my book, in exploring the experiences of queer mothers, I considered what it was like to inhabit a profoundly entrenched social norm in a different way. I wanted to see how they understood their experiences and came to make the choices they had. What was it like for them, to become a parent outside of heterosexuality? The experiences of minorities are always so marginalised in research and assumed to be irrelevant to everyone else, yet we have so much to learn from them. This is something that I feel very strongly about. I am currently writing a book chapter called 'Queer Lives Matter' that expands on this point – the epistemological and ontological importance of queer lives for wider social research, in a context where they are increasingly seen to matter politically on some level, but less so in social research.

Charlotte Beyer: In your book you make the compelling point that "academic research on lesbian and gay parent families has largely centred around questions of sameness and difference – to what extent these families are either 'ordinary' or 'unique'". This point links back to the issues you touched on earlier, regarding the significance of documenting marginalised and/or unreported perspectives in relation to sexual citizenship, including lesbian motherhood.

Could you say a bit more about this issue, and the possibilities offered in your book for resisting binaries such as 'ordinary' and 'unique'?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: When I first developed an interest in this field, I was taken aback to discover that lesbian (and gay) parent families were always, always considered in terms of their relationship to so-called norms. The overwhelming emphasis in research was on the impact of their parents' sexuality on the children. This was realised in social research that emphasised the children's inherent sameness compared to their peers raised by heterosexual parents. There was a general obsession with how these children turned out – were they more likely to be gay themselves? (No). Was being a lesbian or gay person somehow incompatible with being an effective parent? (No). These questions reflect very homophobic assumptions of course about the inherent 'wrongness' of being queer and having children at all. Nonetheless, this focus on developmental outcomes for children has been really important in challenging homophobic assumptions in the courts. It used to be the case that if you came out as gay you would automatically lose custody of your children. In many parts of the world, this hasn't changed, but certainly things have improved dramatically in the UK for example. Legislative change that facilitates access to assisted reproduction by lesbians is another positive result that stems partly from this research. So while I find it frustrating that so often research has been focused on refuting homophobic assumptions, I understand that it has been necessary and believe that we owe a debt to those researchers.

Another trend that emerged was one that emphasised positive differences. This is an important development, because for so long difference was assumed to be inherently negative in relation to these families. Stacey & Biblarz (2001) made an important epistemological point when they highlighted how researchers assumed that any difference on the part of lesbian and gay parents would be bad, so they emphasised their overwhelming sameness to heterosexual parents and did not consider any possibility of positive differences. Yet authors highlighted how the children of lesbian and gay parents may see themselves as more open minded and aware of diversity in a positive way for example. Gill Dunne's (1998) work suggested that lesbians share childcare and domestic labour more equitably and come up with creative new ways to achieve this. These are important findings. Yet inevitably, a presentation of lesbian and gay parent families as inherently different in a positive way, just creates an essentialist norm that again not everyone will live up to. It also means that these families are judged differently and must conform to a higher standard in order to be accepted. Ultimately, any essentialist claims of good or bad parenting based solely on sexual identity – whether heterosexual or gay – is nonsense. Good and bad parents are found in every social group. Being straight or gay does not predispose you to performing better or worse parenting practices. However, homophobic assumptions suggest that heterosexuals are better parents and that queers should not parent at all. So the emphasis in theory and research on ways in which queer parents can do parenting 'well' or 'better', is understandable. It represents a challenge to constructions of a queer identity and parenting as inherently incompatible. I also think this rush to embrace positive difference, echoes what Sally R. Munt (1998) refers to as the 'pride/shame' dichotomy that haunts queer subjectivities and experience. The experience of being despised as Other means that people resist by refuting that position of shame and proclaim a positive sense of their identity. To me, this was echoed in some of the sameness/difference debates that haunt queer parenting research.

When anything is understood as 'different', it is always considered in relation to its otherness. But research that looks at these families solely in terms of the extent to which they are either the same as, or different from, a heteronormative standard (which many heterosexual parent families do not conform to either), is inevitably limiting. We have to be free to look at these families in all their complexity. To me, this is an important development that allows us to go beyond questions of how queer parents 'perform' and their children develop and opens up much more interesting questions about wider configurations of kinship, gender, normativity, queerness, and citizenship.

It is this effort to engage with questions beyond a binary opposition of sameness and difference that were at the heart of my book. So I asked about the experiences of co-parents and how differences in relation to biological parenthood were experienced and enacted within these families. How did they navigate sometimes powerful notions of inequality – for example where only one parent is recognised legally in relation to the child she raises equally from birth with her partner. I explored how social norms were experienced and engaged with within these families, through their everyday experiences.

Charlotte Beyer: The critic Shelley M. Park in her book *Mothering queerly, Queering Motherhood*, asks "What does it mean to mother queerly? And how might such practices […] queer the study of motherhood?" These questions got me thinking about the symbolic and real aspects of motherhood and its representations.

Do debates around what constitutes a 'real mother' over-focus on biological aspects such as pregnancy, giving birth, breastfeeding?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: I think this is an important question. There are two things I would like to say about this. Firstly, queer theory has always emphasised transgression and challenging normativity. There is a strand of queer theory that is sceptical of what is called 'the family turn' in studies of LGBTQI lives. It sees the emphasis in research on the turn to formal recognition of same sex relationships through marriage or civil partnership and the 'gayby boom' as problematic, because it is concerned with assimilation, or homonormativity, whereby there is a new construction of the 'good gay' who is typically white, in a stable monogamous relationship and implicit in conventional modes of capitalism. While I share a critique of homonormativity, I think it is problematic to assume that all lesbian and gay parents are homonormative, or to simply assess to what extent they are or not. As I have pointed out in my work, it creates a binary between the revolutionary queer and the heteronormative mother, with lesbian moms stuck in the middle and apparently inhabiting neither space. Yet being a lesbian mother can be a profoundly queer experience. Challenging heteronormativity at every stage of becoming a parent – whether at the fertility clinic or adoption process, at the hospital, nursery and school – is a part of that experience. As a lesbian parent, you have to stand up for your family as a way of protecting your child against ridicule and homophobia directed at their family. This means coming out about your family form so that your child doesn't have to. That can certainly be experienced as a queering of everyday spaces in a productive way.

Secondly, the ability to transgress can be a signifier of privilege. In my research, this was often classed. Middle class parents were able to inhabit space as queer parents more easily, because they could be 'rich eccentrics', or access a liberal enclave through gentrification and affluence. So as I have argued in my book, queer theory is often

unwittingly endorsing of queer privilege through the emphasis on transgression. Dismissing lesbian parents as 'not queer enough', or simply assimilating to homonormativity or heteronormative social forms, overlooks the complexities of their experiences and the constraints faced by many.

Finally, it is the case that lesbian parents are usually both queer and normative in complex ways. But rather than resort to a binary understanding of their lives, I think we need to address what their experiences reveal about wider social norms and build new theories that way. So once again, we're back to the criticism of the binary that inhabits so much work on these families. Therefore, while I welcome Parks' question about how to mother queerly, I think this cannot be the only way in which these families are of interest. Otherwise, they are set up to fail as either too assimilative and not queer enough, or acceptable only to the extent to which they performatively produce new queer relationalities that conform to a particular queer standard. Mostly, these are just parents trying to juggle care and work and raise their children in a world that is still often hostile. But this does not mean that the question of what it is to mother 'queerly' is redundant, just that it should not be the only yardstick by which these families are measured. I think in my work I highlighted many interesting and provocative moments in queering kinship that emerged from lesbian parents' narratives. So for example, lesbian parents talking about how they saw the wider gay community as a positive resource for challenging gender norms seemed profoundly queer to me.

In terms of defining motherhood, I think that on the one hand, anti-essentialist thinking – to which I subscribe! – challenges the idea that there is one way of experiencing and understanding biological motherhood. We know for example that while some women plan and welcome parenthood, many women find themselves in situations where they do not. I think that feminist work has been important in challenging normative assumptions about what a mother is and should be. In my own work, I presented cases of unplanned motherhood among my participants – a young lesbian who gave birth to a child conceived through rape, and another self-identified lesbian who had a consensual one night stand with a man and then had a child as a result. Their experiences of motherhood were affected by the unplanned nature of it, although both did bond with their children eventually. It was also the case that co-parents felt a tremendous bond and connection with the children that they had no biological or genetic tie to. This is of course unsurprising as it is something that we know from adoptive parents for example. People create family bonds with those whom they have no genetic connection. This has long been established as a queer family practice, as Weston (1991) pointed out in her classic work on 'families we choose'. But it is not exclusive to queers, as adoptive parents have long illustrated. Weston's work highlighted queer creativity in this regard – as many LGBTQI people experience rejection or distancing from their families of origin, they create new kinship communities based on love or friendship – families of choice. This notion of chosen kin has continued to be an important insight in wider family and kinship studies.

My research with Swedish lesbian parents also highlighted the history of camaraderie and kinship between lesbians and gay men. Many Swedish participants chose to co-parent with men, usually a gay male friend or couple. This reflected a wider Swedish cultural norm of participatory fatherhood, whereby men are expected to be involved parents rather than more removed breadwinners for example. This social norm became incorporated into Swedish lesbians' reproductive narratives, as they chose to have involved donors. Swedish participants often talked about the queer community as a positive resource for progressive gender norms – with men who cooked and cleaned, and women who fixed cars and did DIY. They saw this as beneficial to children, who would experience a range of positive gender role models and grow up believing that women and men did not have to conform to traditional gender norms.

Irish women were confident in their ability to create loving supportive families without involved donors. While lesbians in both countries expressed a preference for a known donor – often referring to adopted children's need to know their biological origins - they achieved this differently. So in Ireland, lesbian parents chose to have a friend or acquaintance as a donor so that they could convey his identity to a child when they were grown up, but he was rarely an involved parent and in fact often his identity was kept secret (although would be disclosed to the child when they were of age). This dramatic cross-national difference represented wider cultural norms about gender and parenting. The fact that this was realised in lesbian women's reproductive choices was a surprise to me, as nothing had been written about this before. To me, this remains an important finding because it shows how lesbians are not simply Other, but very much a product of the cultures and citizenship contexts in which they live. Too often in social theory and empirical research, queer lives are treated as interesting only in relation to their Otherness. We forget how much queers are also a product of particular cultures and societies and both inhabit and repudiate wider social norms.

Charlotte Beyer: In your book you make the powerful assertion that "lesbian mothers often occupy an uncomfortable place in academic work, torn between the pressure to be 'normal' in order to challenge homophobic critics, and the subversive imperative of queer theory." The issue of conformity in relation to sexual citizenship and lesbian motherhood still looms large, both in individual lives and on a collective level.

Could you expand on the important point you made, regarding the "uncomfortable place" occupied by lesbian mothers?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: While there have been important changes in relation to family courts in some countries, it would be a mistake to assume that there is now full equality and that lesbian and gay parents do not face particular challenges. There is still enormous injustice and inequality in terms of ignorance that these families exist, as well as outright homophobia. Recent protests in the UK around incorporating a mild recognition that LGBT people exist in relation to sexuality and relationships education illustrates this. So work that continues to emphasise that the children within these families are no different in terms of development outcomes remains important. That is why I refuse to dismiss this work as simply a response to homophobia. It has made a difference and we owe it a debt, even though I think that the question – to what extent these children and families are the same as or different from a heteronormative family model - is problematic at best and downright homophobic and offensive at worst.

The lived experiences of these families indicate that it takes strength and courage to assert your identity and protect your child. It is not as simple as just assimilating. As I highlighted in my book, lesbian parents often went to great lengths to support their child and ensure that teachers and other parents knew about their family form so that the child did not have to 'come out' about it. A recurrent theme was having to educate well intentioned nursery and school staff about the needs of their particular families. I would say that this remains the case today. As I noted earlier, the ability to transgress is often a sign of privilege and much facilitated by particular gender, race and class identities.

Some authors have argued that lesbian and gay parenting is part of a normative impulse in society. Yet they ignore how non-normative it can feel to be a lesbian parent in daily life – at the school gate, or a playgroup for example. However, it is also the case that LGBTQI people can feel the same pull to become a parent through entrenched social norms that construct this as the most meaningful life path.

Charlotte Beyer: Your research in *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship* compares and contrasts attitudes to mothering and parenting among Swedish and Irish lesbian couples.

Could you briefly outline the biggest and/or most striking distinctions and differences you identified among couples from these two countries, and the context behind those differences?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: The biggest cross-national difference definitely centred around ideas about donors and fatherhood. Lesbian parents in both countries usually preferred to have a known donor, because they thought that this would be beneficial to children. The need for some adoptive children to know their origins was often cited in support of this. In the UK, any child born through donor gametes or embryos can track down their donors when they turn 18. This is also the case in Sweden and echoes this argument about the rights of adults to know their biological heritage. It contrasts with countries like Spain, that emphasise secrecy and not disclosing a donor conception as in the best interests of the child. So the point is that these are cultural constructions, rather than pragmatic facts. The ethics around donor conception are complex and involve different sets of rights and actors – donor conceived people, donors and social parents.

But while lesbian parents in Sweden and Ireland preferred a known donor, Irish women were content for him to play a donor role with no involvement. However, Swedish lesbians also expected him to be an involved parent. It was assumed that if a man donated sperm, he would also be an active father. At the time, it was not possible for lesbians to access fertility treatment, including sperm donation, in Sweden. So they had the choice to go to neighbouring Denmark for example, where it was also against the law for doctors to help lesbians with assisted reproduction. However, a Danish midwife got around a loophole in the law and was able to offer sperm donation because she was a midwife, not a doctor. So lots of lesbians from Sweden and Denmark travelled to her clinic for insemination by anonymous Danish donor sperm. One couple I interviewed from Sweden used her services, but opted to import sperm from the Sperm Bank of California (SBC), because it allowed them to use donor identity release sperm, whereby the child could access the donor's identity when they turned eighteen. This shows some of the lengths that these women had to go to in order to create their families in a hugely unsupportive political and social context. Most Swedish lesbian parents however chose to co-parent with a gay male friend or couple who was also an active father. So the children grew up with three or four parents and sets of grandparents from birth.

On a practical level, this kinship arrangement meant that these children were surrounded by extensive family networks. It was also often hugely complicated for the adults involved to navigate! For lesbians, co-parenting with gay men who they may not have known well prior to having a child together presented some difficult challenges. One participant described it as a process of becoming closer to one another over time, unlike in heterosexual parent families where the couple is the starting point. This had some advantages – more people to love and care of a child, personal growth in terms of communication – but also disadvantages. If a couple split up, then a child had to navigate moving between three or even four homes, which was difficult for the child but also the adults

who had less contact due to more shared time. It was also the case that in Swedish law only two parents are formally recognised. So if a lesbian couple co-parented with a gay man or gay male couple, then the non-biological co-parents were very vulnerable in the case of a relationship breakup or death. I interviewed women who experienced these situations and sometimes things were resolved amicably, but sometimes co-parents were marginalised and excluded and felt relatively powerless. This also relates to Butler's (2002) important question: '*Is kinship always already heterosexual*?' I would argue that the construction within the law of families as only consisting of two parents reflects a heteronormative bias that overlooks the lived realities of queer families, at least in a Swedish context.

Charlotte Beyer: Your emphasis on kinship (rather than transgression) in in your book is really interesting, because it presents an alternative model for representing and thinking about parenthood.

Could you explain this idea, in light of some examples from your research?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: The fact that much prevailing work at the time focused solely on developmental outcomes for children, meant that the subjective experiences of lesbian parents themselves were often ignored or overlooked. If lesbian parents were considered, it was always in relation to how they either conformed to or challenged a heteronormative standard. I really wanted to challenge these paradigms and ask different questions about these families. This was because I felt that much of the prevailing work at the time – which was still interesting and important – unwittingly reinforced this binary of sameness and difference. To me, these were simply not what was interesting about these pioneering families. I attempted to redress this balance by asking lesbians about reproductive decision-making, experiences of co-parenting, and the everyday experiences of parenting outside of heteronormativity.

At this point, I also want to highlight how brave and innovative this group was in choosing parenthood at a time when certainly the law and wider society was profoundly unsupportive of them. It took a lot of courage to choose to parent outside of heteronormative family forms. I would argue it still does, although there is certainly a bigger infrastructure in place today and even visible role models in popular culture, which did not exist when I was doing this research.

Moving beyond the binary of transgression/assimilation meant asking different types of questions. I was interested in how lesbians inhabit a cultural norm like motherhood and navigate it in their daily lives. The fact that they were so invisible in popular culture perhaps gave them a certain freedom to be more experimental with their family formation. There was definitely a sense of this being a pioneering group. At times I was awestruck in interviews at how hard these women fought to have their families and to protect their children from homophobia and ignorance.

In focusing on their lived experiences, and how they were situated as sexual citizens, parents and lesbians, it was possible to move beyond binaries to explore the complexity of their narratives in relation to different issues. So it became evident through discourses around choosing donors for example, that lesbians are also situated within wider cultural discourses and social norms. Yet as lesbians, we are so constructed in much academic theory and research as Other, that the ways in which we inhabit (and repudiate) particular social norms is often overlooked. This is an important point, because it means that looking at queer lives teaches us about far more than queer lives! So lesbian reproductive decision making is revealing of wider cultural discourses of fatherhood for example. The fact that Swedish lesbians often chose known donors illuminates how entrenched the notion of participatory fatherhood is within Swedish culture more broadly. Too often, the expectation is that studying queer lives will only reveal insights applicable to queer lives, and that these insights are only interesting in terms of their exceptionalism. This is the reinforcement of Otherness at an epistemological level. I believe that it is important to challenge this and highlight how queer experiences reveal insights that are applicable to wider social theory and research. Otherwise, queerness just becomes ever more marginalised even while we make concrete gains in terms of social rights.

Charlotte Beyer: Shelley M. Park critiques the normative assumption that a child can only have one real mother as the assumption of what she terms 'monomaternalism'. She states that, "what is at stake in our claims about 'real' mothers is the notion that children must have *one and only one* mother. Heteronormative power cannot countenance polymaternal families and practices of childrearing."

This critique seems to me to chime with your work?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: Yes absolutely, I think this is an important and interesting point. As I have mentioned already, the legal framework in Sweden (and elsewhere) only recognises the possibility of two legal parents. Yet the lived reality for many of the children growing up in these families in a Swedish context (and elsewhere) was that they had three or even four parents. Dominant heterornormative discourses of kinship are centrally based around

the 'one mother, one father' family form, even though different types of kinship – including the role of extended families – exist throughout history.

The focus on monomaternalism relates to the role of biological motherhood in culture and normative understandings of kinship. Lesbian couples who co-parented challenged this norm by having two mother figures involved in a child's life from birth. Of course this happens already with step parents for example, but I think that there is something interesting about lesbian couples who parent together because they share parenthood with another woman who is also their intimate partner. This matters, because another way in which lesbians are treated problematically in academic theory and research on these families, is that they are often studied solely in relation to their child's needs and effectively desexualised as a result. Yet their status as erotic subjects co-parenting with their lover is also meaningful. When I embarked on this research, I was curious about the experiences of co-parents – the non birth-giving mother. I anticipated that this might be a sensitive topic among couples and wondered if I should interview partners separately. What soon became apparent however, was that this was a topic that was openly discussed and acknowledged within couple relationships. This was precisely because of their presence in each other's lives as partners and lovers. So far from being a taboo topic, it was very much something that women felt comfortable being open about. This opened up a range of interesting discussions about gender, biology and parenting. The findings of course revealed that biology does not determine parenting and that bonding can take place in the absence of a biological relationship, or may take time to develop even when there is one. These complex narratives of maternity are perhaps unsurprising and echo other work on biology and kinship.

Yet what was novel was navigating this situation in a context where co-parents at that time had no legal rights. While this was not a problem when couples were happily together, it did make co-parents very vulnerable in the context of a relationship ending, or their partner dying. In addition, the biological mother was not only the legal parent, she was also more easily socially acknowledged as a mother. This was openly discussed and navigated among participants and biological mothers often asserted their support for their partner's motherhood status. Yet it remained a power imbalance. The happily egalitarian narrative that informs the transformative/subversive binary construction of these families overlooks the possibilities for inequalities that are built into these families when they are not formally recognised by law in all of their complexity.

However, I also do not think that equality is simply built around 'sameness' and it is the case that for some women, the biological relationship of motherhood was meaningful, especially when children were very young. I do not think it is necessary to ignore or denigrate those narratives of maternity, but it is important not to essentialise them and recognise the diversity of experiences. Moving beyond binaries meant exploring these women's experiences and asking difficult questions of my participants about what it means to parent with and without a genetic or biological relationship, and in the context of social and legal inequalities between partners.

Charlotte Beyer: Stories and experiences by LGBTQ+ parents and children contribute vitally to adding a sense of complexity to social constructions of motherhood, family, and community, and importantly, documenting histories of kinship.

A recent book that struck me as very interesting in this regard is the edited collection *Spawning Generations: Rants and Reflections on Growing Up with LGBTQ+ Parents* (Demeter Press), edited by Sadie Epstein-Fine and Mazeda Zook. In the Introduction, the editors state that the purpose of the book was to, "carv[e] out a space for our voices. It is an attempt to create space for our stories without the pressures of having to conform to a narrative that demands perfection." This links with the rejection of essentialist identities which you mention, and which is so important for feminism in evolving its discourses around mothers and motherhood.

Could you say a bit about gender flexibility as a dimension of your argument to 'move beyond the binaries' which I think sounds really fruitful for feminism, and also for motherhood scholars?

Róisín Ryan-Flood: During the late '90s, there was a brief flurry of excitement in the field of queer kinship theory at the idea that lesbians and gay parents might parent differently in a positive way. So for example, Dunne (1998) argued that lesbian couples found creative ways of sharing childcare and housework more equally. This was often misinterpreted to assume that she was making an essentialist point about lesbian parenthood. In fact, she argued that some lesbian couples may be freer from some of the constraints of dichotomous gender roles and that this enables them to navigate parenting responsibilities differently. Her point about gender being played out differently in queer communities intrigued me. Ultimately all essentialist identities are ridiculous and play into the tired binary of sameness and difference, but nonetheless I think there is a lot more we need to understand about how queers do gender. So for example butch/femme relationships play out in complex ways in relation to gender that are both part of an erotic dynamic but also to do with subjectivities and identities and this is not necessarily simply an emulation of heteronormativity or part of an unequal power relationship.

I explored the question of queer genders in relation to parenting in my book. Participants usually claimed to share housework and childcare equally and that they felt it was easier to do this as women because they did not

necessarily fall into prescribed roles, being capable at both traditionally feminine and masculine tasks for example. Swedish lesbian parents also referred to gay fathers in the same way. They highlighted that the wider queer community was a source of diversity in terms of gender performativity and felt that their children benefitted from this. Recently, the notion of queer genders is something that I find myself returning to again and hope to explore in future research on same sex couples, dating and intimacy.

Charlotte Beyer: Thank you so much, Róisín, for this really compelling discussion, and for providing so much material for further reflection and research.

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Beyoncé, Black Motherhood, and the Return of Wrenching Times

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ABSTRACT

This article contends that Beyoncé Knowles stages several spectacles in tribute to the mothers of slain Black sons as an homage to Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of 14-year-old Emmett Till, and interrogates the role Beyoncé plays in supporting Black mothers in rescuing their dead children's fate from the *banlieues* of racist logic, and thus the normalising of Black children dying out of sequence. Knowles's effectiveness results from the appeals she makes to Black collective memory of the staggering offence the U.S. nation-state has perpetuated against Black children. This article asserts that the relationship Knowles has forged with highly visible Black mothers of murdered sons enacts what Daphne A. Brooks has defined as 'Black feminist surrogation,' which is 'an embodied performance that recycles palpable forms of Black female sociopolitical grief and loss as well as spirited dissent and dissonance.' To this end, Knowles, recuperates Mrs. Till-Mobley as an icon of grief and in doing so, helps to define the Mamie Till-Mobley narrative of Black motherhood as that which expresses the will to overcome the continued denigration of the integrity of Black parenting as well as the sustained assault against Black mothers' pursuit of justice for their children since 2012.

Keywords: celebrity, Beyoncé, Black Motherhood, Emmett Till, Mamie Till-Mobley

INTRODUCTION

Scholar Daphne A. Brooks draws on a reading of African American pop stars Beyoncé Knowles and Mary J. Blige to define 'Black feminist surrogation' as 'an embodied performance that recycles palpable forms of sociopolitical grief and loss as well as spirited dissent and dissonance' (Brooks, 2008: 180). For Brooks, such surrogacy is effected through singing, which 'marks a new era of protest singing that sonically resists, revises, and reinvents the politics of Black female hypervisibility in the American cultural imaginary' (Brooks, 2008: 180). This article extends Brooks's theory by using Beyoncé's political interventions following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, to argue that the singer has continued to deepen and expand the work of recycling 'palpable forms of Black female sociopolitical grief and loss' through the lens of Black motherhood. Thus, alongside the resistance, revision, and reinvention that Brooks first identified, Beyoncé now recuperates a specific narrative of Black maternal grief by recalling the experience and suffering of iconic Black activist, Mamie Till-Mobley.

Mamie Till-Mobley emerged as a critical voice in American culture after her 14-year-old son, Emmett Till, was found dead in the Tallahatchie River on August 28, 1955. Young Till left his home in Chicago, Illinois to visit relatives in Money, Mississippi. Emmett had very little first-hand experience of either the customs or the laws stipulating racial segregation that were strictly enforced in the American South. His ignorance proved tragic when he entered Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market and fatefully encountered Carolyn Bryant, the storeowner's wife. Mrs. Bryant claimed that while they were alone together in the store, Emmett accosted her. Acting on this claim, her husband Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam stunned Emmett's uncle Moses Wright and the other members of his home when they showed up late at night armed and demanding to see the boy who had dishonoured Mrs. Bryant. Fearing the harm that could come to his nephew, Wright pleaded with Bryant and Milam to take him instead but only Emmett would satisfy the pair. Mrs. Till-Mobley was soon notified that her son had been kidnapped at gunpoint.

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Ruth Feldstein's scholarship on Mrs. Till-Mobley provides essential reading on her importance as an African American woman, mother, and principal author of the politicisation of Emmett's murder during the 1950s.[1] Examining representations of Mrs. Till-Mobley in the White and Black news print media, Feldstein demonstrates that 'motherhood itself was a battleground on which the meaning of [Emmett] Till's death was fought' (Feldstein, 2000: 265). Using Mamie Till-Mobley as a prism, Feldstein emphasizes the ways that race problematizes the ways that motherhood had been established as a site for claiming moral authority over children, for identifying their remains, evoking sympathy for their loss, or seeking justice in their names. Such an insight regarding race and motherhood matters, given that Black mothers have repeatedly stood as witnesses to lethal, race-based violence. As Karla Holloway contends, the 'death of children should be unexpected events in the life-death cycle' and yet Black children's experience of meeting an untimely death in the United States 'had become familiar — and even anticipated' (Holloway, 2003: 131); this fact remains. Therefore, this article seeks to expand the scope of Mrs. Till-Mobley's role in politicising her son's death, through a consideration of Beyoncé's role in staging 'Black feminist surrogation' and so demanding justice for murdered Black children through a revised and stylised presentation of their mothers.

Thus, this article locates its interest in the role that Black mothers have played in rescuing their dead children's fate from the *banlieues* of racist logic and the normalising of Black children dying out of sequence.[2] I contend that while the racist and patriarchal logic that denigrated Mamie Till-Mobley and sought to undermine her moral authority as a mother surely proved challenging, she has emerged the victor on the battleground of memory. So, as Mississippi tried to erase the brutal imprint of the marks it left on young Emmett's body by first attempting to bury him and then claiming he simply walked away (Whitaker 1988: 22, 41); as media reports tried to ease the horror of this crime by making the boy a monster and his living accuser, Carolyn Bryant, an ethereal beauty (Tyson, 2017: 1), Black people who saw that boy laying brutalised and bloated in a glass-top casket or pictured ugly in *Jet* magazine remembered what they saw and recalled the courage of the woman who extended them their invitation to look. As Ralph Ellison posited about Black American memory:

> Negro American consciousness is not a product (as so often seems true of so many American groups) of a will to historical forgetfulness. It is a product of our memory, sustained and constantly reinforced by events, by our watchful waiting, and by our hopeful suspension of final judgment also to the meaning of our grievances. (1995: 124)

Since 1955, the mobilising of Black motherhood as a marker of righteousness and fitness for exposing crimes against Black children has been an exercise in Black collective memory. To that end, this article expands Brooks's articulation of 'Black feminist surrogation' through the figure and deliberate efforts of Beyoncé to consider her current recuperation of Mamie Till-Mobley as an icon of grief. I assert that Beyoncé helps to define the Mamie Till-Mobley narrative of Black motherhood as that which expresses the will to overcome the continued denigration of the integrity of Black parenting (especially at the site of grief), the legitimacy of Black maternal grief, and the sustained assault against Black mothers' pursuit of justice for their children since 2012.

AESTHETICS OF GRIEF

The invitation Beyoncé extended to four Black mothers of slain sons to attend the MTV Video Music Awards (VMA) at Madison Square Garden on August 28, 2016 sets in relief her clear recognition of the role that Black mothers have historically played in demanding that the world look at the brutal, if not lethal, handling of Black children at the hands of the state. Thus, 58-years to the day that Emmett Till was killed and thus in the aftermath of his mother's demand for witnesses to look upon the gruesome mess white supremacy made of her child, Beyoncé invited a new generation of Black mothers whose children have been added to the nation's dishonoured

[1] As this article engages extensively with the Jim Crow past that described race relations in the United States when Emmett Till was murdered, and as his mother pursued justice for him, it insists on acknowledging the aspects of respectability that mattered to its key subjects. To that end, I refer to Mamie Till-Mobley as Mrs. Till-Mobley throughout the article as Black women were routinely denied courtesy titles at a time when they were commonly used in referring to or in addressing adults. In fact, Black women often used their husbands' first and last names along with a courtesy title to prevent white people from addressing them using their first names and so in a way that suggests familiarity. Spike Lee provides an excellent case of this in *4 Little Girls* (1997), his documentary film about the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963. In the film, Mrs. McNair rails against a white nurse in the morgue who insists on calling her 'Maxine.' In her grief, Mrs. McNair corrects the woman's racist presumption and boldly identifies herself as 'Mrs. Chris McNair.'

[2] In referring to the '*banlieues* of racist logic' I aim to draw attention to the French term for the circle of suburbs surrounding a city, which have become predominantly places of high rise public housing where ethnic minorities, and the poor, have been placed. These suburbs, often the place of public riots, have seen state violence against racial and ethnic citizens, including police dragging pregnant Black women on the ground, sometimes with their bare backed infant children on the cement in order to stop them from protesting their eviction from apartments in the Seine-Saint-Denis suburb of Paris in 2010. See further: 'Video of Forced eviction in Paris Suburb Prompts Shock,' *France 24*. https://www.france24.com/en/20100730-video-forced-evacuation-paris-suburb-provokes-shock-tent-women-police-children

roll to echo Mamie Till-Mobley's demand to *let the people see it* (quoted in Whitfield, 1991 23). Beyoncé's publicity website *Beyoncé.com* shows the singer's awareness of the VMAs coinciding with the date of Emmett Till's death; it features *Moveon.org's*, *#actnow4Trayvon*, which frames its narrative between the death dates of both sons and in doing so it exemplifies the critically engaged memory that Ralph Ellison associates with Black American consciousness (1995: 124).

The explicit call for activism expressed in the online petition mirrors the political activism of previous generations in the wake of Emmett Till's murder. Thus, the message that Beyoncé posted on her website accepts the call to make Trayvon Martin's murder a rallying cry and her awards show guest list takes up that charge. Lezley McSpadden, Gwen Carr, Wanda Johnson, and Sybrina Fulton attended the 2016 VMAs as Beyoncé's guests. These mothers, like Mamie Till-Mobley before them, became recognizable through the deaths of their sons. Like Mrs. Till-Mobley, the mothers that invited as her guests made their critique of racism and power explicit. In previous generations, as seen through the lens of Mrs. Till-Mobley, civil rights groups like the NAACP extended the witness of a grieving mother to mobilize the public towards protest. Beyoncé's online petition works in similar fashion. Thus, the message that Beyoncé posted on her website accepts the call to make Trayvon Martin's murder a rallying cry and her award's show guest list takes up that charge. Lezley McSpadden, Gwen Carr, Wanda Johnson, and Sybrina Fulton attended the 2016 VMAs as Beyoncé's guests. Each of their son's deaths have shaped the visual field of police brutality and racial violence that has led many to query the relationship between past atrocity and contemporary horror.

Cell phone video taken from citizen journalists, police dash-cam video, and public surveillance video have routinely captured instances of excessive force as well as lethal instances of police brutality being used against Black people since the death of Trayvon Martin and the exoneration of his killer, George Zimmerman, on July 13, 2013. These visual records document longstanding African American grievances concerning police brutality (Kelley, 2000: 24, 49). While the circulation of these visual records through social media has guaranteed a broader public audience beyond Black communities, the list of Black victims of police brutality continued to grow. In many communities across the United States outrage turned into protests.

One of the earliest protests occurred in New York on July 17, 2014 when cell phone video showed 43-year-old Eric Garner uttering "I can't breathe" eleven times while officer Daniel Pantaleo held him in an illegal chokehold (Lowery, 2019). Less than a month later, police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. Wilson fired the first shots after alleging that the unarmed Brown attacked him through the window of his police SUV (Somashekhar and Kelly, 2014). According to Wilson, he fired the lethal shots at Brown because he felt threatened when the injured Brown initiated a forward motion that he interpreted as an aggressive charge (Somashekhar and Kelly, 2014). Making matters worse, the police left Brown's exposed, bullet riddled body in the middle of the street where he was shot for at least four hours (Bosman and Goldstein, 2014).

The scene of Brown's death provided an occasion for the mobilisation of grassroots activists who organised themselves through the lens of #BlackLivesMatter, a hashtag which originated from a Facebook post that Alicia Garza made after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013 (Cobb, 2016). Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi drew on their skills as organisers and activists, their identity as queer women of colour, and their deep sadness and anger over the Zimmerman verdict to inform what became the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). BLM draws on the rootedness of its membership in their own local communities to respond to and disrupt systemic violence against Black flourishing. BLM website frames its work as a movement through its "ideological and political intervention" (Herstory, n.d.). Brown's death carried the BLM message through the hashtag #blacklivesmatter.

By the time Beyoncé appears at the VMAs with the mothers of the victims of police brutality and vigilante violence, #blacklivesmatter identified and reclaimed even the dead who came before its genesis as falling within its scope. For example, cell phone video captured on the Bay Area Rapid Transit platform on January 1, 2009 showed police officer Johannes Mehserle shooting Oscar Grant III while he lay prone with his hands tied behind his back (McKinley, 2010). The outrage and protests following Mehserle's conviction on a lesser charge matched the outcry at the sense of injustice experienced following similar verdicts in the BLM era.

Contemporary social media commentary, popular news articles, and classroom discussions have invested time and attention on Michael Brown's prone body, Oscar Grant's open execution, Eric Garner's pleas to breathe, and Trayvon Martin's ostensibly ominous hooded sweatshirt; these separate representations are often associated with the powerful symbol of Emmett Till's brutalised face. Mainstream media has voiced the association between past and present horrors in thoughtful editorials from artists, journalists, and scholars including Claudia Rankine, Isabel Wilkerson, and Elijah Anderson. Wilkerson's reflections on Tamir Rice, the 12-year-old victim of Cleveland Police Officer Timothy Loehmann's quick trigger, destabilises certain claims about the progress the nation has made towards racial justice. In 2014, Loehmann shot Rice within seconds of arriving on the scene of the boy playing with a toy gun and did not stand trial for his actions. As Wilkerson notes in her *New York Times* article, 'Emmett

Till's killers were acquitted by an all-white jury, but at least they had gone to trial,' (Wilkerson, 2016) and thus the boy who symbolises the impoverishment of criminal justice for Black Americans appears the beneficiary of a largess compared to Black Americans killed by police shootings during the 21st century. Anderson's article for the *Washington Monthly* (Anderson, 2013) accepts that there are similarities between Till and Martin, but urges greater consideration for the nuances of contemporary articulations of race thus writing that, 'these killings must be understood as the result of very different strains of racial tensions in America' (Anderson, 2013). According to Anderson, Martin lived during a time that evidenced great tension between the extreme displacement of Black Americans into urban ghettos and the incorporation of the largest Black middle class in American history. For him, racism has greater complexity today than in Till's time. In the face of what might be contemporary nuance, the fact remains, for Rankine, that a fundamental experience of Black life in America has long been a permanent 'condition of mourning' within the daily outrage of untimely death and dying (Rankine, 2015).

Rankine's characterisation of untimely death and horror as daily experiences for Black people in the United States evokes Mamie Till-Mobley's activism; in a similar way Deborah McDowell also grounds Mrs. Till-Mobley's political significance. As McDowell contends, Mrs. Till-Mobley established a 'tradition' of curating sites of witness for dead Black children. Such a 'tradition' involves '[seizing] the political stage [and] refusing to be relegated to roles as passive mourners' (McDowell, 199: 169). Advancing a similar view, Rankine writes:

> Mobley's refusal to keep private grief private allowed a body that meant nothing to the criminal-justice system to stand as evidence. By placing both herself and her son's corpse in positions of refusal relative to the etiquette of grief, she 'disidentified' with the tradition of the lynched figure left out in public view as a warning to the black community, thereby using the lynching tradition against itself. The spectacle of the black body, in her hands, publicized the injustice mapped onto her son's corpse. (Rankine, 2015)

For Rankine, Mrs. Till-Mobley challenged the established 'looking relations' set within a white supremacist context of terror so that 'Black looks' actively '[looked] back, and at one another, naming what we see' (hooks, 1992: 95). Rankin contends that Mrs. Till-Mobley's revaluation and operationalising of 'Black looks' directly contributed to civil rights activism as it 'reframed mourning as a method of acknowledgement that helped energize' (Rankine, 2015) this movement for social change through embracing her son as its 'sacrificial lamb' (Hudson-Weems, 1994: 95). As such, Mrs. Till-Mobley meticulously reads her world of racism and sexism in an effort to create a broader public audience for grieving her son. Establishing a relationship to beauty would prove critical to this effort.

In addition to the terrible odour that attended an encounter of Emmett's body after it was recovered from the Tallahatchie River on a hot Mississippi summer's day, he was gruesomely disfigured. As Mrs. Till-Mobley encountered her son for the first time in Ahmed Rayner's mortuary, she saw a 'large gash in his forehead,' an open mouth and protruding tongue; she noticed that his 'lips were twisted and his teeth were bared just like a snarling dog's'; in addition to a gunshot wound, an eye was missing, and she 'found that part of the ear was gone, and the entire back of the head had been knocked out' (Anderson, 2015: 55); and this was only the right side. The left side of Emmett's face 'looked as if somebody had taken a criss-cross knife and gone insane' (Anderson, 2015: 56). As Mrs. Till-Mobley decided to embrace her son as a 'sacrificial lamb,' she extended this Christian symbolism to ensure public witnesses at this symbolic crucifixion. Not only did she insist on an open-casket funeral, she allowed photographers to take pictures of the body and to have those images appear in national and local newspapers and magazines. In photographs of Emmett in his casket, one may also observe earlier photographs of him, as Devery Anderson writes, '[Mrs. Till-Mobley] taped photos from the [Christmas before] to the inside lid of the casket so that people could contrast the mutilated face before them to the handsome young man who was so full of life only a week earlier' (Anderson, 2015: 56). Thus, in addition to the work of 'reframing' that McDowell and Rankine identify, that speaks to the larger cultural expectation regarding the presentation of Black children in general, the intimate curatorial work that Mrs. Till-Mobley performed also speaks to her son's particular life and history. This dialectic between mine and ours, one mother's son and a community's representative, insists upon an intelligible beauty.

The great distance between Emmett's appearance in the before photographs and then how he looked after being brutalised and killed obscures the ugliness Milam and Bryant, Till's killers, initially saw in him. White supremacy insisted that Emmett was ugly and Mrs. Till-Mobley needed to challenge what they saw as fact; she needed to frame Emmett, within a discourse of beauty. In the introduction to her book *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present*, Deborah Willis cites Ben Arogundade who provocatively frames the subject of the moral and political implications of beauty:

> in literary terms, Black beauty remains a cause without a portfolio […] Who can really talk of the folly of beauty when there are still so many other battles to be won? But beauty is also a battle. And the right to be beautiful and to be acknowledged as such whoever you are, wherever you are from is not so much

> a folly as a human-rights issue. In writing the history of the black experience did we forget something important? Did we forget about beauty? (Arogundade in Willis, 2009: xv)

Beauty is a 'human-rights issue' because it is easier to kill people considered ugly. As Toni Morrison (2008) notes, white supremacist ideology has insisted on Black American ugliness. In reflecting on the historically peculiar fact of this insistence, she recalls a conversation that establishes a link between beauty and grief:

> Once I heard a white man comment on the Vietnam War with much grief for the Vietnamese. He ended his brush with compassion by saying: 'It seems all the more horrible to me because they are such beautiful people.' His aesthetic sensibilities were outraged far more than his morals, it seemed. I was tempted then--and now--to believe that although this country was easily capable of annihilating a 'beautiful' people, the awareness of that beauty may very well have been a major cause of the subsequent national remorse. (Morrison, 2008: 47)

Morrison goes on to query the possibility of such grief emerging if the people 'looked like the Congolese' (Morrison, 2008: 47). As her reflections suggest, beauty informs how grief is acknowledged within a white supremacist context. Opening the casket and exhibiting her dead son seems insufficient for attracting appropriate support for her suffering; it did not make his life 'grievable' within mainstream U.S. culture: 'If a life is not grievable,' writes Judith Butler, 'it is not quite a life; it does qualify as a life and is not worth a note' (Butler, 2006: 34). So, where Emmett's beauty and humanity were not presumed, his mother underscored these aspects through the photographs she strategically arranged on the raised lid of his coffin. Evidence of beauty here gets deployed as a visual assertion of his life and humanity.

Another much discussed case for African American media and activists is the murder of Trayvon Martin. Trayvon was a very attractive young man, as emphasised in the mainstream press coverage following his killing. The earliest media images of him showed him with a closely cropped haircut, smiling or wearing an immaculately clean football uniform with an unblemished face, striving to scowl; it was a cliché of American Beauty. In a counter-narrative move, journalists scoured social media to uncover photographs of Trayvon that undermined his claim to beauty and thus logically justified the killing. Thus, the boy who had been on the honour roll and volunteered, baby sat, and baked cookies began to be described in the mainstream media as someone who smoked marijuana and was depicted in photographs wearing gold grills on his teeth. This counter-narrative cast Trayvon as a thug (and thus, ostensibly, unattractive). Beyoncé intervenes in this narrative of ostensibly unattractive Black boys who deserve their intolerant, brutal fates - both indirectly and explicitly. Indirectly, the lyrics to Beyoncé's former pop group's (Destiny's Child) song 'Soldier' (2004) celebrates the glamour of a street, 'hood aesthetic that Trayvon was clearly experimenting with. The photographs of Trayvon Martin that came into mass circulation following speculation about his character reflects the allure of an urban, hip-hop aesthetic of desirability that Destiny's Child heralds in the song. Thus, just like the photograph of Trayvon trying to look like he was a tough, hard, football player show him trying on an image, the photographs of him with a grill as well as the ones with subdued eyes show him making an effort to be the 'chiefin' ' 'rude boy' with 'street credibility' celebrated in the song.

Scholar Michael Eric Dyson (2001) shares a perspective on famed, slain rapper Tupac Shakur that helps situate how Trayvon Martin may have been consciously framing his self-presentation. According to Dyson, Tupac was a thespian who found that his interest in the arts plagued his efforts to attract the attention of the girls who attended his high school. Thus, adolescent angst drove Tupac to adopt a thug persona because the 'bad boy' look contributed to his desire for popularity (Dyson, 2001: 76, 176, 200, 241-242). Dyson's story about Tupac's angst fills a gap in popular representations of heterosexual Black male adolescents and by extension, offers a way of interpreting Trayvon Martin's self-presentation that provides a motive for his behaviour beyond the presumption that he only lived as a violent gangster.

Beyoncé more explicitly enters the story of Black boys who are made ugly in American popular culture and die brutally for it, once the American criminal justice system fails to hold murderer George Zimmerman accountable for Trayvon Martin's death, in 2013. After Zimmerman's acquittal, Beyoncé appeared with her husband Jay Z at an activist vigil in New York City that called for an end to 'stand your ground laws' (Devereaux and Williams, 2013). This is a reference to US legislation that makes it lawful for lethal acts in the face of self-defence against a perceived threat. This legal context directly informed Zimmerman's acquittal; Beyoncé and Jay Z also appeared in a photograph with Trayvon's parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin (Longo, 2013). By 2016, Beyoncé showcased an evolving and highly sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the past and the present when she invited the 'Mothers of the Movement' to be her guests at the VMAs on the anniversary of Emmett Till's death, and carefully styled them through an appeal to glamour.

GLAMOROUS CONTESTATION: AUTHORING GRIEF

Poet Kevin Young (2012) recognises that unexpectedly, glamour serves Black artists in their political confrontations with racial atrocity. He offers jazz singer Billie Holiday's iconic performance of 'Strange Fruit' (1939) as an example of glamour making its unlikely appearance. The words of the song were first written as a poem by Abel Meeropol in 1936 under the title 'Bitter Fruit' (Margolick, 2001: 21). The poetry captures the sight and smell of a lynched Black body hanging from a tree. As cultural critic Hilton Als explains, during the 1930s and 1940s when Holiday sang the 'Strange Fruit' at the racially integrated night club Café Society in New York, she was doing something bold since the song 'tackled' racial hatred head-on at a time when protest music was all but unknown' (Margolick, 2001: 3). Even if the progressive patrons present at Café Society wanted some reprieve from the weighty content chronicled in the song, Holiday's song styling and stage presence contributed to its appeal. Those present to see Holiday perform described an unforgettable experience. Songwriter Betty Comden remembered the experience as 'thrilling' (Margolick, 2001: 40). In Comden's estimation, 'Strange Fruit' was 'bloodcurdling and wonderful' no less because of the way Holiday styled the song and presented herself (Margolick, 2001: 40). As jazz writer Robert Gleason explains, Holiday was 'shocking in her personal magnetism,' which she accented with 'a gardenia in her hair' (Margolick, 2001: 40). Young suggests that Holiday's appeal to glamour in performing 'Strange Fruit' works because it communicates through a visual plane of desire and thus flirts with the eye. Thus, for Young, glamour tempts witness.

Stephen Gundle contends that glamour may be, 'best seen as an alluring image that is closely related to consumption' (2008: 6). Sharp feminist critique of Beyoncé challenges her self-professed claim to feminist politics for the very links to consumption that Gundle places at the centre of glamour's definition. bell hooks, perhaps one of Beyoncé's most prominent and consistent critics, finds that Beyoncé's claim to feminism fails to account for the ways in which her presentation of wealth colludes with capitalism and overlooks other structural forms of domination. Admitting that Beyoncé's *Lemonade* visual album (2016) 'positively exploits images of black female bodies,' (hooks, 2016), hooks contends that their glamorisation stops short of providing an alternative worldview rooted in structural change. Though Janet Mock (2016) criticises hooks for dismissing femme feminists and their ability to have complicated critiques of patriarchy whilst embracing hyper-feminised celebrations of identity, her position overlooks hooks's contention that freedom struggle roots out structures of domination.

Beyoncé best exploits glamour for the sake of freedom struggle when she acts on her understanding that 'there is power in looking' and uses such understanding to challenge white supremacy (hooks, 1992: 94). For hooks, the 'oppositional gaze' is developed in response to white supremacist efforts to dominate the Black gaze and thus punish Black people for looking. For hooks, the oppositional gaze becomes a form of agency whereby Black people seeks to 'change reality' through looking (1992: 94). Such forms of looking endeavour to interrogate, critique, discern, and generate an awareness of how whiteness as power operates and to document it (1992: 95). Thus, when hooks celebrates *Lemonade* for presenting 'a powerfully symbolic black sisterhood that resists invisibility' (hooks, 2016), she acknowledges the importance of Beyoncé's work in contesting 'the violent erasure of black womanhood' in popular culture (hooks, 1992: 119). For hooks, the problem with how Beyoncé asserts Black sisterhood is that it stops short of offering another model of seeing Black women once present (2016). For this reason, Beyoncé's live performances and award show attendances matter, because in these arenas, Beyoncé wields glamour to convey solidarity with Black mothers whose children were victims of murderous figures of state authority. While *Lemonade* features Beyoncé's alliance with these mothers, her appearance with them outside the frame contests the expectations of even these 'looking relations.'

Beyoncé, herself a meticulous, careful cultivator of self-image, paid homage to Mrs. Till-Mobley's call for beauty at the site of her grief when she invited the 'Mothers of the Movement' onto the 'red carpet,' and thus to a place where onlookers expect beauty to make an appearance. Though the VMA 'red carpet' was actually white in 2016, its culturally symbolic function was the same: to hail Hollywood stars as celebrity versions of royalty. In honour of the tradition believed to have begun when Clytemnestra rolled out 'the tinted splendours' upon Agamemnon's return home as a war hero, the red carpet pays homage to triumph and success (Baker, 2016). Here, celebrities and fans collude in staging tableaux; celebrities expect for people to stare at them and so arrive prepared to meet that expectation with highly stylised and alluring hair, makeup, and fashion. Throughout the tableau, Beyoncé's staged glamour mingles unexpectedly with grief and remorse, featuring an array of Black girls and Black women who have been celebrated and ridiculed in staggering ways. From the mothers to the actresses and models, from Beyoncé to her daughter Blue Ivy, this group represents an entire spectrum of marginality within the event's context of glamour, making their experience of white supremacist violence visible in the name of beauty and excellence. So as ethereal as the sartorial styling of Beyoncé and her guests may initially appear, their challenges and losses reveal the deadly seriousness of difference at its furthest extremes. For example, on the non-lethal end of the spectrum, African American actresses and models Quvenzane Wallis, Winnie Harlow, and Ava Clarke all experienced and confronted public cruelty. Harlow's vitiligo and Clarke's albinism casts them as 'extraordinary bodies' and thus

objects of enfreakment (Thomson, 1997). Quvenzane Wallis's experience of racism as a Black girl demonstrates how deviancy informs a reading of ostensibly 'normate' girls (Thomson, 1997: 8). In her case, the online magazine *The Onion*, known for their biting satire, apologised to Wallis after calling her a 'cunt' in a tweet during the 2013 Oscars where the then nine- year-old was nominated in the Best Actress category for her performance in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Ditum, 2013).

In addition to this blatant sexual objectification, Quvenzane Wallis was the target of racist trolls on Twitter for playing the starring role in *Annie (2014)*—in which Beyoncé's husband and Blue Ivy's father, Jay Z was one of the producers - met with the ire of fans of the original film who unleashed their contempt via social media against casting a Black girl in the role made iconic by a red haired White girl (Edwards, 2014). The Carters have experienced similar outrage with fans critical of their daughter's hair; in Blue Ivy's case, she has been the subject of intense outrage by mostly Black fans of her parents who dislike how the child's hair appears; some even started a *Change.org* petition demanding that the pair comb their daughter's hair (Wilson, 2014). While neither has responded in the press, they each have made statements through their music that might speak to the matter; in the video for 'Formation,' (2016) for example, Beyoncé sings that she likes her 'baby hair and afros' and in 'Picasso Baby,' (2013) Jay Z notes that haters even 'talk about your baby crazy.' While *Genius.com*, a website offering public annotations of rap lyrics, makes a specific link between Beyoncé and Blue's hair in 'Formation,' 'Picasso Baby,' which debuted before the petition, does not interpret the lyrics as a reference to her hair; instead, their interpretation suggests that Jay's lyrics reference rumours about the child being a product of an occult affiliation.[3]

Rather than as an array or a continuum of 'extraordinary bodies' accompanying the celebrity whose *Lemonade* visual album was nominated for eleven awards in six categories that evening, the news media focused their attention on the fact that Beyoncé and her guests were adorned in *couture*. Beyoncé wore Francesco Scognamiglio and four-year-old Blue wore a dress from the Mischka Aoki luxury children's line. Breathless reports celebrated the $13 million worth of Lorain Schwartz jewels Beyoncé wore, and were charmed that Blue Ivy complemented her $11,000 gown with a pair of $595 Giuseppe Zanotti sneakers (Michault, 2016). As staggering as these prices are, Beyoncé's guest list begs consideration for the knowing juxtaposition of the financial cost of these luxury goods set against the human cost Black mothers have historically paid through their children's blood; the Black mother and daughter whose luxury items may be celebrated is diametrically opposed to the Black mothers represented who are absent a child; all caught in a web of history that extorts the commodification of their toil and their wombs. While the 'pride of place' that these Mothers of the Movement also occupy in *Lemonade* comes across at the VMAs where they were 'dressed like royalty in shades of purple and champagne' (Francis, 2016), arguably, appearing with Beyoncé cost McSpadden, Carr, Johnson, and Fulton one son each. The fee exacted from these ordinary Black mothers, the other end of the social class spectrum of women in Beyoncé's party, brings into ironic focus the exorbitant price they have paid without fanfare. Glamour and tragedy intersect here to set in relief the human toll extracted from Black mothers. If Beyoncé's relationship to 'black feminist surrogation' helps to make 'black female sociopolitial grief and loss palpable' through both the lyrics and music videos for her 2006 *B'Day* album (Brooks, 2008), the staging of her guest list to include these mothers at the VMAs ten years later expands the scope of her original work. This expansion recognises a longer narrative of suffering that Black mothers endured, on the very anniversary of Emmett Till's murder. A closer examination of the tableau that Beyoncé stages leads to an articulation of what can be called the Mamie Till-Mobley narrative of grief. This narrative offers an origin story of US Black mother's politicisation, and documents the challenges she confronts in pursuing justice.

As Mrs. Till-Mobley admitted, Emmett's death politicised her (Till-Mobley and Benson, 2003: 192). Prior to his death, she had not concerned herself with racial violence much, since it had not touched her life in such a personal way; Emmett's death changed that (Till-Mobley and Benson, 2003: 192). In providing a lens into Black women's mothering in the aftermath of tragedy, the Mamie Till-Mobley narrative of grief becomes a window into activist dimensions of mourning for Black mothers, making such civil rights widows visible. When Black women are at the centre of narratives of catastrophic loss, although glamour may seem alien to a consideration of grief, it can join together in such instances of public visibility. It is certainly a function of white supremacy to marginalise Black women from a general discourse of honour through grief. As a point of contrast, Jacqueline Kennedy's dignity after the death of JFK, has been heralded and entangled with discursive associations of Whiteness with youth, beauty, glamour, fashion, death and mourning. Recognition for a Mamie Till- Mobley narrative anticipates and informs Mrs. Kennedy's example alongside the civil rights widows occasionally discussed in the same terms (Margolick, 2018).

The adoring gaze that met Beyoncé and her guests on the VMA white carpet stands in stark contrast to the hostile glare that Mamie Till-Mobley met from white onlookers in Mississippi. Many White Mississipians felt chastised as a result of the attention they received from Mrs. Till-Mobley's decision to expose Emmett's body and with it, a harsh media glare that indicted the state for Bryant and Milam's crimes (Whitfield, 1991: 27-31). They felt the need to defend their way of life against the intrusion that Emmett's ostensible transgression represented, and

[3]See: https://genius.com/Jay-z-picasso-baby-lyrics

the trial further upheld. Stanley Nelson's documentary film, *The Murder of Emmett Till* (2003) features news footage of White townspeople castigating Mrs. Till- Mobley for offering up his gruesome body for public consumption, thereby ignoring the way that her decision perfectly mirrored decades of similar scenes that White lynchers turned into postcards and sent through the U.S. Mail (Allen, 2000). The criticism voiced in Mississippi was not new to Mrs. Till-Mobley - as she reports in her memoir, when a news bulletin interrupted the popular television comedy *I Love Lucy* to report that Emmett's body had been found, she received hate mail chastising her for this intrusion into popular white American everyday life (Till-Mobley and Benson, 2015: 130). By way of contrast, Ellen Fitzpatrick writes that when President Kennedy was assassinated, among the more than 1.5 million condolence letters sent to Mrs. Kennedy, there was 'an almost total absence of any letter or comment critical of the president' (2010: XXI). According to Fitzpatrick, 'those who despised the President found venues other than a condolence letter to express their sentiments' (2010: XXI); not so for Mrs. Till-Mobley. For her, condolence letters served as an outlet for white supremacist ire, such letters became a vehicle for hurling insults at grieving Black mothers and widows. Typically, one of the letters sent following the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King features at least one such example where the writer is particularly bitter because Mrs. King's comportment suggests dignity. 'Who do you think you are,' the anonymous writer asks, 'another Mrs. J. F. Kennedy? To me,' the writer continues, 'you were just another wig-covered burr head plotting more riots to carry on the black King's program.'[4] Though Mrs King's loss was extraordinary, she remained an open target for offence.

Race also obscures some of the parallels that can be drawn between how highly visible American women have used their bodies to convey responses to catastrophic loss. For example, Jaqueline Kennedy echoes Mrs. Till-Mobley's call to witness. Thus, in the wake of her husband's assassination on November 22, 1963, Mrs. Kennedy refused to change out of her pink Chanel suit because she, 'wanted them to see what they've done' in killing the President (Horyn, 2013). In this instance, eight years following Mrs. Till-Mobley telling journalists that she wanted 'the world [to] see what they did to my boy' (quoted in Whitfield, 1991: 23) called for similar witness. Rather than make this comparison, Mrs. Kennedy relationship to grief is engaged through an emphasis on how fashionably elegant she appeared during the funeral for her husband. Self-presentation also figured prominently in media accounts of Mrs. Till-Mobley in mourning, but in her case, such concerns focused on her appearance following her son's funeral.

Mrs. Till-Mobley further stoked the ire of White Sumnor, Mississippi residents in how she dressed for court. According to the *Nation* newspaper reporter Dan Wakefield, when Mrs. Till- Mobley appeared in court wearing a 'gray flowered dress, a brown bolero jacket, a black hat, tortoiseshell glasses, and a gold watch,' her appearance was upsetting because 'she didn't fit the minstrel-show stereotype that most of Mississippi's white folks cherish' (Anderson, 2015: 124). Fashion served here as a vehicle for articulating Black subjectivity as it had been shaped within an affirming Black collectivity; this self-presentation as respectable enforced her appeal to justice as reasonable. Though Mrs. Till-Mobley was not a seasoned activist, her understanding of the importance of self-presentation reflected the respectability politics that came to characterise the civil rights movement (a movement inspired by her fortitude and refusal to be cowed by racist disempowerment). Thus, as political scientist Jeanne Theoharis writes of Rosa Parks, 'there was a fixation on how she dressed' (2014: 85). On the day of her court hearing, Theoharis writes that Parks 'dressed carefully' and could recall every detail of what she wore because she 'well understood the importance of image to this protest, and she chose her outfit to reflect a dignified and proud citizenship, an in-your-face challenge to the degradation that segregation had long proffered' (2014: 88).

Sartorial style and activism emerges as an important consideration through the Mamie Till-Mobley narrative of grief as a way to provoke reflection on the role of money in conversation with socially prescribed race and gender roles. By heralding Mrs. Till-Mobley as a model of integrity and courage, this challenges some of the criticism that she received from prominent voices within Black political organisations soon after her son's murder. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) President Roy Wilkens had grown weary of Mrs. Till-Mobley's requests for additional funds for her father and others who accompanied her to speaking engagements, held on behalf of the NAACP. Mrs. Till-Mobley and her Uncle Moses Wright were capable of drawing large crowds, which netted the NAACP great profits from the venues that offered advance fees as well as from the people who wanted to offer their financial support. Wilkens alleged that Mrs. Till-Mobley had become greedy and he fired her immediately after her impromptu shopping trip led her to miss a scheduled flight. In a recorded conversation, Wilkens tries to pin Mrs. Till-Mobley down in a disingenuous attempt to document her greed. Having accused Mrs. Till-Mobley of extorting money from her son's murder and in her alleged pursuit of fame, Wilkens even questioned the legitimacy of her grief, and further insulted her as a mother (Anderson, 2015: 204-207).

As an homage to Mamie Till-Mobley, Beyoncé's invitation to the 'Mothers of the Movement' on the anniversary of Emmett Till's death sets in relief the price of fame for Black mothers. Beyoncé's deployment of glamour allows

[4] Taken from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence website: https://thekingcenter.org/archive/document/anonymous-letter-mrs-king-following-mlks-assassination (Accessed 1 November 2018).

Black civil rights mothers of murdered children and widows of martyred men to enter a discussion about white supremacy's insistence upon Black indignity and the eloquent ways that Black women have figured a response. Again, appearing with Beyoncé cost these mothers one son each. In the contemporary sense, these mothers are dressed in anticipation of fans who are expecting a celebratory scene. The activist position that these mothers now occupy would suggest a knowing confrontation between the expectations of that gaze and Beyoncé's attempt to show them confronting those expectations through their self-presentations of honour. In his engagement with the question of Mrs. Till-Mobley's request for money and dress, Devery Anderson's scholarship overlooks any motive beyond the one Wilkins advanced. In doing so, Anderson's work also ignores the friction that other individuals and organizations encountered regarding the fundraising actions of the NAACP. For example, as the Montgomery bus boycott extended throughout 1956, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) came under financial strain through their local fund raising and turned their efforts towards a national audience (Theoharis, 2014: 126). The NAACP, which had not fully endorsed the boycott, questionably benefited from their fundraising efforts. Mrs. Parks was rare in her service as a speaker for the MIA in refraining from keeping an honorarium for her services. As Theoharis explains, when Parks spoke on behalf of the NAACP, she was paid $25 per talk with the rest of the money split between the local and national branches (2014: 122). Though Mrs. Parks turned over all of her earnings, others viewed that money as 'compensation for their effort' (Theoharis, 2014: 122). Taking from the earnings suggests a strong critique of the fairness with which speakers were paid. This response was similar to longstanding practices that working-class Blacks employed where they responded to unfairly depressed wages by introducing informal methods of remuneration through a signifying practice that drew upon the moral economy (see also Kelley, 1996: 18-21). Ignoring this economic history in the case of Mrs. Till-Mobley proves problematic because it ignores the ways in which Black women can experience the intensification of the intersectionality of race, class and gender to further insult their grief.

White supremacist efforts to diminish Mrs. Till-Mobley's humanity were not limited to white people. Roy Wilkins, and by extension, the NAACP also insulted the integrity of her suffering and grief. To that end, the Mrs. Till-Mobley narrative of grief underscores the way that Black women's self-presentation can expose the agency of Black women in rejecting such insults. Through a consideration of how Black women dress for mourning, Black women's activism is directed towards achieving everyday justice and respect. Beyoncé draws attention to these intersections through her inclusion of her own daughter among her guests, as she was the target of intra-racial attacks about her appearance. Furthermore, the price of the garments that each of her guests wore also can be interpreted as symbolic of the inestimable cost of Black life for the Black sons who were killed, as well as the vicious attacks borne by the daughters who face racist assault.

One crucial component of Emmett Till's tragic fate is the way that hindsight underscores the fact that he stepped into an on-going history of national injustice that he most likely did not know or understand (Whitfield, 1991: 12). Not only was Till unaware of how the racial animus further peaked for Mississippi segregationists after the Brown v. Board of Education decision eroded legal protection for public school segregation, but he was probably unaware of the broader, longer history of disdain for Black boys in the American South. While it is certainly possible to cite the many names of those Black boys who died at the hands of white racists, we need to probe such unknowing in a broader, structural way that respects the injurious history but also explores its silencing. To that end, the intersection between Cathy Caruth's (1996) reading of Freud's efforts to think through the venomous persistence and insistence of European anti-Semitism, together with James Baldwin's (1985) reading of Christianity's legacy through the lens of U.S. racial history proves instructive. As Caruth details the mechanics of this association, the latency of the initial trauma helps explain the political conflict and antagonism expressed. As Freud would have it, Jewish history features an Oedipal repression of murderous feelings toward an authority/father figure, the matter of atonement in Christian and Jewish history unconsciously repeats such intent. Caruth writes, 'In belatedly atoning, as sons, for the father's murder, Christians feel Oedipal rivalry with their Jewish older brothers; a lingering castration anxiety, brought out by Jewish circumcision; and finally a complaint that the Jews will not admit the guilt that the Christians, in their recognition of Christ's death, have admitted' (1996: 18). Caruth explains that this belated Oedipal structure of unconscious wishes, reveals the way that Christian and Jewish history are inextricably bound to one another, revealing that the traumatic nature of history means that 'events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others' (1996: 18).

James Baldwin exchanges Freud's structure of consciousness for the structure of biblical narratives of slaughter and sacrifice, to arrive at a similar conclusion concerning U.S. racial history. In his reflections on the serial killing of Black children in Atlanta between 1979-1981, Baldwin offers that 'we all came here as candidates for the slaughter of the innocents' (1985: xv). Here, Baldwin is referring to King Herod's order to kill all male children under two-years old in the vicinity of Bethlehem, for the sake of preventing the rise of challengers to his throne, following a prophecy. The persistence of those intended for slaughter, for Baldwin, offers proof of the repetition of this biblical history of violence. The continued or repeated presence of this past contests the notion that History

has been resolved and is over in any final sense for Baldwin; instead, it confirms our participation in historical cycles, which would include Jesus's crucifixion (the intended victim of King Herod's order).

As James H. Cone has noted, African American cultural workers have consistently drawn attention to the relationship between Jesus Christ and lynched Black bodies (2013: 93). As Cone writes, these cultural workers recognised 'that in the United States, the clearest image of the Crucified Christ was the figure of an innocent Black victim, dangling from a lynching tree' (2013: 93). Artist Renee Cox exemplifies this connection between Black bodies and the most powerful iconography in the Christian tradition through her *Flipping the Script* series, which was featured in an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2001. One of her paintings in this series, *Yo Mama's Last Supper* depicts a nude Cox and other Black figures re-staging Leonardo Di Vinci's *The Last Supper*; in response New York Mayor Rudolph Guiuliani claimed at the time he wanted 'decency standards' for New York City museums in receipt of government funds (Bumiller, 2001). Cox rebuked critics like Giuliani and the Catholic League President William Donahue for registering their offence - but avoiding expressing their offence for police brutality (Williams, 2001). The controversy had its roots in the way that Cox's 1990s work spoke directly to the on-going and notorious history of police brutality in New York. *It Shall Be Named*, a series of distorted photographs of a black man affixed to a cross, and *Yo Mama's Pieta* address directly the relationship between the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the killing of unarmed Black people. *Yo Mama's Pieta* recasts Michaelangelo's famous Renaissance sculpture. Cox herself appears in the role of the Virgin mother and a male Black figure is in the role of Jesus. Placing a Black woman in the role of the Virgin Mary sets in relief the way that Black motherhood is implicated in the possibility of 'deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy' [emphasis mine] (Cone, 2011: XV).

Mamie Till-Mobley's experience of loss, and her acceptance of the characterisation of Emmett as the 'sacrificial lamb' of the Movement, has influenced many scholars who have symbolically interpreted her in relationship to Mary, the mother of Christ (Baker-Fletcher, 2006: 149). The tableau that Beyoncé presented at the 2016 VMAs on the anniversary of Emmett Till's death and his mother's witness evokes this same narrative of religious witness. From the Italian designer she chose to design her gown, to the fourteen people total representing Beyoncé's group, an ethical call was staged. Further underscoring an intentional focus on motherhood and love, Beyoncé chose for the mothers a fashion designer for their attire who when asked 'who is the Francesco Scognamiglio woman,?' responded: 'My woman is a mother. My woman is a lover. My woman is a very sensitive and a very special person. And she is a woman who loves men. She knows how to love. She knows how to cry and she knows how to look chic, provocative and sweet at the same time' (Michault, 2016). Scognamiglio's response underscores the polysemic function of the mothers in Beyoncé's tableau who represented a multidimensional history of racial violence. Scognamiglio's description, (and by extention, Beyoncé's presumed intent), also reflect evokes the Mamie Till-Mobley narrative iconic symbolism that Scholar and cultural critic Koritha Mitchell contends that the author BeBe Moore Campbell weds to her as a complete character in her fictive portrayal of Delotha, is also a character inspired by Mrs. Till-Mobley. As she writes, "Campbell succeeds in making Delotha a complete character who is both strong and vulnerable, forgiving and vengeful, maternal and sexual" (2012: 1050). Another layer of the ethical rhetoricism of the presence of these guests is also found in the legacy of the Petrarchan sonnet and its link to Emmett Till, given Marilyn Nelson's *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, the book-length tribute to the murdered fourteen-year-old (2005). The fourteen people in Beyoncé's party were thus like a living Petrarchan sonnet - the eight/six arrangement has a call and response structure. Both forms, the fashion and the poetry, represent efforts towards remembrance and witness through culturally specific structure and form. One is a 'tiger's leap' into the past, while the other is recursive--a present that insists on it (Benjamin, 1968: 261).

CONCLUSION

Beyoncé knowingly invited the 'Mothers of the Movement' as a symbolic appreciation of the trajectory of bearing witness to mourning Black children that Mamie Till-Mobley established. Moreover, this established Beyoncé's role as acting in support of Black Lives Matter as a contemporary social justice movement that, as Rankine contends, 'aligns with the dead, continues the mourning and refuses the forgetting in front of all of us' (Rankine, 2015). In honouring Mrs. Till-Mobley on August 28, 2016, Beyoncé was paying homage to her understanding of what a white supremacist culture needed to see, in order to recognise and honour Emmett Till's humanity and that of the similarly dead and brutalised Black people whose killing remains in need of redress. Like Mrs. Till-Mobley before her, Beyoncé's effort to curate an image of Black motherhood in mourning expands the terms of 'black feminist surrogation' to create a tableau through style and glamour that shifts the terms of Black hypervisibility to include dignified grief, and signal a call for a proper mourning of Black life.

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Mothering by the Book: Horror and Maternal Ambivalence in *The Babadook* (2014)

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ABSTRACT

Attachment parenting strategies underscore the breakdown of the distinction between child and mother, producing an abject horror that is literalised in *The Babadook* (2014). In this film, a menacing character from a (parenting) book comes to life, and the Babadook threatens the widowed mother, Amelia (Essie Davis) with the darkest part of herself—her desire occasionally to be free from her child's demands. This article reads *The Babadook* through neoliberal ideologies of intensive parenting and feminist theories about maternal ambivalence and abjection to ultimately argue that the real monster in the film is the pressure to be the perfect mom that comes from the ideologies of intensive mothering. Amelia eventually expels the Babadook from her body in a pool of black vomit, also expelling her abject reaction to motherhood. However, the Babadook is not entirely defeated—instead, Amelia goes to the basement, alone, daily, to feed it. In the basement, she remembers her desire to exist independently of her child, a desire that the film codes as monstrous.

Keywords: film, maternal ambivalence, attachment parenting, horror, abject

INTRODUCTION

A thin, blonde mother, dressed fashionably, stands, breastfeeding her three-year-old son, who is standing on a chair and looking at the camera while latched onto her breast. This image graced not breastfeeding propaganda, but a *Time* magazine cover in 2012. The cover asked, "Are you Mom Enough?"—a question that implies a fierce dedication to mothering exceeding that of the average mom. The accompanying story discussed attachment parenting 'guru' Dr. Bill Sears, who suggests ways one can improve one's odds of being 'mom enough' (Pickert, 2012). Sears and his wife, Martha, wrote and published the 700-plus-page bestselling attachment parenting 'bible,' *The Baby Book*, in 1992. Attachment parenting involves a mother's complete devotion to the child, such that the mother eventually anticipates the child's needs and the child never has to cry or act out. Although Sears suggests that working mothers can also be attachment parents, he writes, "As the attachment develops after birth, the mother continues to feel complete only when she is with her baby. When separated from her baby, she feels as if part of herself is missing" (2001: 8). What of those mothers who don't feel incomplete when briefly separated from their children? They might feel like failures, like they aren't 'mom enough.' After all, as Alison Stone points out, the parenting industry is disciplinary; its discourses 'regulat[e]' mothers until their 'confidence and authority drain away' (2012: 18). "When children are measured," Stone notes, "their parents—in practice, mostly their mothers—are effectively measured too, as having perhaps hindered their children's development or advanced it less well than they might have done" (2012: 18). The ideology of attachment parenting, also called intensive mothering, is a key player in the 'Mommy Wars' over breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, crying-it-out or waiting-it-out, working or staying at home, and the pressure on mothers to get it 'right.' Mothering, women are told, should be done 'by the book,' but mothering by the book, especially if that book is an attachment parenting tome, can be a horrifying enterprise. Ideologies of intensive parenting underscore the breakdown of the distinction between child and mother, producing an abject horror that traverses national boundaries,[1] one that is literalised in Australian director Jennifer Kent's 2014 film *The Babadook*.

[1] Attachment parenting is a popular ideology in Kent's Australia, as evidenced by the fact that Sears's book is listed first on the 'Useful Books and Publications' page of the Attachment Parenting Australia website. An article in *The Australian,* published just four days after the film's Australian release, entitled 'In Defence of Attachment Parenting,' also references the *Time* cover with which I began this article

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In this film, the (parenting) book comes to life, and its central character the Babadook threatens the widowed mother, Amelia (Essie Davis), with what, because she has internalised the self-surveillance that accompanies the neoliberal ideology of intensive parenting, she considers to be the darkest part of herself—her desire occasionally to be free from her child's demands. Her son, Samuel (Noah Wiseman), reminds Amelia of the car accident that occurred as her husband, Oskar (Ben Winspear), drove her to the hospital to deliver the child, an accident that took her husband's life. The bulk of the film's action occurs in the weeks just before Samuel's seventh birthday. Although Samuel is an older child in this film, viewers see Amelia struggling to be 'mom enough.' Amelia's efforts to establish a definitive boundary between her child and herself indicate an ambivalence toward her child that comes from striving to meet his every need and losing herself in the process.

The film features both other mothers and 'experts' associated with the school, the hospital, and family services who try to tell Amelia how best to raise her child; these experts are representatives of the ideologies of intensive parenting found within popular books throughout western society. These ideologies become a genuine threat first when a mysterious red-bound storybook, titled *Mister Babadook*, appears in Samuel's bedroom. Samuel soon warns his mother that the Babadook is in their house, and that it is trying to possess and corrupt Amelia, but she only grows more frustrated with him because of these warnings. When the Babadook infiltrates Amelia's body and mind, she expresses negative feelings toward her child, for example, telling him to 'go eat shit,' but she also demonstrates love and concern for her son throughout the film. Amelia eventually expels the Babadook from her body in a pool of black vomit, figuratively expelling her negative feelings toward motherhood and her child. However, the Babadook is not entirely defeated—instead, Amelia goes to the basement, alone, daily, to feed it. In the basement, she remembers her desire to exist independently of her child, a desire that the film codes as monstrous—but only when that desire is ignored or denied. Because she has tamed the Babadook, Amelia is a 'better' mother at the end of the film, as evidenced by her son's successful birthday party—but because the film depicts maternal ambivalence as inescapable, it also critiques the ideologies of intensive motherhood, most commonly expressed in attachment parenting advice. This article reads *The Babadook* through neoliberal ideologies of intensive parenting and feminist theories about maternal ambivalence and abjection to ultimately argue that the real monster in the film is the pressure to be the perfect mom that comes from the ideologies of intensive mothering.

INTENSIVE MOTHERING: HORROR FROM A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

To say that *The Babadook* is a critique of ideologies of intensive mothering is to argue that this horror film is not about an endangered child, but about the terrors that plague the mother. *The Babadook* is a film written and directed by a woman—perhaps this is why, rather than focus on the child's response to and relationship with the mother (such as in *Psycho* [1960, dir. Alfred Hitchcock], *Carrie* [1976, dir. Brian De Palma], or a number of other horror films), *The Babadook* contemplates the mother's response to and relationship with the child. In this way, *The Babadook* participates in what Sarah Arnold (2013: 70) has identified as 'a more maternal-centred perspective' in twenty-first century horror films (such as the maternal perspective in *The Others* [2001, dir. Alejandro Amenábar], for example) (see also Harrington 2016: 202). Noting that *The Babadook* centers around a maternal perspective is crucial for considering its critique of the horrors of intensive mothering ideologies.

From the film's opening moments, viewers are situated in Amelia's perspective, and this perspective unites two disparate but equally pivotal moments in her life. The initial shots are tightly focused close-ups of Amelia's face as she breathes through contractions in a car, with silence on the soundtrack. A shrieking note accompanies shattered glass smashing into Amelia's face, followed by rumblings and creakings, and a distant groan of "NOOOO!" as we see Amelia tumble back and forth across the frame, totally unmoored from her surroundings. The sense of disorientation only grows as we hear a faint "Mom?" in the background. Amelia turns to look at her husband, who is slumped over the steering wheel, and viewers see a blinding white light indicative of both a further crash and Amelia's waking due to a young boy repeating "Mom! Mommy!" A further disorienting shot shows Amelia falling through the air, arms akimbo, until she lands on the bed and opens her eyes. The boy is now shouting "Mom!," and Amelia sits up. This opening sequence reveals the two defining factors in Amelia's life—her husband's death and her son's demands.

Like many contemporary parents, Amelia's life seems to revolve around her son. While educated stay-at-home moms might choose to invest in mothering the same energies they would have devoted to careers, all mothers—working or not—are subject to the same cultural surveillance that insists that the best mothers mother to the extreme. "Attachment parenting requires sacrifice, dedication, strategizing and a lot of long hours doing thankless tasks. In other words," Belinda Luscombe (2012: n.p.) points out, "it's exactly like climbing the corporate ladder.

(Gambotto-Burke, 2014). This article reads the film through the context of intensive parenting ideologies rather than through a specific national context.

Except there is no glass ceiling. Or annual bonus." As critics such as Andrea O'Reilly (2010) and Sue Thornham (2013) have pointed out, intensive mothering is at odds with the imperatives of feminism, which advocates for a woman's right to individual subjectivity. According to Thornham, contemporary ideologies of motherhood 'reinscribe the distinction between selfhood and (maternal) female embodiment: as individualised subjects women are urged to mobility and self-definition; as mothers they are re-embodied and returned to place' (2013: 10). Amelia is a working mother, but she is never free from what Lisa Baraitser so insightfully terms the 'interruptions' of caregiving, because she cares for elderly people at work—that is, she experiences 'the transition to motherhood,' which Baraitser associates with 'a certain horror; disintegration' (2009: 63), more acutely because both at home and at work, 'her own self-narrative (…) is punctured at the level of constant interruptions to thinking, reflecting, sleeping, moving and completing tasks' (Baraitser, 2009: 15). The expected loss of selfhood and separateness, the 'constant interruptions' that accompany motherhood, are a horrifying state of affairs, indeed.

Moreover, as Barbara Creed influentially establishes in her essay "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine" (2015), filmic representations of maternal agency are frequently coded as monstrous, and Amelia frequently appears to be a monster, but it is important to consider her monstrosity within the context of these overtaxing ideologies of motherhood. The demands of intensive mothering have made Amelia seem to be a monster because they have destroyed her sense of self. Despite the fact that advocates of intensive parenting tout its virtues, Amelia's problems with mothering correspond with the demands and expectations of attachment parenting. William and Martha Sears insist that:

> All parents want their children to grow up to be kind, affectionate, empathetic, well disciplined, and, of course, bright and successful. (2001: ix)

Through pronouncements like these, ideologies of intensive parenting lead to a vigilant self-surveillance against raising a child who is not these things. This common cultural discourse correlates with Amelia's verbalised complaint that Samuel is 'so disobedient he can't go to school anymore' at the beginning of the film. Near the end of the film, she also calls him 'very disobedient' and points out that he 'deliberately disobeyed' her. The film is initially coded to make it seem as if Samuel is a demon child, in keeping with themes from 1960s and 1970s horror films (*Rosemary's Baby* [1968], *The Exorcist* [1973], *The Omen* [1976]): he builds elaborate weapons (shown with a close-up of him sawing a two by four first thing in the morning and the exaggerated diegetic[2] sound of this undertaking), he fires a heavy ball through the window after his mother yells "please don't!", we see several close-ups of his gaping, screaming mouth and his feet kicking the back of the seat in the car, and he looks satisfied after he pushes his cousin Ruby (Chloe Hurn) out of an elevated playhouse. But this is only an initial coding, one designed, perhaps, to get us as viewers to sympathise with Amelia. She is harried, exhausted, frustrated—but for good reason: she is the single parent of a difficult child.

But Amelia is not failing as a mother because she is not trying. Although she doesn't take joy in it, she seems to live by the dictum that 'the mother continues to feel complete only when she is with' her child (Sears, 2001: 8). Samuel will not go to sleep without her, but bed-sharing makes her miserable. This becomes evident when the scene cuts from Amelia reading to Samuel to juxtaposed close-ups of a sleeping Samuel's foot moving across the sheet, his hand kneading the vein in Amelia's neck, and his teeth grinding (all with exaggerated diegetic sound on the soundtrack). The next close-up is of Amelia, prodded and pummelled by Samuel in bed, her eyes open and an annoyed look on her face. And yet, contemporary parents will recognise Amelia's behaviour as aligned with ideologies of attachment parenting, which, as one commentator who parented by the book for a while understands it, suggest that 'it is every child's birthright to sleep nestled between their parents for a couple of years, firmly latched onto a maternal nipple whenever he or she wants' (Eller, 2015: n.p.). Amelia's actions correlate with this advice, but, like the aforementioned critic of attachment parenting, she, too, feels attachment might be great for the child, but not so great for the mother. Amelia blinks slowly and moves Samuel's leg from on top of her, then scoots to the very edge of the bed (so close to the edge that her nose and half her arm hang over the side). The overhead shot shows a gap of a few inches now established between mother and child. The title card follows this scene, suggesting that the Babadook has less to do with Samuel's fears and more to do with Amelia's desires to reclaim an independent selfhood.

Samuel certainly seems calmer and more secure in Amelia's presence; 'from Amelia's perspective, however, their physical intimacy is shown to be deeply intrusive, eroding her sense of herself as a separate subject with her own needs and desires' (Quigley, 2016: 70). Later, when Amelia masturbates, the scene cross-cuts between her relaxing and easing into a moment of release and shots of Samuel (in his separate bedroom) getting out of bed, looking in his closet, and finally bursting into Amelia's room just before she orgasms; he jumps into the bed and shouts about the Babadook being in his room. Although Amelia emphatically states, "This is not going to happen," she does so while pushing Samuel down on the pillow in her bed, suggesting that she feels bed-sharing should

[2] Diegetic sound is sound from within the world of the film. In this case, the sound is diegetic, but its volume is exaggerated.

solve Samuel's problem with nightmares. Once again, Samuel throws his arm over her neck and ends up sleeping in Amelia's bed—but this time viewers don't see Amelia remove herself from his hold. Amelia's rage in the film is most commonly associated with her grief over her husband's death (see Quigley, 2016: 61; Jacobsen, 2016), but it is important to consider that the traumatic loss of her husband corresponds with the traumatic loss of her selfhood when she became a mother—a self that, because she is a single parent who also works in caregiving, she is unable to reclaim.

Once the Babadook appears in their lives, Samuel's behaviour seems to escalate to the most extreme limits—he yells at his mother from the back of the car that she will be afraid of the Babadook 'when it creeps into your room at night. You will be when it eats your insides,' and he pushes her down and yells, "Do you want to die?" Surely these kinds of threats are enough to make any mother question her success at child-rearing. As Rozsika Parker puts it, minor forms of violence and aggression against children, such as slapping a child who breaks out of a mother's grasp and runs across the street, occur 'because [the mother] hates the child for behaviour that threatens her with the loss of an internal object called "me-as-a-good-mother", for turning her into a monster, and for obscuring the love and concern that are obviously also there' (1997: 21). Samuel's behaviour indicates to Amelia, and to any onlookers, that she is not 'mom enough,' and, to avoid the unsolicited advice of others, Amelia feels compelled to discipline him.

Amelia is surrounded with those who have advice for her regarding how to raise her (difficult) child: his teacher and principal want him to have a one-on-one monitor because he brought a dart gun to school; her sister tells her that she doesn't visit because she 'can't stand being around [her] son,' and tells Amelia, "You can't stand being around him yourself;" the doctor tells her that "all children see monsters;" the police laugh at her when she says she is being stalked; and two family services agents pity her and show concern when Samuel says he's 'a bit tired from the drugs mum gave me.' Constantly, Amelia feels compelled to explain herself and her parenting methods. She tells the teacher and principal, whom the low-angle shot underscores as towering authority figures behind the desk, "Samuel doesn't need a full-time monitor. What he needs is some understanding." But they sit in front of a large window, the bright light behind them suggesting they are enlightened 'experts,' while Amelia is small, emotional, and in the dark in the opposing eye-level shot. When Amelia and Samuel retreat into the house, however, beyond these disciplining voices, the dangers increase—perhaps because it is within the house, with only Samuel and her feelings toward him, that Amelia feels the loss of self most acutely.

Amelia can't turn to other mothers for support, either, because in a neoliberal, individualist society, women police the behaviours of other women, and women also make it seem as though motherhood, and the ways women approach it, are freely made choices rather than the result of complex ideologies. Parker discusses 'mothers mirroring mothers,' pointing out that 'mothers both do and do not provide each other with comforting reflections and a place of safety in a society even more critical of mothers than they are of themselves' (1995: 2-3). Amelia encounters the pressures generated by discursive ideologies of mothering when she attends Ruby's birthday party at her sister, Claire's (Hayley McElhinny), house. After Ruby and the other partygoers leave the room, Samuel clings to Amelia's neck as he whines and refuses to let go. The next shot is devastating—Claire's friends (credited as 'Eastern Suburbs Mums': Pippa Wanganeen, Peta Shannon, and Michelle Nightingale), all in sophisticated black clothing that contrasts with Amelia's pink dress, are gathered around the island, and all drop their polite smiles, turn, and stare at this demonstration of Amelia's inept mothering. When she finally pries Samuel away, the other mothers exchange judgmental glances, most of them avoiding eye contact with Amelia.

These other mothers judge Amelia because they cannot empathise with her experience of motherhood—they clearly possess social and cultural capital (as well as financial capital) that she does not. As the mothers complain about their hectic schedules, filled with volunteering with 'disadvantaged women,' some of whom have lost their husbands, and about their husbands' work schedules that leave them 'with the kids 24/7, it feels like,' Amelia can't stop herself from responding: "That's a real tragedy. Not having time to go to the gym anymore, how do you cope? You must have so much to talk about with those poor disadvantaged women." No one responds verbally to this comment, but the reverse-shots show Claire aghast and the other mothers appalled at Amelia's outburst—they, too, are filmed at a slight low angle with a bright light behind them, echoing the earlier shots with the teacher and principal, while Amelia is again filmed in a seated eye-level close-up, stripping her of authority. The horror of being judged by the same standards as other, wealthier mothers turns on Amelia—she begins to interpret herself as a monster, rather than as a typical mother. This scene highlights the advantages of these 'successful' mothers; for one, they have identities separate from their children, separate from being mothers, and Amelia does not, partly because she hasn't yet been able to admit to herself how much she needs it. Nevertheless, if other mothers are going to police her mothering, Amelia takes this opportunity to point out that she is a single mother who doesn't have assistance with childrearing or a break to go to the gym (suggesting the extent to which intensive mothering is made possible by class privilege).

No wonder Amelia fantasises about time away from her son. When her kind coworker, Robbie (Daniel Henshall), volunteers to cover her shift so she can relax, Amelia goes to the mall. The scene is shot initially through

the mall's windows, so that reflections and a slight haze erect a barrier between viewers and Amelia, who drifts, alone, through the corridors. We don't hear ambient sound either, but rather a non-diegetic score with rustling and the slow, eerie piano notes associated with horror. When Amelia sits on one end of a couch, alone, eating an ice cream cone, a slight haze and the passing shoppers obstruct our view of her, and when she gets in her car in the parking lot, we see her through the glass of the windshield as she intently watches a couple in a nearby parked car. As Paula Quigley reads it, this scene 'create[s] a sense of her being cut adrift from her surroundings and from "normal life"' (2016: 66). However, the haziness here, and the seemingly bizarre nature of her activity—eating ice cream alone in the mall—seem to connote instead the fantasy of time away from one's child. (Amelia's behaviour here resonates with the behaviour of many contemporary mothers, who admit, on social media groups, to the joys of drinking coffee alone in a parking lot.) Perhaps critics have missed reading this scene as such because many viewers aren't used to thinking of mothers as having desires independent of their children's well-being? If we consider Amelia's perspective as a mother's perspective, we might read these scenes not as indicating that Amelia is adrift and isolated, but rather as indicating her fantasies—fantasies that she keeps safe by containing them behind glass, and fantasies that are horrifying according to ideologies of intensive motherhood, because they suggest that a mother has interests and desires that do not involve her child.

Exploring horror from the woman's, and in particular, the mother's, perspective allows the film to consider what the mother's fantasies and fears might be. And many of those fantasies and fears are caused not just by the contradictory and intense experience of mothering, but also by the ideologies surrounding attachment parenting and intensive mothering. For example, a crucial aspect of forming an independent identity (a project that, under neoliberalism, every individual should complete upon adulthood) entails a certain degree of selfishness; however, 'attachment makes selfishness impossible' (Gambotto-Burke, 2014). To consider what attachment parenting feels like from the mother's perspective, we have to think about the mother's 'unconscious fantasy' (Parker, 1995: 64) of herself as a perfect mother, a fantasy inspired at least in part by cultural ideologies surrounding motherhood. According to Patrice DiQuinzio (1999), 'essential motherhood,' or the notion that women exist to be mothers and are 'naturally' suited to succeed at and enjoy mothering, makes the mother's fantasies of what mothering will be like all the more damaging; 'essential motherhood requires mothering of women, but it represents motherhood in a way that denies mothers' and women's individualist subjectivity' (xiii). When women fantasise about being 'mom enough,' they are bound to fail, and the guilt of such a failure might be enough to make them monstrous.

MONSTROUS MOTHER OR MATERNAL AMBIVALENCE?

And, in fact, a critical tendency has been to divide mothers in films into 'good mothers' and 'bad mothers,' with both bound to fail their children in one way or another. In the terms established by classical analyses of the 'Bad Mother,' such as those by Carol Clover (1992) and Linda Williams (2000), good mothers are de-eroticised, and bad mothers are 'phallic,' or smothering and intent on dominating their children. Arnold rethinks this framework for the twenty-first century, however, arguing,

> The Bad Mother is not only a product of the patriarchal imaginary, or a representative of the nightmare unconscious, but also a transgressive figure who resists conformity and assimilation. Her very transgressions often indicate the slipperiness of patriarchy. The Bad Mother can point to dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the psychosocial structures of the family. (69)

Erin Harrington surmises that 'where a "good" mother makes extraordinary sacrifices, a "bad" mother's sacrifice result[s] in a loss of her sense of self' (2016: 206). In other words, a 'bad' mother might reflect not her personal failings, but the failure of cultural discourses around mothering that make her read her own efforts as failures. As Harrington points out:

> Horror films are a space in which historically specific hopes and anxieties about the nature of motherhood and maternal affect are variously articulated, enforced and challenged, instead of bluntly represented as 'good' or 'bad'. (2016: 183)

Rather than think of Amelia as a monster, then, we should question the monstrous aspects of motherhood upon which the film is commenting.

It is undeniable that Amelia and the monster are aligned. For example, when Samuel has a bad dream, she goes into his room and checks for monsters—but when she does so, the shots are from under the bed and within the closet. That is, we now see Amelia and Samuel from a monster's perspective, a momentary point of view shift that, because viewers have already been aligned with Amelia's perspective, suggests a unity between Amelia's and the monster's perspectives. When we consider maternal ambivalence, or, as D. W. Winnicott insisted as early as 1949, the psychological commonplace that 'the mother (…) hates her infant from the word go' (1994: 355), Amelia

comes to seem even more monstrous. But ambivalence is common: Parker (1995), a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, defines maternal ambivalence as 'the experience shared variously by all mothers in which loving and hating feelings for their children exist side by side' (1). 'All mothers' experience, at times, feelings of hatred for their children, but as Parker points out, 'our culture (…) virtually prohibit[s] the kind of full discussion and exploration' that would normalise these feelings and make them bearable (1). Incidentally, up until the very late twentieth century, maternal ambivalence was also discussed primarily from the child's perspective, and in terms of its impact on the child, rather than from the mother's perspective and in terms of its impact on the mother (see Parker, 1995: 12). *The Babadook* challenges this historical framing of maternal ambivalence. The monster in the film is not the mother, but the combined effects of ideologies of intensive mothering and the interference of 'experts,' both of which tell Amelia she is a 'bad' mother, and a culture that makes it unacceptable for a mother to express her (very typical) frustrations with mothering.

The film expresses not a mother's desire to annihilate the source of her frustration, but rather her ambivalent feelings of alternating love and hate for her child. For example, when Samuel caresses Amelia's face in an early scene, she closes her eyes and seems to enjoy the affection, but when he hugs her as tightly as he can a moment later, she pushes him away and growls, "Don't do that!" This early scene indicates that Samuel is aware of how his mother's ambivalence makes it impossible for her to develop a connected relationship with him and to feel good about her accomplishments as a mother. But she does care about and effectively mother her son—she chastises both the school principal and her hallucinated husband for referring to Samuel as 'the boy,' and vows to find an appropriate school for him. The reason she can't express her frustrations alongside her victories is because motherhood has been essentialised as something women are inherently good at and inherently relish, to the extent that mothers are criticised for expressing (outside of what Parker [1995:66] has noted is the socially acceptable form of satire) the frustrations that accompany motherhood. The monster in the film is the institutionalised pressure to be 'mom enough,' to never want to be away from one's child.

Significantly, the film acknowledges that these feelings of maternal ambivalence are nearly universal. For example, Samuel repeats over and over that he is hungry after Amelia has not slept all night, calling to mind the incessant demands of children everywhere. Amelia's response, at least initially, is also a familiar maternal complaint, albeit phrased in harsher terms: she growls, "Why do you have to keep talk, talk, talking? Don't you ever stop?" and, "If you're that hungry, why don't you go and eat shit?" But Amelia doesn't relish that Samuel runs away from her after she says this—instead, she rises from bed and speaks softly to Samuel, apologising and offering to cook him something. In case that scene seems too extreme to express a universal maternal ambivalence, when Amelia takes Samuel to a diner for ice cream because of her remorse about this comment, they sit in a booth adjacent to a mother (Alicia Zorkovic) who is arguing with and disciplining five unruly children (India Zorkovic, Isla Zorkovic, Charlie Crabtree, Ethan Grabis, Sophie Allan). Although Samuel sits quietly sipping his milkshake, Amelia and the other frustrated mother are positioned to mirror each other on the far left and right sides of the shot—and both frown as they lean in the direction of their children. Surely this scene resonates with anyone who has taken even one child to a restaurant, and reminds parents of some of the freedom and peace they lose when they gain children.

But if we look beyond the ideology of intensive mothering, we find that many psychologists note that maternal ambivalence is both normal and healthy—as long as it is acknowledged rather than denied. As Parker explains, 'it is the mother's achievement of ambivalence – the awareness of her coexisting love and hate for the baby – that can promote a sense of concern and responsibility towards, and differentiation of self from the baby. Accordingly, both idealisation and denigration of her baby diminish' (1997: 16). Parker argues that maternal ambivalence can lead to creative solutions: consider, for example, the image in the lullaby 'Rock-a-by-baby' of the cradle falling from a high tree (1995: 63). When faced with a baby that continues to cry, mothers can both sing their frustrations and soothe the baby simultaneously—that is, they can express their ambivalence creatively.

Such a theory provides support for the notion that Amelia, as a woman who used to write 'magazine articles' and 'kids' stuff,' might be responsible for not only the violent actions that the Babadook causes but also the storybook itself. After Oskar's death and Samuel's birth, Amelia no longer writes children's stories. As Stone argues about writing and maternal subjectivity, "The subject is one who actively gives meaning to his or her experience (in speech, writing, or other modes), and who can do so only because at some level he or she identifies as the single agent performing this activity" (2012: 15). Amelia's individual subjectivity is subsumed in motherhood, and that sudden and total abandonment of her independent self, and her writing, ultimately results in the impulse to express her desire to be rid of her son, initially only in fiction. The storybook of *Mister Babadook* is a creative expression of her resentment of Samuel. The DVD version's home screen underscores this solution when it opens with Amelia reading, "Whether it's in a word or it's in a book, you can't get rid of the Babadook," the first line of the story of *Mister Babadook*, suggesting that her word and the book might be the same. It is telling that the last several pages of the storybook are blank, waiting for the details of Amelia's and Samuel's story to emerge. If the story of *Mister Babadook* is Amelia's use of the horror genre to explore her feelings toward her son, expressing those feelings, in a

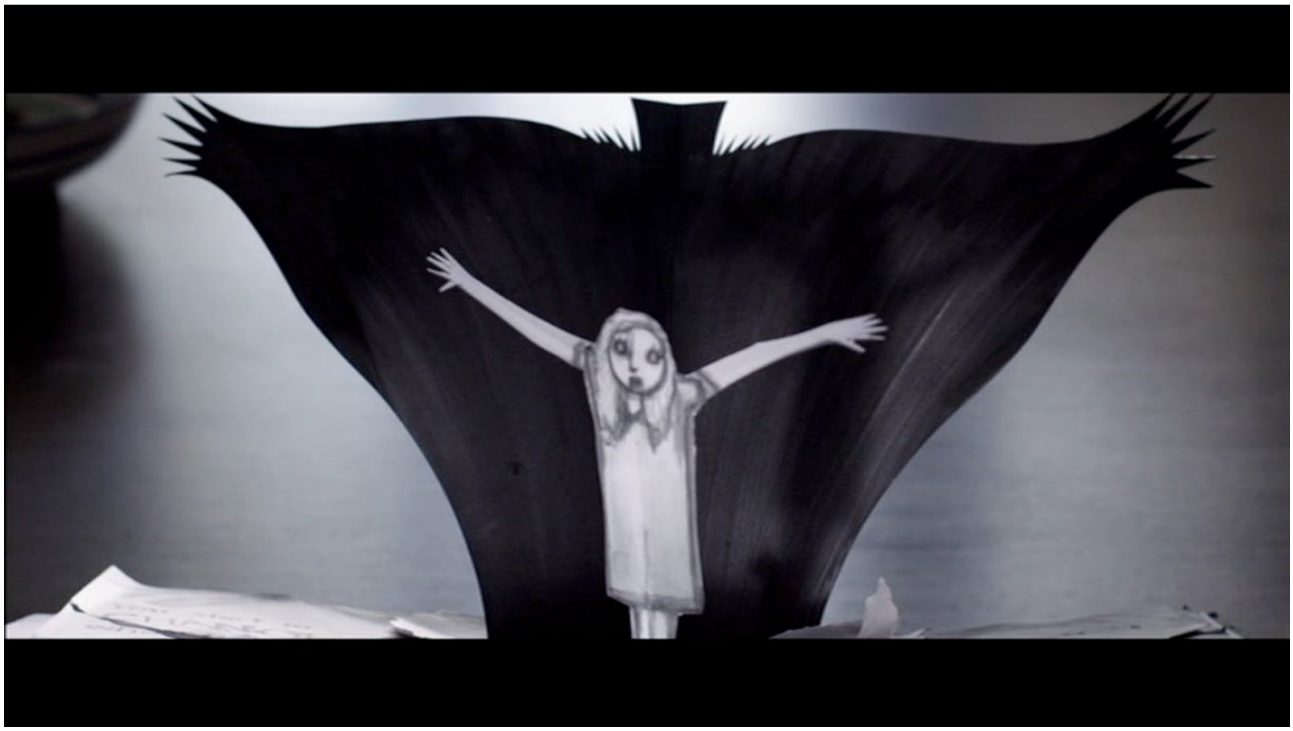

Figure 1. The mother and the Babadook are intertwined. Frame from *The Babadook* (Screen Australia, Causeway Films)

culture in which mothers are told to sacrifice individuality and that their children are the only thing that will make them feel complete, truly horrifies her. As Quigley notes,

> As Amelia's mask of maternal self-sacrifice begins to slip, the conventions of the horror genre provide a vocabulary capable of articulating the 'real' feelings beneath Amelia's façade. (2016: 70)

The storybook, whose title *Babadook* seems to echo a child's attempt at saying 'baby book,' becomes another parenting book whose shadow and influence the harried mother cannot escape, and therefore, like *The Baby Book* and other attachment parenting manuals, it takes on a life of its own and gives Amelia more grief than support.

What does the storybook of *Mister Babadook* tell Amelia—and, according to this reading, what does Amelia tell herself—about who she is as a mother? "The more you deny, the stronger I get," the book reads. "You start to change when I get in, the Babadook growing right under your skin." One crucial pop-up in the book features a woman, in a nightgown similar to the one Amelia wears throughout the film, with her arms spread above her head. A large shadow with the top hat and pointy fingers of the Babadook extends behind her, suggesting that the woman and the Babadook are intertwined (**Figure 1**). The next pages feature elaborate pop-ups of a woman strangling a child and then cutting her own throat. The storybook, I argue, expresses Amelia's ambivalent feelings toward her son; the Babadook is a projected embodiment of her rage and frustration with the demands of parenting, not to mention the added pressure to be the 'perfect' parent despite the difficult circumstances of this family.

First Amelia begins to see the Babadook everywhere, and then she begins to change as a mother, no longer concealing her frustrations with Samuel, but now giving them voice. For example, when she tries to convince the police that someone is stalking her and her child, she quickly stops when she sees a jacket with the Babadook's long, thin fingers hanging on the wall. She later hallucinates roaches crawling out of the wall behind the refrigerator and begins frantically cleaning the house. These roaches seem to express the disgusting, not-me feelings Amelia has about being a parent—feelings that, as the storybook says, will make you 'wish you were dead.' And while the house in which Amelia and Samuel live is dark, stuffy, and entrapping, it's important to note that the Babadook follows them when they leave the house. For example, Amelia sees it creeping on the roof of the car, after she sees roaches crawling on her dress, and crashes into another driver. These are additional indications that the Babadook is intertwined with Amelia.

As the film continues, Amelia becomes a danger to her son, but not until the final battle with the Babadook is she wholly consumed by rage and aggression. Before that, she might lash out at Samuel, but she also lovingly apologises. Even when she's almost wholly consumed by the Babadook, and Samuel tries to wake her, she refers to him as 'sweetheart.' Similarly, when she hallucinates Samuel lying on the couch with mouth gaping and blood running down his face and chest, she is horrified—and becomes even more horrified when she wakes from this hallucination to find that she is standing over a terrified Samuel with a knife in her hand. Although Amelia becomes,

as Harrington notes, 'the monstrous antagonist of the story,' it is also important to point out, as Harrington does, that Amelia endangers Samuel because 'she cannot live up to the impossible ideals of motherhood, and she cannot do what is, supposedly, a natural and essential part of a woman's experience' (2016: 180). Thus, while Amelia is aligned with the monster, she is also attacked by it, both articulating and challenging discursive ideologies of motherhood.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES

Amelia certainly looks monstrous throughout the last half of the film—she breaks the family dog's neck, pulls out her own bloody tooth, and climbs the door jamb of Samuel's room in a supernatural feat of strength. But, as David Greven (2011: 13) points out, as is common in films that blend horror and melodrama, Samuel is not repulsed by the mother, but drawn to her. She looks horrifying not because she represents what disgusts Samuel—the abject mother—but because there is something within her that is not-her—she has been impregnated with the abject Babadook and has to expel it to reestablish her bodily integrity. Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject in *Powers of Horror* (1982) has been highly influential in film studies, especially in terms of thinking of the 'monstrous-feminine,' in Barbara Creed's (2015) terms. In Kristeva's theory, abjection contributes to identity formation—the child learns to differentiate him or herself from the mother by seeing the mother's body as abject, as the opposite of the child's independence and liveliness. As Creed summarises it:

> One of the key figures of abjection is the mother who becomes an abject at that moment when the child rejects her for the father who represents the symbolic order. (2015: 38)

But such a theory works only when the horror aligns us with the child's perspective, and *The Babadook* is about what horrifies mothers.

Thus it is necessary to think a bit more about how Kristeva defines the abject. Kristeva points out that the abject is caused by 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (1982: 4). The child learns to separate itself from the mother by seeing the mother as abject. In a crucial discussion of the corpse, Kristeva writes:

> Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (1982: 4)

That is, the abject is both horrifying and attractive. If the child does not definitively separate him/herself from the mother, he risks the danger of not forming a unique, separate identity—and, in turn, if the mother does not maintain an identity separate from her child, she might also be in danger. As Arnold explains, Kristeva discusses the maternal body as 'a site of many of those things which are abjected (breast milk, menstrual blood), and she points back to a time of non-differentiation between the child and mother' (2013: 14). But, Arnold continues:

> The abject is not something, therefore, that is inherently evil or 'bad', since to be so is to be distinct from the self. The abject is that which, like Freud's uncanny, points back to origins, to a time before self: birth, mother-child symbiosis. (2013: 14-15)

The abject points to the breakdown of boundaries between child and mother—and recalling 'mother-child symbiosis' is as likely to 'disturb identity' for the mother as it is for the child.

Motherhood is, after all, an experience which blurs the boundaries between the self and the other; those mothers who experience pregnancy and bear their own children literally experience a prolonged period when the child is a part of themselves. For Kristeva, abjection is a loss of one's personal identity, and an identity that is constituted by some other: "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'" (1982: 10). Thus, while Kristeva explains that subjects always establish their identities by differentiating themselves from the mother's abject (disgusting, terrifying) body, she does not discuss how a mother might form an identity separate from her child. Surely the mother is not bound to only see herself also as monstrous, terrifying, and abject. José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification provides a way of rethinking representations of maternal abjection. Muñoz writes that

> disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (1999: 31)

Although Amelia sees herself as abject until her final battle with the Babadook, perhaps the film can help mothers recognize the limiting dominant ideologies of motherhood and envision the many unique identities that mothers possess.

Thus, the horror in *The Babadook* becomes tied to the eroded boundaries between mother and child (boundaries that were eroded because of the pressures of the ideologies of intensive mothering). Creed points out that 'that which crosses or threatens to cross the "border" is abject' (2015: 42). One's child certainly crosses a border when it gestates inside the mother, but children also continually violate the border between mother and child when they insist on being in the mother's space, following the mother to the bathroom, calling for the mother, and touching the mother. Might the mother instead see the breaking down of boundaries between self and Other that occurs when one forms attachment bonds with one's child as threatening to her identity in the same way that the child sees the fusion between mother and self as threatening to his/her entrance into the Symbolic Order? As noted previously, the constant interruptions of caregiving make writing difficult, and thus threaten the mother's sense of her individuality, her sense of herself as part of the Symbolic Order as well. But Baraitser contends 'that motherhood lends itself to anecdote rather than the grand narrative of "mother-writing" due to the constant attack on narrative that the child performs' (15). Within *The Babadook*, Samuel embodies all those things that remind Amelia of the fragility of her body and independence; her son threatens the borders she constructs around herself, he threatens her with non-differentiation. In other words, encountering the abject for the mother would produce a desire for the eroded boundaries separating mother and child to be restored.

Amelia's desire for boundaries is clear throughout the film. When Amelia gives Samuel sedatives to help him sleep (in his own bed, alone), she descends into her bed from above in a shot that echoes the shot of her awakening from the film's opening nightmare—but this time her face is contented, and her arms lie still at her sides. She is happy to know that she has this reprieve from her son and his demands—as Baraitser theorises about maternal subjectivity, mothers might find themselves reduced to tears by a sleeping child because 'in sleep, the child's capacity for separateness is simply shown up in relief, and for a few moments it makes (the mother) weep (…) because of a sudden realisation that the child already knows how to separate' (2009: 109). Amelia is desperate for these moments of separateness. Later, Samuel, out of desperation, tries to call Mrs. Roach (Barbara West) and Auntie Claire, but Amelia takes the batteries out of the phone handset, cuts the phone lines, and turns Mrs. Roach away, insisting that they're 'ok'—and thereby establishes boundaries around this family unit. When Samuel tells her he's trying to protect them from the Babadook and shouts, "I just didn't want you to let it in," she responds, "Nothing is coming in here tonight. Nothing!" While this scene hints that she will harm Samuel, it is also crucial to understanding how much of Amelia's possession stems from the need to establish boundaries between the me and the not-me. When the Babadook's possession of her allows her to express her extreme frustration, she endangers Samuel, because she has not been able to acknowledge her ambivalence. But, possessed by the Babadook, she freely admits: "You don't know how many times I wished it was you, not him, that died. … Sometimes I just want to smash your head against a brick wall until your fucking brains pop out." Samuel responds, "You're not my mother!" She asks him to repeat himself; when he does, she screams, "I am your mother!" The Babadook allows Amelia to express her rage and frustration with mothering—but it also forces her to claim her maternal identity.

Even when she is fully possessed by the Babadook, Amelia alternates between love and hate. She apologises to Samuel for not being good since Oskar's death—but it turns out that she is using claims that "I want to make it up to you, Sam" to be able to get close enough to him to strangle him so he can 'meet [his] dad.' She has nearly superhuman strength at this point, but Samuel jams a kitchen knife into her leg, and when she follows him into the basement, clubs her so that she passes out on the floor, where he can tie her up to protect himself. Samuel refuses to leave her, saying, "We said we'd protect each other. I know you don't love me. The Babadook won't let you. But I love you, mum. And I always will." Amelia becomes tearful at this confession, perhaps because he here acknowledges that he is distinct from her. Then Samuel encourages his mother to 'get it out.' In this way, the film can be cathartic for any mothers in the audience who also feel frustration about mothering and a need to 'get it out.' Amelia frees her hand and begins strangling him, moaning and weeping as she does so—she is finally expressing her simultaneous hate and love for her child. Her grimace and grip soften when Samuel caresses her face, just as he did at the beginning of the film. She shakes violently, but finally vomits an inky black puddle and collapses on the floor.

While Amelia thinks this is the end of it, Samuel states, "You can't get rid of the Babadook" as the Babadook hurls Samuel's body up the stairs. And indeed, if maternal ambivalence is normal and healthy, it is important that Amelia can't get rid of it. But once she expels the Babadook, Amelia is also freer to express her love for and protectiveness of her son. And that love for and protectiveness of her son, she realises, can only be fully expressed once she establishes some boundaries. To finally subdue the Babadook, she shouts, "This is my house. You are trespassing in my house. If you touch my son again I'll fucking kill you!" The Babadook tries to pull Samuel out

of Amelia's grasp, but her hold on him is too strong, proving that establishing boundaries strengthens her ability to protect her son.

The Babadook exposes and critiques the ideologies associated with contemporary motherhood, especially those that would insist on the intensive mothering correlated with attachment parenting. The film takes a different approach from that of most horror films about mothers, which, as Harrington argues, 'suggest that the precarious balance between the needs of the self and the demands of motherhood can only ever end in destruction of the mother and/or her child' (2016: 184). Amelia and Samuel approach destruction, but in the end, neither of them is destroyed. Instead, after Amelia locks the Babadook in the basement, she scoops Samuel into her arms and kisses him for the first time in the film. This is a film, as Hazel Cills puts it, 'about a mother against a *valid* and vulnerable part of herself' (2014, my emphasis). That 'valid and vulnerable part of herself' is her ambivalence, and, as Harrington notes, the 'monstrous' 'notion that a woman can and *should* be judged using a set of impossible criteria against which she will always be found wanting' (2016: 214). That the film validates Amelia's ambivalence is crucial to understanding how it critiques and challenges contemporary ideologies of attachment parenting and essential and intensive mothering.

But does the film ultimately transform motherhood? After all, at the end of the film, Amelia seems to have not one, but two, difficult children to nurture—one of them the roaring, rage-filled Babadook who now lives in her basement. Whether we see the film as challenging contemporary ideologies of intensive mothering depends on what we interpret the Babadook to represent. If it represents Amelia's grief at the loss of her husband (which is how many reviews of the film interpret it), then the figure of the Babadook might seem to be Amelia's longing for a literal embodiment of the patriarchal 'law of the Father' to relieve her of the burdens of being both nurturer and authority figure—in other words, it might suggest that she would be better off if she was not a single mother, but rather one more fully embroiled in the patriarchy.

If, however, the Babadook is an embodiment of Amelia's own ambivalence toward motherhood, we might interpret her nurturing this ambivalence as a positive step toward challenging the ideologies associated with contemporary motherhood. The basement is off limits throughout the film; it is where Amelia keeps Oskar's things, which she avoids. But at the end of the film, the basement is off limits only to Samuel. Amelia visits the basement almost ritually, without Samuel, and quiets the Babadook's rage in that space separate from her child. In fact, when the Babadook tries to bend her under the weight of its rage, she pushes against it, repeating three times, in a kind of ritual chant, "It's alright." Parker, drawing on Jessica Benjamin, indicates that 'the recognition by a mother that she has her own needs and priorities is (…) crucial for a child's development' (1997: 20). For Amelia, this space separate from her child, where she confronts and quiets her rage, is also a space that makes her a better mother. After Amelia returns from feeding and calming the Babadook, she tenderly strokes the bruise on Samuel's neck, a bruise that he got when she, filled with the Babadook's rage, tried to strangle him. Samuel comments that "it's getting better, mum," referring both to the bruise and their relationship.

As O'Reilly points out, 'to say that the boredom, exhaustion, ambivalence, guilt, loneliness, anxiety, and self-doubt mothers feel is normal and common—indeed more real than the contented, calm, and composed mother found in magazines—is therapeutic, indeed liberating' (2010: 209). *The Babadook* is a film that opens itself to various interpretations. It expresses feelings of rage, grief, the desire for independence, and love, and ultimately accepts maternal ambivalence. Crucial to this reading of the film's critique of parenting 'by the book' is the fact that the film gives Amelia one final chance to confront the authorities: the family services agents return on the day of Samuel's birthday party. This time, though, the camera is at a slightly higher level when focused on Amelia and Samuel, and both Amelia and Samuel and the agents are in normal ambient light. That is, Amelia has demonstrated that she as a mother does have some authority over the raising of her child, and she no longer has to mother 'by the book.' Like Cynthia Eller (2015), a mother who writes about succumbing to the pressures of attachment parenting, who 'renamed *The Baby Book* "How to Be a Perfect Mother and Why You'll Never Be One,"' and now keeps the book in the garage for occasional reference, Amelia keeps the Babadook locked away in the basement.

The film's final sequence is crucial to understanding what has been accomplished. Only after Amelia has quieted the Babadook—her feelings of frustration and rage—by telling Samuel to get out of the house and stay out until she comes up from the basement, can she embrace spending time with him doing magic tricks, preparing for his birthday party, and cradling him on her lap. The film's final shot is a close-up of Amelia's face, and the film doesn't go to extremes in creating this happy ending—Amelia is smiling, but only slightly, as she holds Samuel's head against her chest. This fact, combined with the Babadook who remains in the basement, indicates that the film is realistic about maternal ambivalence as a lifelong condition. If neoliberal ideologies of self-surveillance result in the ideologies of parenting that insist that mothers can have it all and do everything perfectly, then perhaps a cultural recognition and representation of the difficulties and frustrations of mothering, of maternal ambivalence, will help other mothers resist the demands to mother by the book in the future.

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Curating 'Creative Dystocia': Exhibiting the Relationship between Artists, Identity and Motherhood in Twenty-first Century Australian Art

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ABSTRACT

The past five years have seen a reinvigoration of debate regarding the significance and impact of motherhood on artists' careers, suggesting that this remains unfinished business for feminism and feminist researchers. Such conversation reflects an ambivalent and ambiguous relationship between motherhood, art and creative identity. While a number of artist-driven initiatives tackling these ongoing concerns have emerged in the United Kingdom and United States, responses in Australia have been less clearly defined. Suspicious of essentialist arguments regarding the maternal in second wave feminist art, contemporary artists are just as likely to address motherhood as an industrial issue as a philosophical position or symbolic motif, suggesting a strategic negotiation of motherhood. Building on previous research analysing the barriers that inhibit women artists in Australia and the creative strategies they employ, this article applies a blended methodological approach to map the current relationship between artists and motherhood. It outlines the curatorial development of an upcoming feminist group exhibition *Creative Dystocia*, discusses a sample of contemporary artists, and contextualises these historically and conceptually. The intention of this developing curatorial project is to interrupt dominant narratives of motherhood in the Australian context to provide a more deeply textured account of contemporary artists' experiences of motherhood and art-making.

Keywords: motherhood, Australian art, creative identity, feminist curation, practice-led research

INTRODUCTION

The past five years have seen a reinvigoration of debate regarding the significance and impact of motherhood on artists' careers, suggesting that this remains unfinished business for feminism and feminist researchers. This global conversation reflects a stubbornly ambivalent and ambiguous relationship between motherhood, art and creative identity. While a number of artist-driven initiatives directly tackling these ongoing concerns have emerged in the United Kingdom and United States, the responses in Australia have been less clearly defined and less concerned with interrogating the assumptions underlying these current discussions. Suspicious of seemingly essentialist arguments regarding the maternal in second wave feminist art, contemporary artists are just as likely to address motherhood as an industrial rights issue as a philosophical position or symbolic motif, suggesting a strategic negotiation of motherhood that has not yet been adequately addressed in the context of contemporary art. Although it can be argued that Australia has a long and strong history of feminist thought and practice (Lake, 1999), both in art and society more broadly, substantial dialogue and strategising regarding the relationship between art and motherhood is currently largely absent.

Building on previous research analysing both the systemic barriers that inhibit women artists in Australia and the creative strategies they employ (see Pedersen and Haynes, 2015), this paper applies a blended methodological approach to map the current relationship between artists and motherhood. It outlines the curatorial development of an upcoming feminist group exhibition *Creative Dystocia* (2019-), discusses a sample of contemporary artists, and contextualises these approaches historically and conceptually[1]. 'Dystocia' is the medical term for when the birthing labour fails to progress. In the context of this project, it refers to a failure of creative labour due to the common perceptions of mothering or the structural disadvantages it creates, as well as the difficulties many artists experience when attempting to reconcile creative and maternal labour. As a consequence, the project *Creative Dystocia* also aims

[1] *Creative Dystocia* is being developed as a collaborative, artist-driven exhibition project for realisation in Australia in 2020. Originating in Brisbane, its eventual form is being negotiated by an evolving team of artist-mothers and childfree, woman-identifying artists.

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to open up a space for women-identifying artists who are not mothers to consider how perceptions of mothering impact on their practices. As artist-curators, our intention is to interrupt singular or dominant narratives of motherhood in the Australian context in order to provide a deeply textured account of contemporary artists' experiences of motherhood and art-making. The structure of this paper reflects the practice-led nature of creative enquiry, where the creative practitioner makes sense of the field of knowledge through the act of making. While practice-led research has the capacity to yield rich new perspectives on the world around us (Smith and Dean, 2009), Andrew McNamara (2012) points out that it also presents the risk of internal bias and solipsism. Acutely aware of the potential echo-chamber of practice-led research, this paper focuses on the contextual and historical factors that have influenced the developmental curatorial rationale rather than the mechanisms of curating the exhibition. It positions the project of feminist curating within its global context, while pointing out the pressing local factors that have impressed on us the need for additional investigation in Australia.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT OF MOTHERHOOD ON ARTISTS' CAREERS

As has been observed regularly over at least the past forty years, art has a gender problem (Miller, 2016: 119). Globally, women study art in numbers equal to or greater than men, and yet they are less likely to be represented in exhibitions and museum collections than men (National Museum of Women in the Arts, n.d.; Townsend, 2017; The CoUNTess Report, 2016). The past decade has seen a resurgence in feminist research regarding the dynamics of the visual arts sector. In Australia that institutional critique has been exemplified by *The CoUNTess Report* (2016), a benchmarking project and online resource on gender equality in the Australian contemporary art sector. The CoUNTess' founder, Elvis Richardson, compiles and analyses data on art education, prizes, funding, art media, organisational makeup, and exhibitions of various kinds across a wide range of galleries including national, state, regional, commercial, artist-run galleries and contemporary art spaces.

Recently, this research was consolidated by The CoUNTess Report (2016), which was based on publicly available data collected from websites, exhibition catalogues, magazines and media in the calendar year 2014. The data indicated that in Australia "those graduating with degrees in fine art or visual art in 2014 were 73% female and 27% male, while those with postgraduate degrees were 75% female and 25% male" (2016: n.p). And yet almost from the moment they graduate, male artists are more likely to be selected by galleries for commercial representation and curated into exhibitions, with only 40 per cent of commercially-represented artists being women, and only 34 per cent of artists exhibited in state-run museums being women. This statistic becomes even more alarming once artists hit mid-career, where the number of identified practising women artists declines sharply.

As a response to this renewed attention to gender politics in the art world, numerous women-only exhibitions and feminist art retrospectives have been staged in museums and galleries around the world[2]. These exhibitions have provoked heated debates about their potential reinforcement of the art world's patriarchal values, as well as reviving fraught questions regarding biology, social roles and creativity. One reason given for the gender disparity apparent in gallery exhibitions and museum collections is the supposed incompatibility of motherhood with the role of being an artist (Gratton, 2017). *Creative Dystocia* addresses this assumption through the collaborative development of a group exhibition utilising feminist curatorial methods. It also investigates the current relationship between motherhood, creativity and visual arts in Australia.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MOTHERHOOD, ART AND CREATIVE IDENTITY

An overview of the literature regarding the relationships between motherhood and art reveals that women artists with mothering responsibilities generally report that being a mother has a positive influence on their art because they encounter new experiences, emotions, and imagery, which all inspire new creative work (Summers and Clarke, 2015). Even those who do not employ direct imagery of pregnancy or motherhood in their work indicate that the experience of seeing the world in a new way is influential (Power, 2008). This is notable, given the common belief that motherhood (or perhaps more accurately, the duties of mothering) diminishes an artist's creative capacity, or as Andrea Liss (2009) describes it, 'the lie that women, especially mothers, are not or cannot be thinking, critical human beings' (xiv). While many artists believe that motherhood has a positive impact on the

[2] See for example: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA (2007); *Global Feminisms,* The Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA (2007); *elles@centrepompidou,* The Pompidou Centre, Paris, France (2009); *Contemporary Australia: Women,* Gallery of Modern Art, Queensland, Australia (2012); *Unfinished Business: Perspectives on Art and Feminism*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia (2017).

art they make, they simultaneously say it diminishes the time available for making it (Brooks and Daniluk, 1998; Power, 2008; Summers and Clarke, 2015).

One of the inherent tensions experienced by artist-mothers is that child-rearing and making art use the same resources: time, focus, energy and inspiration. Many artists point out that these resources are limited, and consequently, must be carefully allocated to either mothering or art practice (Ciciola-Izzo, 2014; Power, 2008). Kirschenbaum and Reis' 1997 comparative study of ten female artists, for example, made these tensions between the desire and motivation for creative work and the demands of motherhood very clear. Social expectation dictates that mothering should be prioritised and many artist-mothers report feelings of guilt when they put their needs for creativity above their children's needs. However, as Kirchenbaum and Reis (1997) note, mother-artists remain hopeful about the future capacity to dedicate themselves more fully to art:

> The same factors also contributed to their creative process and the development of their identity as artists, their awareness and passion for their life and art, and their love of family and work. Whether or not any of these artists ever achieves the status of eminence cannot be determined at this time. What does seem clear is that because they are both artists and mothers, eminence may not be of ultimate importance in their lives because the creativity of each of these artists was expressed not only in their creative art products but also in their creative efforts in raising their children and nurturing their families. This provided frustrations for all of the participants in this study, but none of the artists regretted having children, and all looked forward to time later in their lives in which additional hours could be devoted to their art (263).

In recent years, the message to young artists has become more negative. From 2014 onwards, a number of mainstream media and online think pieces circulated, inferring once again that motherhood and artistic success were incompatible. For example, the BBC Two Artsnight episode *The Pram in the Hall* used Cyril Connolly's famous quote regarding parenthood as the 'enemy of good art' as the starting point for a discussion of whether 'children inhibit a creative life' (Artsnight 2015), and the Australian author Kate Holden was quoted as saying, 'You know those photos of the American dustbowl in the 1930s where the families literally walked off their land, leaving half eaten bowls of cereal on the kitchen table? That's what it felt like happened to my work when I had a baby' (in Williams, 2016: n.p).

Common themes emerge in studies of art and motherhood, including: the common assertion that art and motherhood are fundamentally incompatible due to the rigorous requirements of a successful art practice (Miller, 2016); that art making and mothering are both 'soft' tasks and therefore compatible with each other (Stohs, 1992); the deep two-way guilt of both artist/mothers and non-mothers, concerned that any decisions they make regarding art and parenting will be 'wrong' (Kirschenbaum and Reis 1997; Reis 2002; Ciciola-Izzo 2014); and the apparent blindness to the necessary 'third stream' where both working artists and mothers are required to undertake additional paid work to support themselves and their families (Crane, 2011). From the perspective of the mothers themselves, there are often positive impacts, both on their mothering and their art practice (Summers and Clarke, 2015). There remains however, some concern among contemporary artists that depicting motherhood in art risks 'being labelled saccharine, sentimental, and kitschy' (Kutis, 2013: 1).

Is the representation of motherhood for artists as an epic battle between competing desires and social imperatives accurate, or is something more complex and slippery being missed in this analysis? In the recent discussions, easy assumptions have been made about those women artists who are not mothers. Beyond the overtly antagonistic opinions of prominent artists such as Tracey Emin (Alexander, 2014) and Marina Abramovic (Neuendorf, 2016), whose views reinforce the narrative of motherhood and artistic success as mutually exclusive, there is little nuanced discussion of whether perceptions of motherhood also impact on women's artistic practices or the decisions they make regarding their careers. As Gayle Letherby (2018) has pointed out, voluntary and involuntary childlessness is often a continuum or an evolving status for women, rather than a single point of identification – and ambivalence about one's status can be experienced by both those with children and those without (246). There is also the risk, as Jennifer Stuart (2011) has indicated, of artistic output by childfree women being interpreted entirely as a substitute procreative activity; an attitude that elides the complexity of women's lives:

> To view the creative artist's product as equivalent to, or substitute for, a baby would demean the many other possible motivations for its creation. And yet there is certainly potential for the artist's creation—the painting, the symphony, the novel, the screenplay—to represent both her fantasied child and a version of herself (among other people and things) (418).

ARTISTS' RESPONSES TO MOTHERHOOD, CREATIVITY AND LABOUR

Depictions or representations of motherhood appear in the work of women artists throughout history. Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun's eighteenth-century self-portraits with her daughter or Berthe Morisot's Impressionist studies of motherhood, such as *The Cradle* (1872) provide an affectionate view of mothering from a feminine perspective. Much work that emerges during second wave feminist practice however, moves from motherhood as a subject of art to its matter (Lindau, 2016). In her study of maternality in Yoko Ono's practice, Elizabeth Ann Lindau discusses the artistic production of the late 1960s and 1970s as a galvanising moment in the relationship between art and motherhood. Citing projects like the Mother Art collective, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1976) and Susan Hiller's *Ten Months* (1977-79), Lindau reinforces Ono's claim that motherhood could be 'an artistically creative as well as procreative force' (Lindau, 2016: 72). Given this generation of artists' enduring significance as feminist practitioners and the influence Ono and Kelly have had on the current generation of contemporary artists, it is not surprising to see evidence of these approaches in current practice. Similarly, Mierle Laderman Ukeles' works from 1974, *Fall Time Variations III, Children's Piece, Time Stop* and *It's Okay to Have a Babysitter* have been revisited by younger artists due to retrospective exhibitions of the *Maintenance Art Works* between 2013 and 2016, in Austria, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the United States and in Brisbane, Australia – the location of the *Creative Dystocia* project. As Andrea Liss explains (2004):

> The art world patriarchy tried to make Ukeles cut off part of herself in favor of the other. It was unthinkable for a woman to be an artist and a mother. She had a brilliant idea. Rather than give up, which was decidedly not an option, Ukeles wisely and outrageously took the matter-of-fact stance that her maternal work was the material from which art and cultural commentary could be made (26).

In the Australian contemporary art context, art about motherhood is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Del Kathryn Barton, whose self-portrait with children[3] won the Archibald Prize, a high-profile Australian portraiture award, in 2008. She followed this with a similar family portrait of the actress Cate Blanchett, *Mother (a portrait of Cate)* in 2011. These paintings, although executed in a highly decorative, expressionistic style, are the descendants of Vigée Le Brun's court paintings of over 200 years earlier. In each of these works, a dignified mother figure collects her children to her in a protective or proprietorial way, surrounded by flora, while also performing mudra-like hand gestures. The mother is presented like a goddess-queen. While the popularity of these works indicates the resilience of motherhood as a popular romantic subject, contemporary approaches to motherhood by women artists are often more pragmatic.

One of the characteristics of contemporary art practice has been the growing professionalisation of the artist's role — or perhaps even its 'hyper-professionalization', as Daniel S. Palmer (2016) describes it. As artists have been encouraged to view their practice as a career rather than a critical vocation, there are increasing intersections between the issues they encounter and those experienced by the wider workforce. Attempts to address motherhood as an industrial issue for the arts are regularly stymied however by the distinctive differences between work arrangements. While most women workers have legislative protections against discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or parenthood, and access to some form of maternity leave, a majority of artists are freelance or self-employed (Throsby and Petetskaya, 2017: 10). As precarious workers with carer responsibilities, women artists find themselves at the pointy end of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on individualised empowerment and the dismantling of collectivised labour negotiations. As Elizabeth Humphrys (2018) points out, the rise of neoliberalism took on a unique complexion in Australia, where it developed under a structured agreement between government and the trades union movement, rather than in politically conservative arenas as elsewhere (3). This has implications for both their subjective position in the world, as Katarzyna Kosmala (2017) has pointed out, and for the more prosaic logistical aspects of their lives. Given this political 'squeeze', it is little wonder that artists are creating artwork in an attempt to re-order the world of work. In this regard they are also echoing Ukeles' declaration in her 1969 manifesto that there are important parallels between the processes of maintenance (including the chores of motherhood) and some art processes:

> Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials. Conceptual & Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes (1969: 2).

Artist activists with a focus on the particular experiences of motherhood continue to emphasise this principle of maintenance labour in the work that they carry out. A number of recent artist projects address the persistent gaps between professionalisation, career maintenance and the circumstantial conditions of artists' lives with regard

[3] Del Kathryn Barton, *You are what is most beautiful about me, a self portrait with Kell and Arella,* 2011

to motherhood. In the United States, the voluntary community organisation, Cultural ReProducers (established in Chicago in 2012 by the artist Christa Donner) places an emphasis on the collective benefit of resource sharing and truth telling. In her 2016 web article '*Who Cares for Whom? Parenthood in the Creative Community'*, Donner implores artists to own and acknowledge their parenting identity. Her suggestions include mentioning parenthood during artist talks; acknowledging the impact of child-raising when applying for funding; taking children along to art world events; referencing creative foremothers (the canon of artist mothers); rescheduling events to more child-friendly times; reconfiguring spaces and events to be more inclusive; and crucially, asking what payment is being offered for creative work. These strategic approaches acknowledge the barriers that are encountered by artist parents and importantly, indicate that collective and structural remedies are required.

What can artists do if they do not have access to a physical network for support or collective action however? Pittsburgh-based practitioner, Lenka Clayton initiated a home residency programme for herself in 2012. Titled *An Artist Residency in Motherhood* (ARIM), this self-designed artistic program resulted in a number of proposed and realised artworks as well as associated professional paraphernalia such as a manifesto (or artist's statement), business cards, signage and a website. With the assistance of mentors, studio visitors, and grants from the Pittsburgh Foundation and the Sustainable Arts Foundation, Clayton's project enabled her to continue both her creative and professional development as an artist. Clayton has since extended an invitation to other artist-mothers and in 2018 said over 600 artists-in-residence were participating in this project (Clayton, n.d.). While on the one hand, ARIM can be read as a practical response to the enduring problem of maintaining the discipline of an art practice in the midst of the chaos of parenting, it can also be interpreted as a political provocation, asking why it is that women artists are required to become the mothers of invention when it comes to sustaining their creative work.

A number of proof-of-concept or pilot projects seeking to reconcile mothering with creative work have been established in recent years. In the United Kingdom, The Mother House Studio model was initiated in 2016 by the ProCreate Project, an arts research and advocacy organisation established in 2013. The Mother House ran integrated studio spaces and day care programs for six months in London, Waterloo and for a fortnight in the town of Stroud, before opening in Dagenham with support from Create London. This project responds to the lack of affordable and equitable childcare available to women and explicitly draws a connection between the 'creative health' of mother artists and healthy communities:

> The project demonstrates potential to benefit the well-being of women artists by enabling them to make work during pregnancy and motherhood, sustain their artistic identity and confidence, and access a supportive peer-community, in-turn developing healthy families and young people (The Mother House, 2017).

Taking its cue from *An Artist Residency in Motherhood*, the *Mother in Arts* residency was run as a pilot project in Amsterdam in 2017. The participants-- four women artists who are also mothers – entered into the *Mother in Arts* program with funding from the Mondriaan Foundation. Collective and mutual child-care was provided in one of the artist's homes, while the women realised their artworks in a nearby studio complex, the artist-run space Goleb at de Vlugt. The premise of this residency program was that, given the right conditions, artist-mothers can continue to have successful artistic careers even during the particularly taxing period of early parenthood while still being deeply invested in the wellbeing and development of their children — or as the project's statement reads, 'Being a mother is not a stigma; motherhood can accompany a successful artistic practice' (Mother in Arts, 2017). *Mother in Arts* culminated in the exhibition *Re: Production,* with work by the participating artists: Cecilia Bengtsson, Cecilia Cavalieri, Aurora Rosales and Csilla Klenyanszki. Given the project's determination to connect a deep commitment to rich childhood development with art practice, it is unsurprising that the works included in the exhibition dealt with issues such as the intersubjective dynamics of mothering, parallels between mothering and ecological/political awareness, women's labour, and the precious nature of time. Crucially, it is the principle that 'women have to remain part of the art community after they've become mothers' (Mother in Arts, 2017) that underpinned the project, indicating that for many younger artists, even in relatively equitable countries like the Netherlands, this still feels like a significant challenge.

In Australia, the collective Art/Mums has functioned as a framework for a group of Melbourne artists to collaborate and support one another as they navigate the assumption that motherhood is an impediment to art practice. Carefully describing themselves as 'a group of artists who are also mothers,' Art/Mums members have included Clare Rae, Hanna Tai, Claudia Phares, Gabrielle de Vietri, Clare Needham, Eugenia Lim and Jessie Scott — all artists with distinctive practices of their own. The formation of this group references the consciousness-raising collectives of second wave feminist art activity, but with specific reference to the potentially career-limiting aspects of motherhood. Rather than originating in an activist impulse, Art/Mums arose organically from pre-existing friendships and provides mutual support for its participants:

> Working with concerns and restrictions related to parenting and maintaining an art practice, they seek to unpack concepts that give a voice to their experiences. They hope the group represents what it is to work as an Art/Mum and in turn act as a resource for future generations (Art/Mums, 2017).

Generally, projects regarding art and motherhood in Australia have been less aimed at actively improving the welfare of mother-artists and their children and more about women artists rediscovering a creative identity for mothering that became less visible after the end of the activism of the 1970s and 1980s. It is interesting to consider why this has been the case. It is not for a lack of need; Australia ranked a disappointing 35th in the most recent World Economic Forum's 'Global Gender Gap Report' (2017) and a national survey undertaken by Macquarie University in collaboration with the broadcaster SBS revealed persistent and rigid beliefs regarding gender roles as well as disturbingly high rates of gendered harassment (SBS, 2018). In this context, women artists experience a layering of disadvantage that sometimes appears insurmountable. A small number of exhibitions focussed on the experience as well as the politics of mothering have taken place in Australia over the past five years. For example, Claire Needham curated the group exhibition *MUM* in 2016, including work by Catherine Bell, Erika Gofton, Kate Just, Ilona Nelson, Clare Rae, Nina Ross, Hanna Tai and Meredith Turnbull and Roma Turnbull-Coulter (Needham, 2016; Romensky 2016). In the same year, Kym Maxwell staged an exhibition, *Parenting is Political* at Bus Projects in Melbourne, with contributions by Aurelia Guo, Anastasia Klose and Angela Brennan. This emerged as a response to a panel discussion "Parenting in the Art World", held as part of the exhibition, *Re-raising Consciousness*, curated by Fayen De'Evie, Harriet Morgan and Katherine Hattam at TCB, another Melbourne artist-run space in 2014. Emerging curator, Zorica Purlija brought together 16 early-career and established artists for the exhibition of image-based works, *Realising Mother* in Sydney in 2017. Once again, this exhibition harked back to earlier arguments regarding the tensions between art and mothering, citing 'the Women's Art Movement in Australia (formed in 1974) and Catriona Moore's book *Indecent Exposures* (1994) as significant contributions to interpreting the role of women and mothers in contemporary society' (Purlija 2017).

Artist-mothers, and curators determined to exhibit their work, appear highly cognisant of the well-worn territory they are traversing when they discuss both the benefits and barriers experienced by women while parenting. The regular repetition of an adversarial relationship between family and art raises the suspicion that some other agenda is served by relentlessly pitting one against the other. What purpose is served, for example, by disregarding the 'third shift' experienced by most artist-mothers in Australia: the need for an income source beyond their art practice? In Australia the annual median income for a visual artist from all creative arts-related sources is a tiny $12,000 (Throsby and Petetskaya, 2017: 74). Given the inequitable situation experienced by women, this figure is likely to be substantially lower for them. By looking at the practices of artists whose works refer to the dynamics of motherhood but do not rehearse its assumed antagonistic relationship with art, we can be prompted to problematise this narrative.

Australian artists, Catherine Bell and Anastasia Klose have both used their work to describe and push against the normative expectations of motherhood. The 'bad' or 'neglectful mother' is a spectre that haunts many women artists. Bell's artworks, *Making a Baby* and *Baby Drop*, where lurid cake sculptures of babies were given to women to slice open or were left in public baby change rooms, were deliberately transgressive and elaborated on the ambivalent sensations many women feel about motherhood, both as mothers or not (Aamalia, 2008). Bell explained her production of these works as a cathartic expression of her own anxiety regarding the 'bad mother' as well as a point of connection with other women:

> The creation of this cake as a scapegoat, embodying the sadness realised by the abuse inflicted on children and the ever-present threat of infanticide in our community, has a personal and public function. The trance like state induced by the repetitive act of icing is embedded with mixed narratives of joy and pain. Case studies of the women who have killed innocent babies merge with the elated tales of friends whose babies have just entered the world. Making this cake indicates two orders of exorcism, originating as a personal catharsis and extending to become an act and art of public exorcism or scapegoating (2011: n.p).

While Klose's work often explores her close relationship with her own artist mother, it is her maternal feeling toward her beloved dog Farnsworth that she describes as a panacea for her grief regarding the art world's brutal realities and commercial imperatives (Klose, 2017). A different set of complexities arise for First Nations artists in Australia. While many women artists agonise over the tensions inherent to the relationship between mothering and making, Aboriginal mothers additionally battle the racist presumptions of 'neglect' or 'bad mothering' that are still used to justify the removal of children from their Aboriginal families (McQuire, 2015). As Aileen Moreton-Robinson has pointed out, white feminism has been grossly inadequate in comprehending and accounting for Indigenous experience (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). It is in this context that artist and curator Paola Balla has

articulated her prioritising of 'Blak Matriarchy' over a generic feminism that fails to account for the often-violent dispossession of Aboriginal mothers (Balla, 2018; Perkovic and Balla, 2018).

What this brief discussion of a small sample of contemporary art practices and art projects indicates is that despite the common analogy of art-making and child-rearing as parallel creative activities that make demands on the same set of resources, the relationship between art and motherhood is never simply a single tension, but rather a complex interplay of broader economic, political and social issues with individual and collective desires and values. We can continue to *represent* motherhood in all manner of ways, both/either as a joy and/or as a burden for women artists, but it will not necessarily open up our understanding of how women artists navigate and negotiate practice and/or motherhood. Therefore, this textual and visual analysis of creative examples by Australian contemporary artists simply provides a conceptual framework for the development of *Creative Dystocia.* The development of curatorial approaches to the exhibition will be discussed in the next section of the paper, which addresses key debates about feminist curating and outlines an understanding of the curatorial process as feminist method.

CURATORIAL APPROACHES TO *CREATIVE DYSTORIA*

This section addresses the relationship between feminist curatorial methods and exhibitions that deal explicitly with women's experiences, including the subject of 'motherhood', which occupies a complex and contested position in histories of feminist art. A key aim of this research is developing feminist curatorial approaches to exhibitions as a central investigative method. This section will outline current debates surrounding feminist exhibition-making and reframing of the all-women exhibition. It will discuss the development of our curatorial approach for this project through a framework for 'curatorial care.' Therefore, the resulting group exhibition *Creative Dystocia*, will form part of the research process through the active negotiation of this framework.

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO EXHIBITION-MAKING

Art institutions were identified as contested territory by feminists in the 1970s, who recognised the politics of exclusion in operation. In response, there were two key feminist strategies employed in relation to exhibition making – agitating for the inclusion of women artists in museum exhibitions, and initiating alternative spaces for women artists to create communities and present their artworks. An example of the first strategy is the 1976 exhibition *Women Artists, 1550-1950*, organised by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). As Harris recounts in the catalogue, this exhibition was initiated by the director of LACMA, in response to the demands of women artists for equal exhibition time (Harris and Nochlin, 1976: 8). Key examples of the second strategy were the establishment of *Womanspace Gallery* in 1972 and the *Woman's Building* in 1973 in Los Angeles, which operated until 1991. These were created as *alternative* spaces to the male dominated, patriarchal power plays of commercial art galleries and state museums.

The primary function of feminist organisations and communities was to provide the space necessary to support women's art practices. As Katy Deepwell (2006) notes in the essay, *Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s*, 'The exhibition site became an opportunity for public debate about the possibilities of new forms of art practice, new spaces and new audiences' (75). However, the separatist nature of these alternative spaces was considered problematic by some feminists, who argued for greater inclusion for women artists in established art museum exhibitions and collections. Another criticism levelled at 'alternative' spaces by feminists, was in relation to the politics of exclusion, and the persistent dominance of white, middle-class perspectives.

Over the last decade there has been a resurgence of institutional interest in art by women, and in feminist art, as evidenced through the staging of a number of major exhibitions (Robinson, 2013: 129). Exhibitions in this period have adopted a survey style approach, which reflect the historicisation of feminist art, for example *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), the intersectional approach of *Global Feminisms* (Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2007), or focus on specific geopolitical or geographical frames such as the 'blockbuster' *Contemporary Australia: Women* (Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane in 2012). Following the two key exhibition strategies employed in the 1970s, *elles@centrepompidou* (The Pompidou Centre, Paris, France 2009) was a critical intervention in this major museum in Paris, while the establishment of the *Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art* at the Brooklyn Museum, New York in 2007, functions as a dedicated space for feminist art.

REFRAMING THE ALL-WOMEN EXHIBITION

The development of *Creative Dystocia* takes place in the context of a recent 'curatorial turn' in feminism over the last decade, constituting a proliferation of major 'all women' exhibitions (Dimitrakaki and Perry, 2016: 220). Recent

debates in feminist curating question the women-only exhibition format as potentially replaying the exclusionary politics of the art museum, and exhibitions that deal explicitly with womanhood as problematically essentialist (Hedlin Hayden and Skrubbe, 2010: xiv). In a similar way to the criticism aimed at women-only alternative institutions of the 1970s, the debate continues about the efficacy of separatist (or essentialist) strategies. As Hedlin Hayden and Sjoholm Skrubbe argue in *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2013), continuing to position women artists and art by women as 'alternative' narratives, acts to shore-up the normative, that is, dominant patriarchal position. They claim that, by

> Pursuing the contextual space of the/an alternative, one also keeps (re-)framing the prevalent trajectory in art historical practices: namely a sex-biased structure (…) Do women artists and art by women still need to be defined and employed as a mode of challenge, on the very basis of them being *alternative*? (xiv).

On the other hand, feminist curator Maura Reilly in an interview with Lara Perry argues for the relevance of women-only exhibitions as a 'curatorial corrective', to achieve gender equality in the art world (2016: 50). While accepting the 'essentialist' nature of such an approach, Reilly draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's conception of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1987: 281) to argue: "one might temporarily accept the category of 'woman' as a stable unity for the purposes of mobilizing women in feminist political action" (Reilly, 2016: 50). Like Reilly, curator Dorothee Richter (2006) argues for affirmative action as a central strategy of feminist curating, advocating for gender equality through numbers, and seeing this as a 'temporary strategy, a support structure on the way to diversity and multiplicity beyond fixed categories as a horizon' (64). In an Australian context, the CoUNTess report on numbers of women artists represented in major exhibitions and collections provides evidence that there is still an important role for feminist curating to play in affirmative action. However, beyond just a numbers game, Hilary Robinson (2013) reminds us that we need to continually ask, 'what feminist politics informed these exhibitions, and what feminist politics did they produce?' (147).

One of the key framing questions for the project *Creative Dystocia* is: how can we *re*-frame the contemporary women-only art exhibition in light of these debates, specifically when negotiating the nexus of motherhood and creativity? As Katy Deepwell (2006) notes, 'the women's art movement emerged through group exhibitions and acts by women artists organized thematically and polemically around feminist issues' (75). Exhibition making has played a pivotal role in feminist art politics since the 1970s, both as a form of intervention into art's patriarchal institutions and as a strategy for alternative space-making. As Jenni Sorkin comments in her 2007 essay for the exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, the all-women exhibition format manifests itself as the deterritorialisation of traditional group exhibition practice, 'an unintended history of resistance' (461). The recent 'curatorial turn' in feminism has constituted a proliferation of all-women exhibitions and surveys, once again foregrounding feminism's critical role in the contemporary art institution. In *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (2013), Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry problematise this relationship between the political agency of feminist practice and the 'neutralising' space of the art museum or exhibition. *Creative Dystocia* aims to address the gender politics of inclusion *and* exclusion at play in the contemporary art gallery, and indeed, in the professional life of women artists.

FEMINIST CURATORIAL METHODS

As a lack of exhibition opportunities has been identified as a significant barrier for women artists, the curatorial role is potentially a problematic one, inferring as it does the highly gendered dynamics of gate-keeping, quality discernment and the care of an artist's oeuvre. What are feminist methods of curatorial practice and how can they be identified? While feminist curating has been commonly characterised as fixating on subject matter and the intent of the artist, contemporary analyses of curatorial practice seek deeper patterns of understanding method and ethical engagement. As Devon P. Larsen (2006) argues there are a range of significant feminist strategies that have been absorbed more broadly in exhibition practice including the recognition of exclusions, embracing multiple perspectives and allowing contradictions to remain (96).

It is important to distinguish between exhibitions of 'women's art' and exhibitions curated from a feminist point of view. As Katy Deepwell (2006) argues, an exhibition of art made by women is not necessarily a feminist one (68). By the same token, as Renee Baert (2000) asserts, feminist 'research, issues and methodologies may be folded into other projects, rather than existing in a designated space apart' (6-7). These dialogues about contemporary feminist curating inform our approach to exhibition making.

One of the key characteristics of feminist curating proposed by Dorothee Richter (2016) is the embedding of institutional critique in projects. Richter asserts, 'To take into account the structural and material side of curating means – again – to think of feminist curating as involved in and part of political and economic struggles' (67). She

goes on to argue that this would also question any hierarchical positioning between curators and artists (66). This provocation reveals the deeply entrenched power dynamics of the art world and its gallery system. It lays down a challenge for feminist curators and brings into question authorship, responsibility and reputation – which are the foundations of building professional careers. It is not easy to work in a state of 'risk' – that is to say, collaboratively, which is a relationship of trust and obligation.

The dominant approach to contemporary curating is framed in terms of a selection process, whereby the curator is an expert who chooses artworks from a range of possibilities and thus determines the exhibition form. This is exemplified by Jens Hoffman (2009), who comments:

> We concur that the curatorial process is (…) an imposition of order within a field of multiple (and multiplying) artistic concerns." In this conception of the exhibition process, a curator's role is, "precisely to limit, exclude, and create meaning using existing signs, codes, and materials. (2009).

This approach to art curating can be seen as deeply problematic from a feminist, inclusionary perspective. It positions artworks as interchangeable ideas, disconnected from artistic labour. Dorothee Richter (2016) critiques the proposition of curator as 'chooser,' arguing that this limits curatorial practice to one of 'excluding positions' (66).

While the traditional image of the curator as the carer of material objects has been replaced by an authorial role (the 'making of meaning'), the ethics of care can easily be applied to the personal histories and conceptual concerns that underpin the work of contemporary women artists. In considering our approach to curating a feminist exhibition, we have asked ourselves how can we, contrary to the dominant definition of current curatorial work, *open*, *include* and *amplify meaning* through exhibition making?

FRAMEWORKS FOR CURATORIAL CARE

The reframing of relations in the curatorial process is key to the collaborative conversations that are informing this project. This collaborative approach builds on dialogic methods in curatorial practice as research and the potential of conversation as a key feminist strategy in exhibition making. As a feminist curatorial method, the dialogic pertains to establishing non-hierarchical relations between curators and artists, and reframes the feminist exhibition as a material discursive space. The curatorial process, when conceived as an evolving critical conversation between artists, curators and audiences, opens up new approaches to the mapping and analysis of the current relationship between women artists and motherhood in relation to conceptions of reproductive labour and curatorial care.

The reframing of organisational culture in terms of care is relevant here. As gallery director Jenny Richards (2016) recently commented, this pertains to caring for each other as workers, taking care of the organisation, the gallery program and of the public (124). In her article *Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction*, Helena Reckitt (2016) unpacks aspects of curatorial labour in relation to affective economies of care (7). Drawing on feminist social reproduction theory, Reckitt argues that a shift in focus is needed to redress political conditions under which institutions operate 'to look at how cultural projects deploy human, economic and material resources, and at what cost' (25). She argues that such an approach would 'develop different understandings of sustainability, value and social investment (…) nurturing the reproductive labour that sustains the living process of cultural production' (25-26).

Our feminist approaches and methods to exhibition making have emerged through an ongoing negotiation in curatorial art practice, and in the relational context of working with others in dialogic and collaborative ways. Framing this approach to exhibition making are our own experiences as artists – working with artists, curators, directors, media relations and public programs officers in a range of different institutional contexts from student exhibitions at university to large public art museums. This complex of relations highlights the embedded power hierarchies and the culture of administration that operates at all levels in the contemporary art industry. The question that arises is: as feminist curators, how can we reimagine institutional structures and ways of working within this relational field?

If we are to maintain feminist politics at the core of feminist curating it is necessary to consider the inter-relational qualities of aesthetics and materialism in the museum. Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry describe this as 'museum materialism' (2013: 1). Elke Krasny (2016) suggests a curatorial materialism is a:

> critical investigation into the conditions and means of curatorial production, along with access to infrastructures and institutions, the relations between curators, artists, technicians, builders, educators, (…) sponsors, donors, and supporters and the engagement with the public (97).

In this way, the curatorial process is reframed (not as choosing) but as socially engaged practice, always already existing in a field of relations. As Richter (2016) reminds us, 'thinking of curating as a form of producing knowledge (…) means consciously taking up a position in an ideologically contested space' (16). In presenting feminist exhibitions in contemporary art spaces, it is important to acknowledge the economic conditions and labour that support these structures. What is also highlighted is the importance of reproductive labour and care for art organisations. The task of the feminist curator is to place value on this labour; and to make visible contributions of women in these spaces of production – to emphasise feminist ways of working: including working *against* power hierarchies, exclusions and silencing; and *working towards* an ethics of care.

CONCLUSION: STAYING AT HOME WITH THE POLITICS

During the preliminary research and developmental planning for the feminist curatorial project *Creative Dystocia*, it has become clear to us that the false dichotomy of art-making and mothering has been carefully maintained over time, even throughout and after the explicitly feminist art movements of the second wave. While an emphasis on the structural sexism that underpins artist-mothers' disadvantage and an explicit connection between creativity and community wellbeing is a focus of some strategic projects around the globe, in Australia the emphasis is still very much on the acknowledgement and reiteration of an artist-mother identity and representations of motherhood. In all cases however, there is still a keen sense among artists that motherhood is constructed as an impediment to a successful art career, but does not need to be an impediment to a creatively successful art practice. By using feminist curatorial approaches, we are finding the gaps in current discussions and recognising that 'mothering' or as Ukeles called it, 'maintenance' labour (Ukeles, 1969), is actually the lifeblood of our remarkably precarious sector. By calling in the voices and creative expression of women artists across the mothering spectrum, as well as the carers of the art world, we are starting to map how individual artists and artworkers find themselves enmeshed in a complex structural matrix. This system appears to delight in sending highly contradictory signals regarding any shape women artist's careers may take. These circumstances have been integral to the development of *Creative Dystocia*, an artist-driven curatorial project yet to be born. Culminating in an exhibition and collaborative publication in 2020, this project is embracing these multiple perspectives and allowing contradictions to co-exist in both the content and form. In the local context, what is needed is a deeper engagement with the politics of care and art practice.

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Enacting Motherhood Online: How Facebook and Mommy Blogs Reinforce White Ideologies of the New Momism

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ABSTRACT

Mommy blogs and social media platform Facebook are two ways that 21st century mothers today share their experiences digitally via the 'momosphere'. However, this is often another form in which white femininity is reproduced in popular culture. (Socially privileged white women have the most monetary resources, leisure time, education, and jobs encouraging or requiring the use of technology, resulting in their being the most technology fluent.) In many ways, such writings continue the trend of 'intensive mothering', which is Sharon Hays' widely adopted term for a woman whose identity revolves around her children. It is also similar to what Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels call the 'new momism'. White notions of mother-guilt and fear of mother-blame are countered by attempts to perform the good mother role online and seek validation. Especially mothers lacking in a meaningful community of friends or family gravitate toward this artificial online community. While progress has begun in mothers feeling validated to share their private maternal lives in public realms, there is still work to be done regarding how women feel they can and cannot represent their maternal selves. Unless mothers learn to deconstruct mainstream ideologies of motherhood, they will continue to uphold them in their online personas.

Keywords: momosphere, Facebook, mommy blogs, new momism

INTRODUCTION

Many 21st century mothers seek to publicise their maternal identity online, often popularly referenced as the 'momosphere'. Mommy blogs and social media platforms such as Facebook are at least two digital outlets through which women today seek to share their experiences. However, while emphasis on celebrating (and at times lamenting) maternity can be positive, especially as social media gives voice to mothers who may not consider themselves writers, it may also be another form of white femininity reproducing itself in popular culture, as socially sanctioned online personas of motherhood tend to follow white cultural norms. Because cultural standards linked to whiteness are regarded as universal, commentary on Western motherhood is often accepted as relevant to all women rather than something that mostly impacts white women specifically (Nakayama and Krizek, 1995). Recognising dominant ideologies as influenced by whiteness allows situations in which women of colour can be lauded for ways they have resisted embodying reductive and racist portrayals of motherhood and instead models of white motherhood can be constructed as aspirational for them.

Sadie Plant coined the term cyberfeminism in 1994 'to describe the work of feminists interested in theorizing, critiquing, and exploiting the Internet, cyberspace, and new-media technologies in general' (Consalvo, 2002: 109). However, the integration of online motherhood with the social constructedness of 'race'[1] has been and continues to be little explored territory. In 2009, Jessie Daniels acknowledged that 'it is exceedingly rare within both cyberfeminist practices and critiques of them to see any reference to the intersection of gender and race'; while some headway has occurred, regarding a specific focus on online motherhood and race, today there remains much work to do (Daniels, 2009: 103).

[1] I am distinguishing race from ethnicity in the sense that race is not only one's cultural background and physical distinctions but also the way in which one has constructed his or her identity considering cultural responses and stigmas. I am using race to identify a social group that has formed in light of society's treatment of ethnicity.

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As I am applying a critical whiteness lens,[2] it is noteworthy that racial inequity persists online as much as anywhere else. Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White acknowledge that 'no matter how 'digital' we become, the continuing problem of social inequality along racial lines persists…the digital is altering our understanding of what race is as well as nurturing new types of inequality along racial lines' (2011: 1-2). Because white women have more monetary resources, leisure time, education, and jobs encouraging or requiring the use of technology, it is unsurprising that most technology-fluent women are white and, although the divide is not as wide as it used to be, there continues to exist 'unequal access to digital media technologies across racial and ethnic lines'. (Nakamura and Chow-White, 2011: 5)

In USA culture, more white women than women of colour write about motherhood via motherhood memoirs, a genre rooted in print culture in which women write of their identities as mothers. Furthermore, I believe that a similar trend occurs online as white women are most likely to be in a privileged position with access to online resources. Motherhood memoirs, in which women narrow their roles primarily to that of a caregiver, have largely adhered to the practise of 'intensive mothering', which is Sharon Hays' (1998) widely adopted term for a woman's identity, centring on her role as an ever-nurturing and unselfish mother. Hay's concept is similar to what Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels call the 'new momism' (2005), in which both subtly and blatantly, the values reinforce conventional expectations of how mothers should act. Douglas and Michaels' work, rather than becoming dated, is seminal in the field, as relevant now as ever. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein speaks of Douglas and Michaels' impact, saying that 'the new momism has become an object of study among feminists and motherhood scholars, and these scholars are detailing the various ways that the new momism continues to shape contemporary motherhood' (2014: 188). The tenets of maternal ideologies exemplified via motherhood memoir are moving to new online forms. It is also necessary to recognise a racial component at work regarding the ideology of this new momism, as the idea of a good mother who dedicates her life solely to motherhood is predominantly a white mandated expectation. Douglas and Michaels point out that Western culture's portrayal of and adherence to the new momism 'serves to divide us by age and race and 'lifestyle choices" and that 'the white, upper-middle-class, married-with-children nuclear family remains…dominant' (Douglas and Michaels, 2005: 22). Ironically, Douglas and Michaels' desire for unity amongst mothers of all colours creates a division in which mothers of colour are assumed to function as de facto white mothers because whiteness fails to be addressed as an inherent norm within dominant culture. Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan is one of the few scholars who attends to this, saying that 'intensive mothering is particularly prominent in middle- and upper-class White women' (Schoppe-Sullivan, 2016: 278). Thus, although high expectations of motherhood impact all women in some ways, white culture has been especially privy to aspiring to meet these benchmarks. Evelyn Nakano Glenn writes, "What may be needed to emphasize the social base of mothering is attending to the variation rather than searching for the universal" (Glenn, 1983: 5). Thus, although it is first useful to note trends within white expectations of motherhood, from there is it also necessary to consider how groups formed outside the dominant culture may vary in their practices and expectations and become excluded in representational norms.

Expectations of motherhood are firmly embedded in print media. Influential motherhood theorist Andrea O'Reilly has recognised the subsuming influence of maternal expectation, saying, "Most motherhood memoirs, because of their identification with the new momism, cannot discern, let alone critique, the root causes of mother's oppression" (2011: 212). Moving beyond O'Reilly's feminist claim, we must also recognise that racial dimensions impact all chronicles of motherhood and the same conservative and normative underpinnings which have driven print maternal writings also may be at work in the digital world. Unfortunately, very few studies have focused on race directly in analysing the ways that mothers express themselves online. Scholars must recognise that analysing mothers' online performance without considering how white culture might reinforce itself online, can result in a kind of colour-blindness. However, it is difficult to analyse how performances of online motherhood intersect with race because this aspect of one's identity is not always apparent. May Friedman notes that 'people can construct online identities that do not reveal physical characteristics…the absence of the body tends to erase marginalized identities that are not specifically referenced' (2013: 19). Therefore, while studies of possible differences in how white mothers and mothers of colour enact their motherhood online is important and suggestive of underlying ideologies, the necessary data, because of the nature of the technological interface, is difficult to obtain.

In conducting my research, I largely relied on published case studies and analyzed these findings from a feminist and critical whiteness lens. However, I then applied my interpretation of the data to my own perusals of Facebook pages and blog sites and found my hypothesis confirmed. I surveyed the Facebook pages of those already within my friend network, thus many of them I have been observing for years. I surveyed around twenty-five blogs, none

[2] Critical whiteness theory analyzes how whiteness is constructed (individually as well as socially) and the related moral repercussions. It not only calls attention to blatant and subtle racism but it also calls attention to the nuances of internalized and unquestioned, perhaps even unconscious, acceptance of white superiority. Ruth Frankenberg (1997) states, "For the most part, critical work on whiteness has emerged in the context of, and very frequently in direct response to, critique of racism and the racial order focused on positions of subordination, whether the latter is undertaken by people of color (as has most often been the case) or by white people" (2).

of whose authors I personally knew, and chose them based on their title, which I found through using search terms such as "mommy blogs" and "blogs about motherhood." I surveyed the blogs over a months' time span but was able to view archived posts spanning up to years past. I sought to respect the privacy of those whose pages I visited by never referencing anyone from Facebook by name and never using actual content from anyone's pages or posts. Regarding the blogs, I did use some titles and author names, since this information is made public, but I overall sought to look for patterns amongst the blogs rather than fixating on any individual blog or author.

When analysing motherhood accounts posted on the internet, it is useful to shift from the term 'memoir' to 'narrative' because memoir, like autobiography, suggests a work that is complete and which chronicles reflexive, selective experiences from which the author has had at least some degree of temporal distance. In contrast, because of the internet's immediacy, mothers who write online share their stories while in the midst of experiencing them. There is often little lag time, either from when the event occurs to the time it is written about and shared or from the time it is written to the time the mother begins receiving feedback. As opposed to a cohesive published narrative, which is a literary reworking, the online narratives are snippets; in the case of Facebook, they are often phrases or sentences; in the case of blogs, they are vignettes, capable of standing alone but also still existing in iteration.

Some may argue the heyday of Facebook is over, as adolescents and young adults are moving to other online sites ('Teens are Abandoning Facebook', 2018). While this is true for teens, I have chosen to analyse Facebook because it remains a dominant outlet for mothers at the time of writing. Maeve Duggan et al state in Pew Research Center's report that 81% of mothers used Facebook (2015: 1). This number has remained mostly consistent, as Edison's Research 'Moms and Media 2017' report states that 84% of mothers used Facebook. A potential reason for such a strong maternal presence on Facebook may be that mothers are more likely to stay home or be home during non-working hours and may check Facebook to break up housework and daily routines. Also, mothers tend to engage in activities targeted toward the children, such as soccer practice, playground time, and so on in which the mother may multitask and be on social media platforms at the same time. Bridget Genell Therriault has analysed Facebook's intersection with motherhood. Therriault addresses how mothers relate to a collective group online: "[M]others engaging in Mommy Facebooking validate their individual motherhood identities while also perpetuating society's idealization of the good mother through social engagement and interaction with audiences on Facebook" (Therriault, 2014: 3). According to Therriault's study, mothers use Facebook because it is a contemporary way to enact and display intensive mothering, which continues to be according to socially mandated beliefs of the 'good mother'. Therriault conducted her research on real mothers' posts on Facebook and found three main themes that emerged:

> Promotion of children's activities/milestones, mothers discussing acts of nurturing, and mothers sharing thoughts on the sacrifices and rewards of motherhood represent sentiments that are widely associated with characteristics of the ideal mother, and as such, these were the attributes used by mothers in their online motherhood performances. Conversely, there was rarely any Facebook commenting that discussed feeling of ambivalence related to motherhood. (Therriault, 2014: 53)

While O'Reilly has pointed out that motherhood memoirs identify problems with the cultural expectations of mothers but offers no solutions or challenges, Facebook maternal narratives do not seem to be even be pointing out the problems (O'Reilly, 2011: 212). Part of the reason may be that print memoirs tend to be written by academics or professional writers who are used to being self-reflexive and deconstructing dominant contemporary ideologies. Facebook, by contrast, is an amateur, open portal for ordinary people to express themselves and perform their identity. This is not to say that mothers on Facebook never write negative things about their parenting. For example, a mother may post something along the lines of 'health food fail' next to a picture of her children licking ice cream cones. Yet, even amidst her self-deprecation of food choices, there tends to be an underlying message reinforcing intensive mothering, that it is to say a performative act seeking to reinforce that the mother loves her children deeply, including giving them rewards (good mothers make good children). Typical comments or responses reaffirm the mother, either by focusing on the important memories being made or admitting to one's own equally unhealthy choices. Community feedback plays a large role, and acceptance from the group is important as the mother makes decisions about what to share on Facebook. Therriault reports that in her study, any potentially controversial posts about motherhood received little response in comparison with posts that re-represented social norms (Therriault, 2014: 52). This seems to indicate that audiences of mothers, or those interested in topics related to mothering, do not want to engage in division but instead seek agreement, reinforcement of norms, and hence, community.

There is a body of research focused on asserting how social media sites provide social support to parents. Some analyse Facebook specifically, maintaining that the site allows for the creation and reinforcement of maternal community (see for example M. Bartholomew, et al. (2012); E. M Thoren et al. (2015); and B. Holtz, et al. (2015). Yet, in the midst of mothers seeking community is the need for differentiation. Facebook mommies appear to

desire relationship with others and to show ways in which they as parents and their children are, if not superior, at least pretty special. Tracey Harrington McCoy reports that the competitive parenting spirit on Facebook can hurt a mother's sense of self: "For the mom who barely gets her kids' shoes on before hustling them off to school, posts that portray the perfect family can churn up guilt or even self-loathing" (McCoy, 2013). Of course, Facebook is not a true community in the sense of people who know each other and belong to one another. Research shows that the typical parent on Facebook has 150 friends but that only one third of them are 'actual' friends' (Duggan, 2015: 1). McCoy notes that social media actually can be a place lacking in social graces when intimate relationships do not support the interactions: "It's unlikely a mom will shame a good friend in public for having different values or beliefs, but when the person is just an acquaintance, the rules change" (McCoy, 2013). The irony is that mothers seek social acceptance on Facebook from people who do not truly know them. Communities are defined as groups sharing beliefs and values related to actions and conduct, but 'on Facebook… there's no filter, no rules, no precedent' (McCoy, 2013). Chances for rudeness, trolling, and even shaming increase when mothers who have no relationship offline interact with one another in a realm void of social cues such as facial expression, tone of voice, and body language which typically assist in communication. Unlike in Real Life, on the Internet, friends are made and lost by the click of a mouse.

Therriault and McCoy argue that adhering to the script of maternal perfection online via Facebook can lead to feelings of isolation, which foster a subconscious spirit of competition amongst women; however, neither of them directly consider race. Based on the patterns of intensive mothering emerging from their research, it appears that most, if not all, of the profiles examined were those of white women and we might speculate that those profiles were strongly influenced by cultural expectations of whiteness. Stephanie Hartzell traces the history of expectations and enactments of maternal perfection, "[n]ormative constructions of 'good motherhood' have historically been articulated with a white, middle-class (heterosexual) formation…only white middle-class mothers are able to perform the type of nurturing articulated to 'good motherhood'" (Hartzell, 2017: 65). Such enactments of good motherhood continue on Facebook when women accustomed to performing intensive mothering or the new momism continue this pattern of assumption online. Although it is difficult to obtain information on ethnicity, since this is not a category users are asked to identify, Cameron Marlow's article 'How Diverse is Facebook?' gives an in-depth analysis of ways in which the information was obtained and reports, "We have found that while Facebook has always been diverse, this diversity has increased over time leading to a population that today looks very similar to the U.S. population" (Marlow, 2009). However, while as ethnic minorities appear to be as (un)equally represented on Facebook as they are elsewhere (meaning that the majority of users are white), it is unclear whether minority mothers use Facebook habitually, as much as white mothers do. One recent study on new mothers found that using Facebook leads to feelings of depression, from a participant pool comprised 86% of white women (Schoppe-Sullivan, 2016: 286). The study confirms that societally influenced mothers 'who were more concerned with external validation of their identities as mothers and those who believed that society holds them to excessively high standards for parenting' are most likely to be negatively impacted emotionally and psychologically. As the study mostly analyses white women's Facebook activity, this may suggest an adherence to white presumptive norms (Schoppe-Sullivan, 2016: 276), as stated earlier, "[I]ntensive mothering is particularly prominent in middle- and upper-class White women" (Schoppe-Sullivan, 2016: 278).

While hard and fast data on the ethnic and racial background of mothers using Facebook is difficult to obtain, I would like to suggest that women of colour appear reticent to conform to white motherhood mandates. Women of colour do not seem to be drawn to print memoirs in the same way that white women apparently do, perhaps because they do not feel the need to enact a perfect, and possibly competitive, mother image. The exception could be the current marketability of 'Tiger Moms', which may have much to do with the publishing industries stereotyping of Asian over-achievement (and selling that model to white audiences). I speculate that mothers of colour largely do not read themselves solely through the lens of their maternity or see their enterprise as mothers as something so individualised that they want to write solely about their 'exceptional' experiences. Deeshaw Philyaw suggests that black women specifically and women of colour in general simply feel less ambivalence toward motherhood. However, she also argues that even the motherhood memoirs that are written by minority women do not receive the same level as attention as the white ones, and of course, many more may never be accepted for publication. Due to such experiences of minority women being overlooked, 'women of color don't see their mothering experiences and concerns reflected in the mommy media machine', and so '[a]ffluent white women are the only mothers who really matter' (Philyaw, 2016). While scholars like Philyaw are specifically writing about print culture, I suggest we can draw parallels with the online performances of motherhood too.

While little research on people of colour's online communities exist, there has been ample research conducted regarding physical communities of colour. Research from a critical race perspective mostly compares strong fictive kin ties (non- biologically related friends) in cultures of colour with the weak fictive kinship ties in white culture. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Mary Curry report that 'most research on friendship networks among Anglos fails to document any type of fictive kin relation', suggesting that most white friendships do not foster the type of intimacy

typical in familial relations (Ebaugh and Curry, 2000: 193). I have not been able to find any relevant, updated studies that have occurred since Ebaugh and Curry's research, suggesting a worrying lack of scholarly interest in racial differences regarding women's friendships. Exposing why white culture has little expectations of friends and family regarding supportive community requires a retrieval of part of the core American mythos. Soong-Chan Rah claims, "Western, white culture, has placed at the center of its theology and ecclesiology the primacy of the individual" (2009: 29). Stephanie M. Walls argues something similar, "On the individual level, modern individualism negatively affects the quality of life for each person through promoting alienation" (2015: 146). This alienation is self-imposed but enacted due to an individual's desire, likely unconscious, to adhere to dominant standards of interaction. Facebook mothers' attempts to build online communities may possibly stem from a lack in these women's own tangible networks, be it due to distance, schedules, or strained family and friend dynamics.

Minority cultures, or rather black culture specifically, have a very different history to that of white competitive isolationism. In her seminal and groundbreaking work, Patricia Hill Collins explains some of the historical communal practices enacted by women in black culture,

> [T]he boundaries distinguishing biological mothers of children from the other women who care for children are often fluid and changing…vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. (Collins, 1991: 46)

This acceptance of responsibility and concern that black women take for one another's children helps reduce a mother's fear of failure and inadequacy because she is not exclusively responsible for providing for and guiding her children. This model is in direct contrast to the white practices surrounding motherhood, which is the belief 'that mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the mother has almost total responsibility for child-rearing' (Collins, 1991: 43). While the term othermothering was originally specific to African American culture, many minority cultures enact some form of similar practices, of a more collective form of parenting. Research proves that minority cultures, including Chicana and Asian American, typically include communities of kin in which family members from different generations interact in providing familial assistance in childrearing (Greenman 2011; Segura and Pierce 1993).

Facebook mothers' motivation to enact their mothering persona online, perhaps subconsciously seeking some form of validation of or recognition for their efforts, may stem from the likelihood that these women are white and, therefore, statistically speaking, less likely to be involved in regularly interacting communities which support one another in meaningful ways. According to Duggan, '45% of mothers who use social media 'strongly agree' that they get support from friends on social media' (2015: 1). The results are based on a 56% white demographic pool (Duggan, 2015: 8.) Thus, I wonder about these white women's interpretation of the word 'support' and even the word 'friend', especially when this survey is contrasted with research about Facebook mothers (86% white) suffering from depression due to the societal expectations enacted online (Schoppe-Sullivan, 2016: 286). Sherry Turkle notoriously argued that only faux support exists online,

> If we start to call online spaces where we are with other people 'communities,' it is easy to forget what that word used to mean…Communities are constituted by physical proximity, shared concerns, real consequences, and common responsibilities. Its members help each other in the most practical ways…What do we owe to each other in simulation? (Turkle, 2011: 239)

Perhaps social media outlets like Facebook are allowing white women feelings of 'being heard' online, without meeting the actual tenets (and demands) of true off-line community.

In shifting from Facebook to the blogosphere, 'mommy blogging' has been a key term to describe the thousands of mothers who write about their experience of motherhood through frequent (that is to say at least once a month) blog postings. Altogether, more Facebook mothers post, however, the numbers still add up for blogging, as Deborah Whitehead states that 'more than half of all active female internet users participate in some form of blog activity weekly, publishing, posting, or reading' (Whitehead, 2014: 127). According to *eMarketer,* "Nearly four in 10 online moms read blogs at least once per month in 2012, and more than 4 million moms wrote them" ("Moms Still Make Social a Priority", 2013). Thus, despite mommy blogs not being the norm for every household, they are still a force to be reckoned with, evident from the fact that most are at least familiar with the phrase 'mommy blogger'.

One of the primary ways that mommy blogging differs from Mommy Facebooking is that bloggers tend to have a more prominent literary voice, whereas on Facebook, mothers typically post short amounts of text (often accompanied by pictures) and largely rely on the voices of others to state their beliefs by reposting, as many simply post articles by others with whom they agree, rather than by writing original material themselves. However, mommy blogs are similar to Facebook posts in that they both receive comments and feedback from peer readers. For this reason, Friedman insists that 'mommyblogging…departs completely from individual notions of

subjectivity with the presumption of a stable individual author. Instead, mommybloggers are collectively creating a dynamic cyberorganism that is endlessly evolving' (Friedman, 2013: 142). The digital technology of the Internet changes motherhood memoiring, be it via Facebook or blogs, into something that is more interactional, reactional, and iterative. However, despite this similarity, the monetary status of mothers using these sites may vary. There may be more socioeconomic disparity on Facebook, whereas "[t]he average mommy blog's household income i[s] $84,000 [which is] $14,000 higher than average income for non-blogging moms. Moms who read or contribute to blogs are also 52% more likely to have college degrees than moms who don't, according to Scarborough" (Laird, 2012). Thus, these mommy blogs are written by women who benefit from middle class privilege, demographically more likely to be white women.

The current studies on mommy blogs tend to focus on themes such as female identity and community, with less information available regarding race (see for example D. DiPrince (2012); E. Petersen (2015); and J. Abetz and Moore, J. (2018). As Jen Schradie notes, "The scholarship on the relationship between class and race or ethnicity is underdeveloped in digital production" (2012: 557). Though Schradie does not focus on mothers who blog, her study does have interesting findings regarding race, "Although Black Americans are less likely to be online than White Americans, among those online, Blacks are more likely to blog than Whites. Meanwhile, Hispanics are equally likely to blog than non-Hispanics (Schradie, 2012: 561). Schradie speculates that black bloggers may be seeking a form of community online that emphasises "shared identity and cultural expression" (2012: 567). There is no firm data for how many women of colour blog on maternal related issues. In fact, Babble.com's list of the top 100 'mom blogs' of 2011 only included seven blogs from women of colour (qtd. in *HuffPost,* 2012). *Bitch Media*'s article entitled "Mothers of Intention: Five Bloggers on Race and Erasure in the Mommy Blogosphere" includes five interviewed mothers who provide some useful insight. Arwyn Daemyir, who writes the blog *Raising My Boychick*, poses the question of whether women of colour are actually absent from mommy blogs or simply overlooked: "The media constructs 'mom blogs' as white, middle class, capitalistic—so those of us who aren't don't identify as such, and thus are nowhere to be found when journalists go looking for 'mom blogs,' thus perpetuating the whitewashing" ('Mothers of Intention', 2011). Shay Stewart-Bouley, who writes the blog *Black Girl in Maine,* suggests that part of the reason women of colour are not typically labelled as mommy bloggers has to do with their being less likely to separate motherhood from the rest of their life, or to only discuss their parenting status:

> [O]riginally I thought [my blog] might be a mommy blog, but it became quickly apparent that it really was not. As a black woman in America, even when I tried to focus strictly on parenting, the reality is my work had a certain level of intersectionality involved. Race and class are an integral part of my identity, something that is rarely discussed in most so-called mommy blogs. ('Mothers of Intention', 2011)

Scholars may be overlooking mommy blogs of women of colour for this reason. They may also be deemed too 'political' for the genre. Stewart-Bouley hypothesises over the reason women of colour are so overlooked within the mommy blog genre: "I think it's hard for others to think outside the box and realize non-white bloggers can be active in discussions aside from race" ('Mothers of Intention', 2011). For non-white bloggers then, motherhood is implicated in racial and class politics in a way in which the privilege of whiteness can ignore.

One of the central debates about mommy blogs is whether these mother writers adhere to myths of motherhood or challenge them. Gina Mascullo Chen argues that the term itself 'reinforces women's hegemonic normative roles as nurturers, thrusting women who blog about their children into a form of digital domesticity in the blogosphere' (2013: 510). However, others such as Marshiela M. Banner (2016) argue that mommy blogging is a radical act. When motherhood is authentically portrayed and bloggers show the difficulty of obtaining maternal perfection, patriarchal expectations can be challenged. "[P]ersonal blogs about mothering promise an unedited, entertaining picture of motherhood as it exists in real life, not on TV or in glossy magazines…the successful mom blogger promises real revelation and unvarnished truth" (Whitehead, 2014: 129). In my perusal of mommy blogs, it became evident through blog titles such as *Her Bad Mother, Mama's Losin' It, The Good Enuf Mommy, I'm NOT Super Mom,* and *The Anti-June Cleaver* that some authors do resist the idea of maternal perfection. However, equally noteworthy is that these women, much like Facebook mothers, still predominantly adhere to the new momism or intensive mothering beliefs that parenting is primarily the mother's responsibility and that their life should revolve around their children.

Fourteen years ago Douglas and Meredith analysed how 'the motherhood Web reflects the cultural tensions that fuel the new momism' through 'an obsessive fixation on the details of child rearing and domestic life' (2005: 313) and the same can be said for many mommy blogs today. For every blog title suggesting a resistance to maternal perfection, there are others seemingly reifying this concept. In analysing blog themes they do seem to fall within Douglas and Meredith's key topics, such as health, consumerism, homeschooling, stay-at-home mothering: health mommy blogs include *100 Days of Real Food, Healthy Happy Thrifty Family, Wellness Mama, Up Run for Life, Organic Parenthood,* and *Healing Mama Remedies.* Stay at home mom blogs include *24/7 MOMS, The Stay at Home Life, Home*

with Aneta, Stay at Home Mom of One, and *My SAHM Life*. Blogs focused on consumerism and shopping include *Thrifty Nifty Mom, Shop with me Mama, Mommies with Cents, The Shopping Mama,* and *Mom Style Lab*. Blogs that in their title adhere to an idolisation of maternity include *The Good Mama, All About the Child, Happy Mum Happy Child, Happy and Humble, Mommy Knows What's Best,* and *Successful Mommy Advice*. Such patterns in the blogging momosphere adhere to the same ideologically burdensome views on motherhood that white women held before they started speaking for themselves online. Although there is a misconception that when women speak for themselves, as opposed to being written about, they will break away from oppressive ideologies of motherhood, mommy blogs show that such is not the case, largely because women are not even aware of the extent to what they are succumbing to dominant expectations. Lopez accurately identifies how,

> As yet, mommy bloggers have not come together to tackle social justice or political issues such as parental leave, the cost of daycare and healthcare, workplace equity or any other issue that might benefit from their grass roots mobilization and community organizing. (Lopez, 2009: 740)

Thus, my survey concluded that mommy blogs mostly showcase domestic issues of motherhood rather than political ones.

Some may argue that mommy blogs are still positive because they provide much needed community for women, and that the community may change and evolve over time due to the ongoing and supportive interactions with fellow women. Aimee Morrison argues that 'personal mommy blogs are best understood as motivated by a widespread need expressed by blogging mothers to create communities' (Morrison, 2010). Digital feedback is more specific, fragmented, and immediate. Morrison writes, "The reciprocity of the genre consists in the balance among its participants, the implicit agreement that if you read my blog and leave a comment, I should read your blog and support you there as well" (Morrison, 2010). The question then becomes what type of mothers are most likely to need the validation and support of an online community. Likely, it may be those lacking such community in 'real life.' Middle class white women are the ethnic group least likely to regularly participate in truly supportive community. Morrison acknowledges maternal isolation in modern America, saying that:

> the public understanding of motherhood as an activity undertaken in the privacy of the nuclear family, and the widespread distribution of nuclear families into geographically disparate suburban communities removed from public amenities mean that mothers of young children are physically isolated from their existing social networks and contexts. (Morrison, 2010)

However, Morrison does not sufficiently consider racial implications; mothers of colour are much more likely to be engaged in non-virtual social networks, both with fictive and non-fictive kin. Therefore, Morrison's conclusion that mothers find replacement communities for those that are lacking through mommy blogging may be one example of 'whitewashing', though extended research must be conducted to confirm this hypothesis.

In this article, I would like to question whether mommy blogs provide true community for women, white or otherwise. It is evident that mothers participating in mommy blogs share many core beliefs and goals about motherhood, which does grant them the title of a virtual community. Lynne M. Webb and Brittney S. Lee make similar claims to Morrison's, in both normalising maternal isolation and viewing blogs as the solution: "Because modern U.S. life has depleted 'natural' community opportunities, community now requires coordination. Enter blogs" (Webb and Lee, 2011: 249). They then conclude that, "Because mommy bloggers read and comment upon each other's posts, they are positioned to provide and receive social support. By social support, we mean providing assistance and positive affirmation in times of need" (Webb and Lee, 2011: 250). Also similar to Morrison, Webb and Lee argue that because blogs foster reciprocity between writer and reader, they establish meaningful community.

Yet, can someone's posts and well-wishes regarding child-rearing and parental dilemmas replace the physicality of someone coming over to help? Can an online smiley face replace the warmth of an embrace for a stressed mother? People are most comforted and impacted by face to face interaction. Amy Banks and Leigh Ann Hirschman explain the importance of human contact and how a nerve called the smart vagus positively responds to uplifting face to face communication, saying that 'you get input from other people's faces and voices telling you that these people are safe…The smart vagus is one reason we're less stressed when we're around people we trust' (2016: 34). Thus, giving practical assistance with one's parenting is more helpful than simply giving advice on parenting, and the human embodiment occurring through such exchanges nourishes a weary parent's needs. While many argue that what is important is having a sounding board, regardless of whether a screen facilitates the exchange, Wilma A. Bainbridge et al's research leads them to advocate that "social psychologists should consider physical presence as a factor influencing trust, respect, and perhaps other aspects of social interaction" in a way that the virtual world does not offer (2011: 11), perhaps because digital fora so often function as echo chambers rather than providing the conditions for social engagement.

Validations of life stage-based groups assume that community is most effective when shared with those going through similar experiences; yet, there is benefit too in engaging with those who are distanced from the situation and can provide a bird's eye view. Anna Kudak endorses multigenerational female relationships, saying, "Bridging the generation gap not only increases the friend pool, but it also expands and supports mental well-being…Friendships with older and younger people help broaden your perspective" (qtd. in Funderburg, 2012). Mommy blogs' tendency to limit their virtual community to those with the same current experiences and basic demography, minimally develops community compared to many minority cultures' embracement of a diverse support group for mothers. If white mothers are distanced from their family or do not have a meaningful, diverse community, as can often be found, for example, through religious affiliation[3], then perhaps they are more likely to seek to participate in a purposefully constructed community of likeminded mothers online.

My hypothesis is that it is mostly white mothers who are blogging as a way to find community. This is not to say that women of colour who are mothers are not blogging; however, their sites do not appear to fall into the same narrow topical content as many mommy blogs, perhaps because the content is less domestic and the motivation necessarily less about building community. For example, Marquaysa Battle claims in her article '8 Black Mommy Bloggers To Follow Now',

> Long gone are the days when a woman's identity as a mother overshadows everything else in her life…motherhood may sit at the top of the list, but isn't the entire list. There are also bloggers who provide a lot of practical inspiration with tips for moms about keeping a full life even while taking on the important role that is raising a child. (2017)

Contrastingly, while many white mommy bloggers resist the idea of maternal perfection, they still seem to cling to motherhood as the central defining aspect of their persona. Friedman, who self-identifies as a brown woman, claims that she has found many 'non-normative mothers and parenting practices' through mommy blogs (2013: 5). She claims that the mommy bloggers she has read 'self-identify across the spectrum of race, including many mothers with hybridized racial identities' (2013: 50). I find Friedman's claim encouraging; however, Friedman is an academic and self-proclaimed feminist which may prompt her more than the average woman to have the research skills to find subversive blogs challenging norms of motherhood. However in my online research, no-one else has echoed Friedman's assertion in the past six years since she made it. Facebook posting remains more popular than mommy-blogs. Sarah Pulliam Bailey suggests, "The death of the mom blog has something to do with shifts in how people consume and create on the Internet" (2018). Elizabeth Tenety claims that other platforms have taken over because mommy blogs' 'core audience is trending towards hanging out on their phones - and by extension social media sites like Instagram and Facebook - the digital environment overall is less of a fit for those types of blogs' (qtd. in Bailey 2018). Thus, perhaps it is important to recognise that when mommy blogs, according to Friedman, were on the verge of being diversified, they somewhat decreased to be replaced by instantaneous social media sites like Instagram and Facebook where mothers remain somewhat in thrall to the representational cult of maternal expectation. Researchers need to historicise the peak years of the mommy blog (approximately 2005-2015), recognising that while mothers still blog in 2019, it may no longer be the phenomenon it once was.

In conclusion, mothers who enact their identity online appear to seek validation. Especially mothers who are distanced from family or have apparently not fostered a meaningful community of friends gravitate toward this online community, for example, one mother says,

> [I]n my early days of parenting a newborn, I credit some 'mom blogs' with being my online life raft. I felt really lost and unsure of myself and the parenting community I discovered online helped me stay sane and find support in such a challenging and sometimes scary time, and for that I will be forever grateful. ('Blogs around the Momosphere', 2012)

Using the internet as a resource can be an effective way to allow parents to see themselves as capable with peer appraisal, rather than having to rely wholly on professionals. Lars Plantin and Kristian Daneback explain, "An important reason to the increasing number of parents who turn to the internet for information and interaction has shown to be the weakened support many of today's parents experience from their own parents, relatives and friends" (2009: 1). This research suggests that parents turn to online support and assistance because they have a void in their own lives regarding meaningful parental assistance. Thus, although I do not perceive it as feasible or even helpful to advocate mothers abandoning their online interactions, it is important to recognise that online groups are not synonymous with tangible support from friends and family.

Whilst physical community may be more authentic and helpful than virtual communities, mothering young children requires spending large amounts of time at home, which can be isolating. Working while parenting leaves

[3] Walls posits, "Historically, religion had been a path toward community building, community obligation, and cooperation among individuals" (2015: 103). Gibson explains, "As we bond with God, we bond with other 'kin' who share our beliefs." (2005: 14).

little room for socialisation, and many women relocate to a new place where they know few people when they become heterosexually partnered and start a family. It is no wonder that mothers gravitate to online communities when so many factors complicate the possibility of physical ones. Online community may be alright in moderation and with caveats, and, in fact, some online groups exist to connect people in their 'real lives', helping mothers coordinate times to meet in person, informing them of events where engagement can occur, and helping keep women connected until they see each other again. However, many groups exist where the participants will rarely or never meet. It is likely these groups, almost exclusively representational rather than real, where emphasis on performing the good mother role comes out most strongly. Celebrity mother Joanna Gaines acknowledges how media creates inauthenticity. Going from being unknown to having an Instagram following, she admits,

> I could feel insecurity start to creep in…I found myself critiquing if there were messy backgrounds or blurry smiles…It is so easy to let social media rob us of authentic moments…We make adjustments—find better lighting, dress our kids in something nicer. (2019: 56-7)

Gaines' recognition of the internet's glorification of perfection, including maternal competency, is insightful. Her own ethnic background (being ¼ Lebanese and ½ Korean) may assist her in resisting distantiating cultural mandates.

Society is so critical of mothers that it is perhaps inevitable for us to desire to make a good impression on our virtual peers. However, in my own experience as a white mother myself, though I still struggle at times, I have found several effective techniques in resisting intensive mothering dictates online. I have limited my public postings and post mainly in private groups and sites where I have actual relationships with women when I need advice or assistance. This helps free me from needing parental validation from others who are 'virtual strangers'. Motherhood is hard; dominant culture's expectations of motherhood, which typically reinforce white, middle class ideologies of maternal appropriateness, only make it harder. Women of colour who have resisted reductive scripts of mainstream culture's expectation of performative motherhood can teach much to feminist and critical whiteness studies. As Daniels notes, "[W]hen cyberfeminists explicitly engage both gender and race it is both conspicuous and instructive" (2009: 104). Such undertakings allow white mothers like myself to acknowledge the root of our motivations and to seek to surround ourselves with communities that are truly fulfilling, rather than simply reinforcing patriarchally-rooted obligations through semi-autonomous digital platforms.

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The Exoticisation of Motherhood: The Body Politics of Pregnant Femininity through the Lens of Celebrity Motherhood

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ABSTRACT

At a time when parenthood seems to have become almost mandatory regardless of sexual orientation, and children serve as fashionable props on Instagram profiles and in lifestyle magazines, this article examines the way in which pregnant femininity and maternity is engulfed by neoliberal discourses of aestheticisation and disciplining of the body. It offers a cultural discourse analysis of the body politics of pregnant femininity through the lens of exoticised celebrity motherhood. In order to understand present day celebrity pregnancies, it draws upon the new 'cult of motherhood' and revolves around Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles as case studies in exoticised celebrity motherhood, through a discursive analysis of the publicity surrounding both women's pregnancies. It sees them as being part of a larger narrative that racializes and exoticises shapely (non-white) bodies, while disciplining both women – yet to varying degrees- within the contemporary Anglo-European norms of beauty. Given the educational and pedagogical role of celebrities and their construction of a 'public-private self' (Marshall 2010), global celebrity figures Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles-Carter are seen offering a 'grammar of conduct' (Skeggs and Wood, 2011) around which the moral, and the maternal, self is being articulated and gauged.

Keywords: celebrity, motherhood, pregnancy, exoticisation

WHY THE FUSS ABOUT PREGNANT FEMINITY?

The human body in Western modernity has been enveloped in rationality, being disciplined for work and labour while concurrently operating as the paramount symbol for the subject to demonstrate their self-control and worth. This way, bodily conduct is normalised through the internalisation of a set of social controls while people construct and project a sacred, deep self by means of their bodies (Sassatelli, 2010). Advertising, fashion and commercial culture stresses the firm and toned-up body, as the professionals, practices and spaces of keep-fit culture proliferate – gyms, fitness centres, and health clubs offer expert advice, dietary regimes, personal trainers, and specialised classes that cater to individual needs. This is coupled by a mushrooming of specialised, women's, men's, lifestyle, gossip magazines and websites which offer tons of 'how to' tips on routines, fashion and comportment while performing physical exercise.

The aestheticisation of the body has been extensively and invariably discussed. For some it is a part of an all-encompassing consumer culture, where people attend to their image in an instrumental way, for social acceptability and sense of self-worth is reflected on how a person looks (Featherstone, 2010). Therefore, the modification and enhancement (cosmetic or not) of the body through a number of regimes and technologies is justified by the need to construct a beautiful appearance, and by extension a beautiful self. Other discourses take a more sympathetic view of individualisation – arguing that the self becomes a reflexive and secular project which works around a refined project of body presentation (Giddens, 1991). Within this fitness culture, wider cultural values - the ideals of the fit, toned and slender body, coded as both a conspicuous sign of personal worth and the result of individual choice - are being inscribed and mediated across the globe (Sassatelli, 2010).

The pregnant body has not escaped the professionalisation and proliferation of fitness routines, now imbued with a sense of suave luxury – wellness spas offering aerial yoga classes to pregnant women have a different ring to them and divert attention from the 'macho' world of the 'gymnasium' where big, bulky men were pumping iron. Starting from celebrity pregnancies and by now enveloping almost all pregnancies, pregnant femininity is 'framed' (to use Goffman) within a 'stay fit, stay active' context. Goffman uses the notion of frame to indicate those

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principles of organisation that govern events and activities, and our subjective involvement in them (1974: 10-11). Frames provide a 'context for understanding' and for making 'reference' to what is relevant and appropriate – in this case, pregnant femininity, and motherhood at large, is understood within a 'fitness' frame which values the fit, slender, tight female body over any other.

An emerging body of feminist scholarship discusses how broader political and socio-economic shifts interact with cultural constructions of femininity and motherhood (Ennis, 2014; Hanson 2004; Littler, 2013; Plant, 2010; Ross 2016; Tyler, 2011; Wilson and Chivers Yochim 2015). It is such kind of scholarship that intrigued and encouraged me to join the discussion around celebrity motherhood and femininity, especially the one that revolves around the highly debated femininity of Beyonce Knowles-Carter and Kim Kardashian. Coming from an audience studies perspective, where subject positioning and the construction of meaning amongst readers is of primary importance, I do not pretend to preclude how socially constructed audiences make sense of celebrity pregnant embodiment, and, essentially, motherhood. Rather, what I want to do here is to offer a cultural discourse analysis of the body politics of pregnant femininity through the lens of exoticised celebrity motherhood.

In order to understand present day celebrity pregnancies, I will draw upon the new 'cult of motherhood', as this is contextualized within the 'new domesticity', 'mommy culture' and postfeminism. I will use Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles as case studies in (racialised, exoticised) celebrity motherhood, through a discursive analysis of the publicity surrounding both women's pregnancies. My decision to focus on them stems from the way both women are part of 'transnational celebritihood' – being instantly recognisable and stirring publicity waves wherever they go, and in that sense they constitute a 'common conceptual currency' across space and cultures. For example, even though American, they both resonate in Greece, whether as pop icons[1], or by 'making news': following the release of Beyonce's and Jay-Z's video clip 'Apeshit' in June 2018, shot in the Louvre and featuring the Venus de Milo among other sculptures, the mayor of Milos invited Beyonce to the island as part of a newly launched municipal campaign to bring Venus 'back home'[2]. As far as Kim Kardashian is concerned, she was widely reported when, at seven months pregnant, she visited Mykonos and Santorini with sisters Kourtney and Khloe, the rest of the clan and a TV crew of 50 in August 2013[3].

In fact, both women exhibit what Jones and Weber describe as 'transmediated continuity' (2015) when they explore the relationship between the media and maternal embodiment. Indeed, Kim and Beyonce exemplify such continuity pre-, through and post- pregnancy, in the sense that stories about them have flowed and intensified across diverse media platforms such as the internet, tabloids, cultural critics, fans, anonymous commentators, social media, or retail merchandising[4], though one performs it differently than the other. For example, in Kim's case, her body and the scandal surrounding it – whether in the form of the private sex tapes she did with rapper Ray J in 2003, or in the speculation surrounding her cosmetic procedures[5]- help constitute intermedial continuity. Kim's reality celebrity – her currency as a reality star- secures the attention capital that makes her relevant for the convergence of neoliberalism and postfeminism; within it, good citizens deploy self-management strategies that turn the self into a viable commodity and reinforce self-display as a measure of personal value for women (Jones and Weber, 2015: 25).

I am also interested in them because I see them as being part of a larger narrative that racialises and exoticises shapely (non- white) bodies, while disciplining both women – yet to varying degrees- within the contemporary Anglo-European norms of beauty[6]. Whether it is about Beyonce's 'infamous'[7], 'bombshell'[8] curves, or about how

[1] Beyonce's 2009 concert in Athens sold out and was a huge success; various seasons of *Keeping up with the Kardashians* have been steadily on offer on mainstream terrestrial and cable TV in Greece.

[2] GTP, 28 June 2018, Greek Mayor Invites Superstar Beyonce to Milos, https://news.gtp.gr/2018/06/28/greek-mayor-invites-superstar-beyonce-milos/

[3] Hollywood Greek Reporter, 28 April 2013, The Kardashians Take Over Mykonos, https://hollywood.greekreporter.com/2013/04/28/the-kardashians-take-over-mykonos/

[4] Here, for example, I'm referring to the Kardashian's Dash retail stores, brought to a halt in 2018 (Inc. com, April 25, 2018, https://www.inc.com/gene-marks/kim-kardashian-made-a-big-mistake-by-closing-her-dash-stores.html) and to Beyonce retail (https://shop.beyonce.com/).

[5] As shown in recent media speculation about Kardashian plastic surgery. Harper's Bazaar, Nov. 13, 2018 https://www.harpersbazaar.com.au/beauty/kardashian-surgery-17663; Mirror, Aug. 18, 2018, https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashians-plastic-surgery-timeline-10292368

[6] Further below, I will discuss the way in which Kim Kardashian, although white, performs and comes across as non-white.

[7] The Sun, 11 Aug. 2016, Sun, Sea and Bey: Beyoncé works her infamous curves as she enjoys a boat trip in Italy with Jay Z and Blue Ivy, https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/1602640/beyonce-works-her-infamous-curves-as-she-enjoys-a-boat-trip-in-italy-with-jay-z-and-blue-ivy/

[8] Daily Mail, 30 May 2013, Too bootylicious? http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2333226/Beyonce-row-H-M-discovering-wanted-downsize-curves-swimwear-campaign.html

Kim Kardashian 'flaunts'[9] her 'hourglass'[10] ones, the truth is that both women have been part of the same normalising discourse of whiteness that has constructed an identity for Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek through their bodies (their booties, more likely)[11]. In equal measure, Beyonce and Kim Kardashian can be seen to (re)form the beauty ideal, marketing their 'shapely' posteriors (Angharad and Molina, 2010), and illustrating in the process the implicit antinomy (between exoneration and vilification of curves) embedded in pregnant embodiment.

In this respect, both women demonstrate 'unruliness' – for in some way they both step outside the boundaries of what is perceived as 'good' womanhood, whether through their shapely figures or through their exuding sensuality. And although the unruly woman is perceived to be increasingly under threat in the Trump era, unruly women surround us in our every day lives, becoming yet more powerful when in celebrity form, where they come across more layered and are fraught with contradictions (Petersen, 2017: xi). While sometimes women are allowed some level of unruliness, when it comes to women of colour[12], the rules of 'acceptable' unruliness become more difficult to bent and these women can easily be seen as 'troubling', 'angry' and 'out of control'. Yet given how celebrities are our most binding and visible embodiments of ideology at work, outlining the way we regulate representations of anything - race, femininity, pregnancy – it is interesting to explore how unruly celebrities simultaneously transgress and fortify dominant norms. Whether the case is Kim Kardashian who refuses to hide her heavily pregnant belly, Beyonce's conflation of sexiness and maternity, Serena Williams' s muscular 'like a man's', yet curvy 'like a woman's', body, or Nicki Minaj's sensual trespass into the male-dominated sphere of rap, unruly women of all kinds of shape, form, age and colour create feelings of abject (Petersen, 2017: xv-xvii). Following the notion that the celebrity mom profile is the conduit for the culture of 'new momism' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Moir 2015), I'm also interested in teasing out the tensions that exist when the celebrity motherhood of Kim Kardashian and Beyonce disrupt the neoliberal postfeminist maternal body.

MOTHERHOOD, THE NEOLIBERAL BODY PROJECT AND PREGNANT EMBODIMENTS

Sharon Hays' seminal notion of 'intensive mothering', coined in 1996, has been instrumental in shaping our understanding of the amplifying cultural demands posed on mothers in order to channel extraordinary amounts of time, resources and labour, both physical and emotional, into their children (Hays, 1996). In most Western societies supported by neoliberal ideologies, mothering takes place on top of other, professional or equally challenging, responsibilities (Ross, 2016: 126). This tendency has been further exacerbated across the global North amidst rampant neoliberalism (seen for example in the waning of government or community support for mothers and childcare), increasingly leading mothers to recode and rationalise everyday family life, to the extent that they internalise the idea that it is *their* responsibility to realize the impossible (Wilson and Chivers Yochim, 2015). Yet, contemporary motherhood sits uncomfortably at the intersection of conflicting cultural changes and ideologies brought about by the postfeminist and neoliberal turns. Indeed, while the beneficiaries of post-feminist sensibilities have been raised to be independent, assertive and to exercise personal choice, once they become mothers, they realise that postfeminist neoliberal mothering coexists with unchanged, old-fashioned values regarding family management and responsibilities (placing primary responsibility for childcare and domestic life on mothers) (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015: 36).

In that respect, in their struggle to 'have it all', present-day moms find themselves, in 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2008). In this paradoxical context, women's agency is celebrated, yet concurrently being contained within an unattainable ideal of motherhood, which Douglas and Michaels, (2004) name as 'new momism' and explain as follows. They view a chasm between the honey-hued, as they call them, ideals of perfect motherhood in the mass media and the reality of mothers' everyday lives, within which mothers are conditioned to an 'onslaught of beatific imagery, romantic fantasies, self-righteous sermons, psychological warnings, terrifying movies about losing their children, even more terrifying news stories about abducted and abused children, and totally unrealistic advice about how to be the most perfect and revered mom in the neighborhood, maybe even in the whole country' (: 2). At the same time mothers have difficulty escaping the standards of perfection set and reinforced by the media,

[9] The Mirror, 1 April 2017, Kim Kardashian flaunts curves in tight shorts, http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-flaunts-curves-tight-10137134

[10] The Sun, 26 April 2017, Rear We Go Again: Kim Kardashian back to her best as she slips into another bikini and reveals her hourglass curves https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/3421669/kim-kardashian-shows-off-her-hourglass-curves-in-barely-there-bikini-during-all-girls-holiday-with-her-sister-kourtney-to-mexico/

[11] The normalisation of whiteness also includes hair (Angharad and Molina 2010), as illustrated in various reports about Beyonce's 'sleek' long hair (Vibe, 11 Feb 2013, Get The Look: Beyoncé's Sleek Hair From the Grammys, https://www.vibe.com/2013/02/get-the-look-beyonces-hair-from-the-grammys), or in 'how to get Kim Kardashian's sleek hair' tutorials, (People, 2 May 2017, How to Get Kim Kardashian's Super-Straight, Shiny Hair, https://people.com/style/kim-kardashian-straight-shiny-hair-how-to/)

[12] Although Caucasian, Kim Kardashian plays the race card successfully as will be explained further below.

they are worn down by an all-encompassing culture that suggests that however much you do for and love your kids, it is never enough. The spread of such ideal motherhood has been further facilitated and accentuated from the early noughties onwards by growing media representations that pitched selfless 'moms' against 'welfare mothers' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004).

Whether within a more conservative frame, like Sarah Palin's 'mama grizzly'[13], or a more liberal one, like Michelle Obama's assumption of the 'Mom-in-Chief' moniker[14], motherhood is revered, idealised and branded – even flaunted- across a variety of platforms. In *Postfeminist Celebrity and Motherhood: Brand Mom*, Jorie Lagerway (2017) discusses contemporary popular culture's obsession with moms, as it constructs an iconic, heroic, and supposedly universal, mother figure, fulfilled by the intense affective labour of motherhood while also being intertwined with capitalist brand culture.

Hence, motherhood becomes a potent mechanism of identity construction within everyday life, and Moir (2015) is among those cultural critics who discuss it as a potential lucrative endeavour for celebrities who want to reinvent themselves. She mentions a number of (predominantly white) celebrities whose lifestyle brands and children's apparel are legitimized by the stars' status, expertise and identity as mothers. Whether it is about The Honest Company, Jessica Alba's[15] 'wellness brand'[16] of biodegradable diapers and other baby merchandise, which 'errs on the side of caution' because they believe 'you shouldn't have to choose between what works and what's good for you'; Tori Spelling's baby clothing line (recently under fire for stealing another company's designs[17]); or Gwen Stefani's more alternative clothes line 'at budget prices' for Target[18], maternity provides an easily identifiable state with which celebrities can mould common experiences with audiences, regardless of their rank in the star system. In what is seen as a highly chaotic consumer environment, motherhood affords celebrities the development of a brand identity (Moir, 2015: 51).

This self-sacrificing mom is seen as 'a hallmark of postfeminist culture and has become an integral part of how we understand adult women in popular media' (Lagerway, 2017: 2) today. Lagerway uses TIME's controversial 2012 cover[19], featuring a young, slender, blonde, conventionally beautiful mother and her 3-year old son while breastfeeding, to press upon us the normative ideal of white, beautiful, middle class motherhood post -2000. In the age of the 'new momism', maternity becomes fashionable and competitive – not merely in the sense that (almost) every woman 'needs' to become a mother, but also in terms of performance, i.e. how women 'do' motherhood.

Such a revival of the 1950s revival of 'the cult of domesticity' – a 'new domesticity'- for millennial women who rediscover the crafts of a 'new femininity' has not gone unnoticed. Whether in the form of the 'queen of food porn/domestic goddess' Nigela Lawson (Hollows, 2003), or in a number of high-profile women who gave up their careers in order to become stay-at-home moms[20], domestic femininity experiences a strong comeback amongst millennial women[21], while also refueling the so-called 'mommy wars'[22]. This, voluntary, change in lifestyle as a way-out of the work-life dilemma is known as 'downshifting' (Parkins 2009) – a narrative that tries to bridge feminism with 'traditional' femininity [as] 'it tries to imagine a solution to the problem of inhabiting contemporary femininities (Hollows, 2006: 111).

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[13] CBS News, The Most Memorable Political Quotes of 2010, Sarah Palin Introduces America to Mama Grizzles, https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/the-most-memorable-political-quotes-of-2010/2/

[14] Hayden 2016; MSNBC, Michelle Obama, 'mom-in-chief'; Sep. 8, 2012, https://www.msnbc.com/up-with-chris-hayes/watch/michelle-obama-mom-in-chief-44111939741

[15] Alba downplays and elides any connotations of ethnicity.

[16] The Honest Company, Inc. https://www.honest.com/about-us/who-we-are

[17] INQUISITR, 23 October 2017, Tori Spelling's 'Baby By Tori' Comes Under Fire, Spelling Accused Of Ripping Off Another Designer, https://www.inquisitr.com/4570991/tori-spelling-baby-by-tori-designer-baby-clothes/

[18] Rolling Stone, 18 July 2011, 'Gwen Stefani Designs Kids Clothes For Target', https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/gwen-stefani-designs-kids-clothes-for-target-247103/

[19] TIME,10 May 2012, Behind the Cover: Are you Mom Enough? http://time.com/3450144/behind-the-cover-are-you-mom-enough/

[20] Various examples circulate in the literature: Brenda Barnes, ex Pepsi Cola North America President (Genz 2009); Leslie Morgan Steiner, former Washington Post Magazine General Manager, before she became a global celebrity consultant on inspirational parenting and work-life balancing (Parkins 2009).

[21] Truth be told, for many women, domesticity is not equated with housewifery, as many of them work from home and are breadwinners (Forbes, 9 Febr. 2018, More Millenial Women Are Becoming Stay at Home Moms – Here's Why). Attitudes about stay-at-home women vary across regions and countries, with childrearing increasing levels of part-time work among mothers, rather than fathers, in most countries. Countries with relatively high proportions preferring families with stay-at-home women are developing countries in South Asia and the Middle East. In contrast, in Europe, preference for families with stay-at-home moms is low. In between come developing and developed countries such as Brazil, China, Russia and the United States, where about one-quarter of men and women prefer families with stay-at-home moms (Yale Global Online, 25 Jan. 2018, Despite Growing Gender Equality, More Women Stay at Home Than Men, https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/despite-growing-gender-equality-more-women-stay-home-men

[22] 'Mommy wars' refer to the ongoing debate between stay-at-home and working mothers, which have been in circulation since the 1980s, yet have attained further resonance since the turn of the 21st century, prompted by popular media texts such as Leslie Morgan Steiner's *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families* (2006), Marie Claire's 'Modern Mothers- Who's Doing it Best?' (2007), or Daily Mirror's 'Young, highly educated and proud to be a housewife', 5 Sept. 2017.

However, from a postfeminist perspective, the figure of the housewife/mother is no longer seen as an emblem of female oppression but, rather, as someone who renegotiates and resignifies her domestic/feminist position (Genz, 2009). Indeed, instead of staying within the exclusionary logic of either/or, where women are forced to choose between independence or subordination to the domestic/maternal subject position, Genz argues for the inclusionary logic of both/and, which leaves room for the ambiguities and intricacies inherent in a postfeminist position. This way, she asserts, postfeminism makes room for the 'altered stage of gendered conflicts and transformations, a diversification of feminist issues that women face in a postfeminist age' (2009: 53). Such tensions are no better illustrated than in the flourishing genre of 'momlit' –featuring novels such as Allison Pearson's 'I Don't Know How She Does it' (2003), which sold over a million copies in the UK alone[23], Fiona Neil's 'The Secret Life of a Slummy Mummy' (2007), or Christina Hopkinson's 'The Pile of Stuff at the Bottom of the Stairs' (2011). Overall, momlit foregrounds the struggle between the home and the workplace modern women are faced with, in the much sought-after effort to strike the right work/life balance. Quite often, the solution to the feminist/feminine conundrum lies in the heroine's part-time employment, affording her the best of both worlds – a life 'in balance', where she can, in effect, 'choose' to 'have it all' (Genz, 2009: 59). In fact, 'momlit's increasing popularity has led to the pervasiveness of phrases such as 'having it all' and 'yummy mommy' to the extent they have become common tropes associated with contemporary motherhood and strengthened by the cultural politics of neoliberal consumer capitalism (Moir, 2015: 53).

In addition to the arguments about how mothers are unfairly positioned to absorb the damage from neoliberal policies (Ross, 2016; Wilson and Chivers Yochim, 2017), various scholars discuss the new meanings the body has taken on, on as a result of the neoliberal turn (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; Gershon, 2011; Jette, 2009). What this means is that as neoliberal consumption and politics have become more pronounced over the past thirty years, the body has been rendered the target of purposeful action in its own right – a locus for self-entrepreneurship and self-care. As a result, the body is the place where self-reflexive management, personal agency and good neoliberal citizenship is enacted. We experience our bodies as prized commodities, and the way we manage them is a marker of 'healthy' neoliberal subjectivity (or not). Furthermore, within neoliberalism, the body has become central for self-identity, all the more because well-being is portrayed as a personal responsibility (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015: 46). Practices of 'body making' – cosmetic surgery, working out, weight regulation, fitness culture, personal trainers – are intertwined with gender identity in the sense that the way to reconcile femininity and the body is through 'feminine' body management practices. Thus, women's bodies are mobilized via neoliberal sensibilities as a premier symbol of the good postfeminist neoliberal citizenship (48).

The pressure on motherhood for an ideal fit body is growing both from within (through a process of self-governance whereby subjects internalize the normalising practices, techniques, mentalities and rationalities that govern the maternal body) and from without (through celebrity media, publicity reports on celebrity pregnancies). The body – even more so, the pregnant body – becomes a 'manageable asset', to be regulated and kept under control. Failing to do so is viewed as a signifier of 'deficient' neoliberal citizenship, selfhood and motherhood (Tyler, 2011). At the same time, overweight moms (and moms-to-be) find out that they also lack sexual agency as well as maternal status, for, increasingly, mothers have to negotiate standards of feminine performance and maternal subjectivity.

CELEBRITY MOMS

Within the new culture of 'momism', celebrity pregnancies become the 'new centerfold' – I'm not necessarily using the term with sexual connotations, though without excluding them – as the world watches with vigilance their celebrity bumps grow, monitoring them from afar, and expecting them to go back to the 'right' size soon after they give birth. Celebrities, in fact, become the cultural intermediaries that manage and help shape discursive constructions of contemporary motherhood, while delimiting the frame of 'respectable' maternity - more often than not associated with slender, disciplined, toned, (usually) white, female bodies rather than more 'unruly', 'loud' and shapely (quite often, though not exclusively, non-white) figures. These unruly women compete against a more pervasive and palatable form of femininity – the lifestyle branded motherhood of icons such as Reese Witherspoon, Blake Lovely, or Gwyneth Paltrow, women with 'adorable pregnancies', who have embraced the 'new domesticity', never wear or do the wrong thing, and are straight and white (Petersen, 2017: xviii).

This heightened interest in celebrity motherhood is hardly surprising, given the fascination that has engulfed Western pregnant embodiment since the 18th century. Hardly a thing of today, the 'bump watch' has been part of

[23] The Guardian, 6 April 2011, 'Mum lit: a chore thing', 'The chick lit fans have all grown up, got married and started reading 'mum lit'' reports Zoe Williams (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/06/mum-lit-christina-hopkinson-books). Vogue's Anne Wintour described Neil's book as 'a literary phenomenon to rival Bridget Jones', while publishers reported that mum-lit had become a publishing "sensation" as fans of chick-lit were having families (The Telegrapgh, 4 June 2007, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1553542/Slummy-Mummy-is-the-toast-of-US-Vogue.html)

a sophisticated array of social intervention and control mechanisms that mark the precipitation of medical intervention and monitoring of the pregnant body and sexuality, ever since midwives gradually surrendered authority of maternity to man-midwives/obstetricians (Hanson, 2004). So, although we may have come a long way since expecting mothers were required to stay at home, hiding their 'embarrassment' as a visible manifestation of sexuality,[24] women's waistlines continue to fascinate and attract unwarranted attention, turning what is a private affair to public spectacle[25]. Lagerway (2017) argues the most highly valued, visible and celebrated images and performances of pregnancy and motherhood at the time are those which are most brandable; celebrities, she says, 'cultivate branded identities to navigate the contradictory demands of postfeminism, a neoliberal emphasis on individualism and entrepreneurialism, and the professional or semi-professional requirements of their media' (3). As the new celebrity moms come to define and romanticize 'pregnant beauty' (Tyler 2011), the maternal body becomes the symbol and the 'management tool' for both the ideal fit body and 'perfect' motherhood (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015, 49). Drawing on Foucaldian notions of governmentality – as the organized techniques, mentalities and rationalities of a government to produce citizens best suited to fulfil the government's policies – Hallstein O'Brien suggests that

> '[…] neoliberal subjects are disciplined to view themselves as selves to be managed and, as such, self-regulate themselves to adhere to neoliberal rationalities. [….] Among other things, this means that neoliberal subjects view themselves as having "improvable assets" that they reflexively manage' (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015: 45)

To elaborate, body shape stands as a marker of good health and –more significantly - of morally good maternal citizenship, and popular media love to praise slender-pregnant, bikini-ready celebrity bodies while they loathe those celebrity moms who could not discipline themselves enough. This way, the maternal body becomes a field on which broader anxieties about ideal femininity are played out, rationalised and negotiated.

The now mandatory postpartum body work is a corollary of the above trends, putting increasingly more pressure upon everyday women to look like their pre-pregnancy selves. "You look nothing like you've just given birth' becomes an often-heard accolade, yet still represents something unrealistic for an abundance of women. All the more reason why it is so important when celebrity moms take a stance and talk openly about the 'post baby' 'body real politik'. In this spirit, Jennifer Garner, in the 'Ellen Show', pushed back against expectations about the body and pregnancy when she admitted having 'a baby bump' not because she was pregnant again, but because she'd had three children already – [my bump is here to stay and everybody should get used to it][26].

Other celebrity moms become vocal about the postpartum pressure exerted on women to get 'bikini-ready', or 'runaway ready' in an attempt to exonerate baby bumps and normalize bodies of 'real women' instead. Hilaria Baldwin[27] and Katherine Heiglis[28] are among those high-profile moms who came out, showing and talking about their post-pregnancy bodies in an attempt to 'normalize the post-partum body', criticising the relentless body shaming of maternal subjectivities. Having said this, it's worth thinking about the degree to which celebrities capitalise on a public performance of feminist speech acts when being outspoken about post-partum body politics.

WHEN DID WE START AESTHETICISING CELEBRITY MOTHERHOOD?

Pregnancy has been reconfigured into an aesthetic 'project of the self', in which maternity is the quintessential expression of neoliberal femininity - informed by the notion of 'pregnant beauty' (Tyler, 2011). Tyler traces the representational shift in the visual configuration of the pregnant body in the early nineties – a time when popular culture started to be inundated by images of pregnant women in pop videos, on the catwalk, in soap operas, in advertising, on cinema screens.

Above all, however, it was the front cover of *Vanity Fair* in August 1991, captured by the lens of Annie Leibovitz and featuring a naked and heavily pregnant Demi Moore that broke the taboo around the representation of pregnancy. This celebrity photo shoot changed expected motherhood from a private affair into a sexy, embodied and public performance, and launched an endless array of 'bump chic' generations of women. For them, pregnancy

[24] It is interesting how, in Spanish, being pregnant is still an embarrassment – 'el embarazo'.
[25] Jezebel, 2 Nov. 2011, A Brief History of the Bump Watch, https://jezebel.com/a-brief-history-of-the-bump-watch-5754158; and among many others, see for example Perez Hilton's Baby Bump Watch, at https://perezhilton.com/category/baby-bump-watch/ with news about the latest pregnancies among the glitterati.
[26] Parents. Com (undated) Jennifer Garner Confirms Baby Bump, https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/everything-pregnancy/jennifer-garner-confirms-she-has-a-baby-bump-but-its-not-what-you/
[27] People, 21 May 2018, Hilaria Baldwin Hopes to 'Normalize the Postpartum Figure' by Showing Off Body 1 Day After Baby No. 4 https://people.com/parents/hilaria-baldwin-body-after-baby-fourth-child-selfie/
[28] People, 16 Celeb Moms on Loving Their Post-Baby Bodies, 12 July 2018, https://people.com/parents/anne-hathaway-blake-lively-celeb-moms-talk-body-image/#katherine-heigl

was no longer an embarrassment or an abject physical state - rather, a chance to have a differently sexy and fashionable figure. Let us consider how different this level of visibility and glamorisation of pregnancy is, compared to a time – in the USA of the 1950s- when media portrayals of pregnancy and maternity were scarce and even the use of the word 'pregnant' was prohibited, despite the dominance of the 'cult of domesticity' where the housewife/mother ruled[29].

Tyler discusses how light in this photograph is used to denote whiteness, making Moore look like she is glowing from within. Wearing nothing else but her diamond earrings and a large diamond ring, Moore stands for wealth, success, class and stardom. Despite the visual reference to 15th century representations of Madonnas – which normally were devoid of sexual desire, nevertheless- Moore's pregnant embodiment exudes something sacred, maternal and deeply erotic (2001), which also accounts for the turmoil created in the US as to how to classify it. Indeed, given the invisibility of pregnant bodies in popular media until then, the publication of Moore's photograph took US newsagents by surprise, for they didn't know how to 'read' it; therefore, in several cases it was placed on the top shelf, next to pornography. The cover created the most heated controversy in *Vanity Fair*'s history – surrounded by ninety-five television spots, sixty-four radio shows, 1,500 newspaper articles and a dozen cartoons and causing a number of newsagent chains to refuse to carry the issue, as 'unsuitable' for 'family stores'. Still, it became the best-selling single issue in the magazine's history, while the front cover photograph made the headlines on news bulletins around the globe (Tyler, 2001: 75). The 1991 *Vanity Fair* cover paved the way for numerous pregnant celebrities to follow suit, for ever changing our perceptions of the mediation of pregnant femininity. As a result, young expecting mothers for some time now sport 'skintight' sartorial choices, exposing the belly instead of hiding it underneath large and loose habits. Such 'cool' pregnant subjectivity comes at a price, though, for expecting moms experience today intense self-surveillance and self-regulation.

However, now that being pregnant is no longer considered an obstacle for great sex, it shouldn't escape us that only specific types of embodied pregnancy are considered beautiful and sexually attractive – white, tight, slender, youthful bodies with social capital and aspiration. This implies two things in my view: 1. That those pregnant bodies (black, Latino, low-class, non-slender) which do not conform to normative pregnant beauty, are not seen in the same light of respectability and sexiness; 2. The normative ideal of pregnant beauty, the slender body, obscures the relentless work required to achieve it, especially after giving birth. Celebrity websites and the popular press and magazines endlessly scrutinise post-pregnancy celebrity bodies, offering expert advice as to how quickly to make this goal possible, from the various 'mommy makeovers' – literally 'technologies of the self' – readily available, such as tummy tucks, breast lifts, breast augmentations, early elective C –sections, to dietary and fitness routines. This renders the pregnant body a 'disciplinary' figure, which is, in itself, '[…] symptomatic of a deeply entrenched 'disciplinary neoliberalism' in which the most intimate bodily experiences have become thoroughly capitalized' (Tyler, 2011: 28).

Having argued above how pregnant femininity is seen to represent a particular, neoliberal amalgam of postfeminist maternity and womanhood, I will now focus on the (sexual) politics of the (exoticised) pregnant body, by focusing on Beyonce and Kim Kardashian.

BEING PREGNANT IN THE AGE OF POSTFEMINISM: KIM KARDASHIAN...

Much of Kim Kardashian's fame relates to her 'sizeable assets' – her chest and posterior – heating up public discussions around her pregnancies. Although we've come a long way since popular media encouraged (white middle class) women to gain weight in order to look attractive -because 'skinny girls are not glamour girls'[30] –, the neoliberal construction of the slender-pregnant body has engulfed her pregnancies in intense media scrutiny and celebrity gossip, leading *Vogue* to ponder why American media were so mean to her[31]. During her first pregnancy, in 2013, Kim Kardashian was twice tagged as a 'whale' as a result of the weight she had gained. In the first example, Kim features on the cover of British popular press magazine *You* in juxtaposition to Kate Middleton; the main caption reads 'Battle of the bumps', followed by a smaller one: 'Kate the Waif' vs 'Kim the Whale'. Hallstein-O'Brien (2015) discusses how the British media constructed Middleton as the 'good' princess against the 'bad' neoliberal reality TV star. In so doing, the media discourse framed the way pregnant women should manage themselves and their bodies while preparing for motherhood. At the same time, they were making the case that good body management is a prerequisite for and symbol of good future mothering (Hallstein-O'Brien, 2015: 52).

[29] Television history was made in the US on 19 January 1953, when Lucy Ricardo, played by a pregnant Lucy Ball, gave birth in front of the television audience, attracting an audience of 44 million viewers (compared to a mere 29 million viewers who watched Dwight D. Eisenhower's televised presidential inauguration the following day) (Bor, 2013).

[30] Jezebel, 29 Nov. 2011, "The Good Ol' Days, When You Weren't Fat Enough', http://jezebel.com/5863117/vintage-ads-encourage-women-to-gain-weight

[31] Vogue, 1 June 2015, 'Why Was America So Mean to Pregnant Kim Kardashian?' http://www.vogue.com/article/kim-kardashian-pregnant-media-hate

Public vile against Kardashian reached new heights with a meme that went viral, comparing Kim Kardashian, in black and white, to Shamu the killer whale, and asking 'who wore it best?'[32] . By pitting one woman against the other, the media set off a popularity contest as to whose pregnancy was the best[33].

Once pregnant again in 2015, the media became obsessed comparing Kim's two pregnancy styles,[34] making sure they reported how she engorged on junk food and had a rough time controlling her ravenous appetite[35].

Although still curvy today, Kim 'has worked hard on her post-baby body' and has streamlined herself following a high intensity, interval training workout, accompanied by a diet designed 'to burn fat and increase her strength and endurance while keeping her curves sexy' [36]. Through such bodily 'containment', Kim has turned an 'excessive' body into one 'in control', in order to become a post-partum 'disciplinary figure' herself (Tyler, 2011). Concurrently, media and expert speculation about the procedures she has undergone to forge and secure her (in)famous hourly shape continue unabatedly[37] – with most discussion revolving around her large posterior, thought to have been 'enhanced' by means of a 'Brazilian butt lift'[38].

Apart from being a neoliberal 'project of the self' – to be capitalised upon through her Instagram and Snapchat accounts, to the extent that she may 'break the internet' several times over-,[39] her uplifted derriere has both racialised her and preserved racial (and class) differences. Although the larger rear has been historically associated with women of colour, and continues to be fetishised today, it was initially introduced into mainstream popular culture through the body of Jennifer Lopez. In fact, a lot has been said in the popular media about Jennifer Lopez's 'booty', thus gendering and racialising Lopez as being outside the boundaries of whiteness and middle-class respectability (Molina Guzman, 2010; Molina Guzmán and Valdivia, 2004). For example, for some Hispanic cultural critics the fact that Lopez has embraced her booty as a marketable commodity of desirable beauty[40] points to her ethnic pride while challenging white cultural dominance (Negrón-Muntaner, 2002; Ovalle, 2011). Her big backside upsets white hegemonic constructions of beauty and good taste because it is seen as proof of the dark excess of Latino and African diaspora cultures – while at the same time offers one of the largest Latino populations in the US rare visibility. Furthermore, as Lopez quite often moves ambiguously between whiteness and Latinidad, references to the big (non-white) booty work to preserve rather than challenge racial differences, and although she has lost weight over the years, her posterior continues to be fetishised and circulated as a remarkable 'Latina butt' (Hallstein-O'Brien, 2015: 72). In this respect, Lopez encapsulates 'racial mobility' as she oscillates 'between the normalcy of whiteness and the exoticism of black' (Ovalle, 2011: 7). Drawing on her Armenian descent to authenticate herself, Kardashian's fuller figure is ascribed a similar racial ambiguity, as she moves between the poles of blackness and whiteness. Thus, her

> '[…] curvaceous body is […] not just publicly sexualised but publicly raced, most emphatically by Kardashian herself, as she strategically embodies both the trope of the heavily regulated 'white' body and the trope of the curvaceous, exoticised, non-white (implicitly black) body. (Sastre, 2014: 129)

Public and media attention (and fixation) to Kardashian's butt, cannot obscure the point that despite the various attempts to discipline it (via cellulite treatment, diet pill endorsements, her emphasis on fitness), her fleshy, bacchanalian posterior is far removed from the normative white one, and thus places her within a history of the exoticised 'othered' body. However, far from the colonial white gaze that surrounded Sarah Baartman, the original 'Hottentot Venus' (Barrera, 2002; Netto, 2005), Kardashian's butt becomes a marker of her uniqueness *as well as*

[32] We Know Memes, 1 March 2013, http://weknowmemes.com/2013/03/kim-kardashian-vs-a-killer-whale-who-wore-it-better/

[33] See for example the cover of US Weekly (12 June 2013), where the headline read: "Kate vs. Kim: Due the Same Day! It's a royal vs. reality show down — the nurseries, the baby clothes, their bump style, and baby weight battles. Inside the exciting last month.", or the two women's pregnancy styles on E-online http://www.eonline.com/photos/8366/kim-kardashian-s-kate-middleton-s-pregnancy-styles/279778

[34] Racked, 12 Nov. 2015, An Obsessive Comparison of Kim Kardashian's Pregnancy Styles https://www.racked.com/2015/11/12/9703198/kim-kardashian-pregnancy-style

[35] Daily Mail, 24 Nov. 2015, 'You're a closet eater!' , https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3331423/Kris-Jenner-scolds-pregnant-Kim-Kardashian-eating-sugary-food-KUWTK-preview-clip.html

[36] Your Tango, 3 Aug. 2018, How Did Kim Kardashian Lose Weight? https://www.yourtango.com/2018315822/how-did-kim-kardashian-lose-weight

[37] Mirror, 18 Aug. 2018, 'Kim Kardashian's plastic surgery timeline in full as star exposes her 'injected bum' in tiny bikini', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashians-plastic-surgery-timeline-10292368

[38] The procedure involves moving fat from the stomach and thighs to the buttock, ensuring a thin waist and a protruding derriere (Mirror, 5 April 2018, Kim Kardashian strips down to incredibly tiny black thong to show off her 'real bum' - but is 'crushed by fan backlash', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-strips-down-incredibly-10297483)

[39] In Paper Magazine's Winter 2014 issue (November 12), Kim Kardashian showed off her famous asset on two covers; clad in a sequin dress with a glass of champagne resting on her bum in the first one, and donning black gloves and a pearl necklace, buttocks bare, in the second. The idea was 'to break the internet'. A year later, in time for Halloween 2015, a Kim Kardashian 'PAPER' Mag Halloween Costume, was, half-jokingly, promoted by Bustle (24 Spt. 2015, https://www.bustle.com/articles/112648-a-kim-kardashian-paper-mag-halloween-costume-that-will-win-every-contest).

[40] Rolling Stone, 14 April 2014, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/jennifer-lopez-twerks-hard-in-booty-teaser-20140614

an object of fascination, bringing her (yet more) visibility and financial success. In an attempt to refute criticism and authenticate her body, Kardashian claims her 'right to the booty' on account of her Armenian heritage - thus framing herself as non-white, *despite* the fact that she is Caucasian and, as a result, white. Because of this, she has been vilified by black women for encroaching on their territory (the big posterior) and robbing them of one of the few assets they may have. In the end, she creates ambivalence around her identity, manipulating her heritage into a performance of 'otherness', and becomes wealthier along the way (Sastre, 2014). The public illustration of the authenticity of the Kardashian posterior through the use of X-rays in 2011 (following the hype about whether or not she's had a butt implant), and the disavowal she's had anything artificial in it[41], resonates the publicity surrounding Jeniffer Lopez's unprecedented behind in 1997-1998 – 'Todo es mio' [it's all mine] - in Latin and English speaking media in the US (Beltra, 2002).

Kim's body – pregnant or post-partum- attracts public attention, either through the work of the 'selfie queen' herself and the countless photos of her lower part in various phases of undress, through comments posted by fans and anti-fans, commentary in the popular media and by expert opinion, or through paparazzi lens, and thus perpetuates a labour of visibility within 'transmediated continuity' (Jones and Weber, 2015). As a reality celebrity mother, she fuses narcissism, sexualisation, sexuality, pathology and demonisation in the context of a multiplatform mediascape. Her declarations against body shame and self love[42], find expression in a neoliberal, postfeminist culture that demands sexualized visibility as a sign of one's market appeal (24-25). However, Kim's bodily display may be in conflict with how she is being perceived as a mother, at a time when the narratives of downshifting/work-life balance discussed earlier have gained momentum. The mother's idealised place within the domesticity further problematises her public representation (Kaplan 1992), especially when a celebrity mom like her is being seen as overly sexual, marketed and commodified. Caught up in the 'body positivity' vs 'bikini-ready' antinomy, Kim Kardashian illustrates the tensions embedded in postfeminist motherhood. For, despite the 'racial ambiguity' (Sastre 2014) her derriere may afford her, Kim's bodily image may have more to share with Britney Spears' post-partum 'female grotesque' (Nash, 2005/2006).

... AND BEYONCE KNOWLES

Although for some black feminists, post-feminism has nothing to do with black women, since the postfeminist subject is predominantly white (Hill Collins, 2005), Beyonce Knowles Carter can be considered as a 'rich' text, combining a number of intersecting discourses – black femininity, performativity, sexuality, motherhood, entrepreneurialism, *and* postfeminism. Fierce feminist controversies have surrounded her, dubbed 'Beyonce wars' both by the media and academia (Cooper, 2013; Sawyer undated, Chatman, 2015), whether regarding her 2014 MTV VMAs performance in front of a screen emblazoned with the word 'Feminist' in giant letters[43]; acclaimed black feminist bell hooks' labelling her 'a terrorist' for her appearance on TIME's May 2014 front cover at the New School in May 2014[44]; her sampling a part of Nigerian writer's Chimamanda Ngoz Adichie TEDx talk [We Should all be Feminists] in the single 'Flawless' (2013) [45]; or the heated public controversy that erupted when bell hooks issued a biting assessment of Beyonce's 'Lemonade' album in 2016, admonishing it for its reliance on victimhood tropes and subservience to patriarchal and capitalist themes[46].

Whitney Teal, another black feminist critic, writing for personal essay hub xoJane (folded within InStyle in 2017) argued that what Beyonce has achieved for black women, especially for those who have been raised within a Southern Christian culture[47], is extraordinary. In a culture premised on Victorian femininity and modesty,

[41] Though medical experts suggest that the 'Brazilian butt lift' involves a fat recycling within the body, which is undetectable. Mirror, 5 April 2018, Kim Kardashian strips down to incredibly tiny black thong to show off her 'real bum' - but is 'crushed by fan backlash', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-strips-down-incredibly-10297483

[42] Mirror, 5 April 2018, Kim Kardashian strips down to incredibly tiny black thong to show off her 'real bum' - but is 'crushed by fan backlash', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-strips-down-incredibly-10297483

[43] Pride Source, 25 Sept. 2014, Annie Lennox On Her Legacy, Why Beyonce Is 'Feminist Lite', http://www.pridesource.com/article.html?article=68228

[44] The New School events, 'bell hooks scholar-in-residence - Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body', 6 May 2016, https://events.newschool.edu/event/bell_hooks_scholar-in-residence_-_are_you_still_a_slave_liberating_the_black_female_body. The panel involved a public dialogue between bell hooks, Marci Blackman, Shola Lynch and Janet Mock. Included in TIME's list of the 100 most influential people, Beyonce posed in a white bra and panties, lips parted, gaze sultry. Where Mock saw in this an artist with ultimate control of her public persona, hooks responded that Beyonce was complicit in her own exploitation, and that a part of her was anti-feminist, 'a terrorist', when it came to the impact on young girls.

[45] Quartz Africa, 9 Oct. 2016, 'Chimamanda Adichie says Beyonce's kind of feminism isn't her kind of feminism' https://qz.com/804863/chimamanda-adichie-says-beyonces-kind-of-feminism-isnt-her-kind-of-feminism/

[46] bell hooks institute, 9 May 2016, 'Moving Beyond Pain' http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain

[47] The history of the church in the black community of the American South is connected to the growth of the 'Black Church' and the spread of various Protestant denominations (mainly Methodist, Baptist) within African Americans during slavery and mainly through the 19th century. The church in the American South was instrumental in the rise of black literacy but it was surrounded by tension between North

Beyonce has disposed the historical narrative of the hypersexual/temptress black woman and challenged norms of propriety and cultural and religious righteousness (Teal, 2013 in Sawyer - undated). The daughter of married middle-class parents, a 'can-do' girl, she comes from a socio-economic position that allows her to become an ideal postfeminist subject – independent, successful, self-inventing, entrepreneurial- argues Dayna Chatman (2015), In fact, through her work on Beyonce´'s performances of black femininity, Chatman interrogates how '… her body and personal narrative reinforce normative conceptions of marriage, motherhood, and femininity […] indoctrinating women ideologically into what I refer to as a post-feminist gender regime' (2015: 928).

Furthermore, from a postfeminist point of view, Beyonce has decidedly broken away from playing the perfect, good black girl, and through her music and performance presents 'feminism as a lived experience'. '[…] We don't have to shrink to make others more comfortable with our fierceness. […] We can suck dick in the backseats of chauffeured cars, because, why not? We can brag about our asses because they're amazing and any person would be lucky to have "all that ass up in your face."', says Teal when discussing Beyonce's role in Black women's sexual liberation and wholeness (in Sawyer- undated). In Beyonce's case, it is her *embodied performance* -either as an artist or as an expecting mother- that causes (a feminist) unease with the (postfeminist) sensibility of empowerment and agency through sexuality.

Contrary to prevailing discourses about the 'typical' black family, where the father is absent, and the mother is unwed, poor and welfare-dependent, Beyonce is the real-life personification of 'having it all' momlit discussed earlier – by first becoming successful in her career, marrying, and *then* having a child, Beyonce´ has achieved 'it all' and has thus avoided the 'black girl curse' (where black middle class professional women have difficulties finding 'Mr Right' because of their expectations, Chatman, 2015). In that respect, Beyonce seems to straddle confidently the work/life balance dictated by the 'new femininity' and is looked upon for inspiration in the fields of 'womanhood, motherhood, sexiness, self-worth and self-acceptance' (Caron, 2018).

Beyonce becomes the neoliberal subject per se, in control of her 'project of the self' (Tyler, 2011), as evidenced in the way she manages her private life and negotiates her public/private self. From explicit references to husband's Jay-Z infidelity in Lemonade, to both her pregnancy announcements, she exemplifies how a celebrity can effectively manage the inevitable commodification of her own image and life, in the sense that instead of fighting with the media for her privacy, Beyonce foregrounds her private life in her work under controlled circumstances. Her first baby announcement at the 2011 VMA Awards was well monitored: wearing an orange Lanvin caftan – one out of near-70 gowns she considered – Beyonce merely performed a small belly rub in front of the cameras. 'I put a lot of thought into how I wanted to unveil it. It was important to me that I was able to do it myself" she revealed at Harper's Bazaar48, showing this was a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre. 'I didn't want a crazy picture or gossip story to break the news,' she continued "so I decided to say nothing and proudly show my baby bump […].". Fully immersed in the neoliberal pregnant governmentality that permeates contemporary 'mommy culture' (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015; Tyler, 2011), she offered plenty of advice about her post-partum regime of exercise and diet at a 2012 interview in People magazine, which declared her 'The World's Most Beautiful Woman'. The magazine commented how the artist was 'back to her pre-pregnancy weight and gearing up for her first post-baby concerts, […]', framing her as a role model for other women to follow when 'doing motherhood', particularly so when she wanted to 'show women that when you become a mother, it doesn't mean you put everything away. You can be a mother and a seductress to your husband.' [49] Through this foregrounding of sexual agency, Beyonce is seen to '… [walk] a thin line between challenging attempts to regulate her body and offering up her body as commodity fetish. The former is a feminist project, while the latter is a post-feminist one' (Chatman, 2015: 937).

It's interesting to see how the popular media have canonised - even sanctified – Beyonce's pregnant body especially when carrying her twins. When she appeared in the 2017 Grammys, outfitted in a Peter Dundas glittering gold chain-mail dress draping her belly, a thick band of gold rings around her neck and a sunburst-like halo and body chain by the House of Malakai, almost full term, she was seen as a cross-over between a bacchanalian Mother Nature and a Madonna[50]. While heavier when carrying the twins than other celebrity mums-to-be, she has been constantly praised for her beauty, womanhood and sensuality in a way that other (white) celebrity mothers have not[51]. Removed from any comparison with Sarah Baartman's (black) Hottentot Venus, or a (white) 'welfare mom',

and South: black people in the South did not welcome the interventions from the North, black or white, mainly because most Northern blacks (like whites) saw Southern black worship as hopelessly "heathen." As urban, middle-class membership in the Southern church developed at the end of the 19th century, black women worked to address urban ills, rural arrest and racial violence, established reading groups, wrote for religious periodicals, and promoted traditional ideals of Victorian womanhood and respectability (Maffly-Kipp, 2001).

[48] Harper' Bazaar 11 Oct. 2011, Beyoncé's Baby Love, https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/news/a825/beyonces-baby-love-interview-1111/

[49] People, 25 April 2012, Motherhood Makes Beyoncé Feel 'More Beautiful Than Ever', https://people.com/celebrity/beyonce-knowles-is-people-magazine-worlds-most-beautiful/

[50] Refinery29, 13 Feb 2017, This Is Where You've Seen Beyoncé's Divine Grammys Performance Before https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/02/140654/beyonce-grammys-inspiration-religious-symbols-meaning

[51] The vitriolic publicity Britney Spears found herself engulfed in during her darker and heavier period (including the weight gain during her second pregnancy in 2005) is a case in point. Alluding to notions of 'white trash' (Nash 2006), Britney was vilified by the media between

and being a 'crossover text' (Beltrán, 2002: 74)[52], Beyonce easily encapsulates the figure of the 'yummy mommy' (Littler, 2013) (typically white in pop culture encarnations, Douglas and Michaels 2000). As a working mom, she has become a brand and a style icon, - Lagerwey's (2016) brand Mom incarnate-, through her Ivy Park collection for Topshop[53].

Her second pregnancy announcement was hailed like an artistic event, and literally broke the internet: 'We would like to share our love and happiness. We have been blessed two times over. We are incredibly grateful that our family will be growing by two, and we thank you for your well wishes. - The Carters'54 announced Queen Bee on her Instagram account, releasing a self portrait that became the most-liked Instagram post ever55 (until that day). The portrait - taken by Awol Erizku, a conceptual artist well connected with the pop-music industry, who likes to distill notions of black beauty within canonical and contemporary works in Western art - pictures her heavily pregnant, seated in front of a colourful wreath, on a bed of ivy, wearing a bra and a veil, reminiscent of a Renaissance Madonna. Reports suggest[56] that this photo was chosen, much like a curator or a magazine editor - by the artist herself after trying a variety of others in her personal account for her pregnancy announcement.

Although not as muscular as other black bodies – look for example at the visceral comments surrounding Serena Williams' body over the years (Petersen, 2017: 8-11) – Beyonce's curves and physical strength point to trenchant assumptions about black women's bodies and the 'unruliness' surrounding them. Her body eschews traditional trappings of (white) femininity, where leaner – 'drier'- body aesthetics have been ushered in. Beyonce's body - like Kim's – goes through different phases of containment and (self)-policing, yet always remains fuller than the 'stick-thin' Anglo-Saxon (gold) standard of female emdodiment. In fact, rather than being 'skinny-toned', following the body aesthetics initially paved by Jane Fonda in the eighties, both women encapsulate the curvier, fuller-yet-toned, female body.

Beyonce illustrates the individualised feminism of the 21st century: everything, motherhood above all, is a choice. In this, she becomes yet another example of a woman who 'has it all' – a successful career, a good marriage, despite its ups and downs, self-worth, personal wealth, and now a happy family, and she confesses how she needs to joggle everything (career and family, public and private life), 'like every other woman'[57]. In so doing, however, not only is she normalising discourses of heterosexual marriage and maternity, but of downshifting as well. Through this performance of motherhood, enabled within the 'celebrity confessional' (Jermyn, 2008; Littler, 2013; Redmond, 2011), Beyonce's 'ordinariness' is maintained and solidified, allowing identification with female audiences. In addition, resonating present day culture of body-positivity and acceptance, in a September 2018 Vogue interview, she utterly humanised the post-partum body by exonerating the 'mommy pouch', which she admitted she now has, and publicly denouncing social pressure to immediately resume the pre-pregnancy body[58].

CONCLUSION

At a time when parenthood seems to have become almost mandatory regardless of sexual orientation, and children serve as fashionable props on Instagram profiles and in lifestyle magazines, this article has examined the way in which pregnant femininity and maternity is engulfed by discourses of aestheticisation and disciplining of the body. As the regime of fitness culture becomes mainstream and carrying the burden of being 'bikini-ready', celebrity mothers personify a responsibility -and respectability- narrative which expects women to self-control and self-regulate. Within such 'disciplinary neoliberalism' (Tyler, 2011), and given the educational and pedagogical role of celebrities and their construction of a 'public-private self' (Marshall, 2010), global celebrity figures Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles-Carter offer a 'grammar of conduct' (Skeggs and Wood, 2011) around which the moral, and the maternal, self is being articulated and gauged.

Furthermore, this article has teased out the tensions that exist once the celebrity motherhood of Kim Kardashian and Beyonce disrupts the neoliberal postfeminist maternal body. Both women/mothers have been discussed as pertaining to an exoticising narrative as a result of their curvy bodies and as to how each one negotiates

2007-2011 only to be revered anew when a few years later she bounced back, leaner, stronger and with a killer six-pack (Body, Height, Weight, 29 Oct. 2016, Britney Spears to present the weight changes, https://bodyheightweight.com/britney-spears-weight-loss/)

[52] Crossover is defined as the process of becoming popular with a new audience, especially to denote how non-white stars succeed in becoming popular with white audiences (Beltrán 2002: 74).

[53] https://www.elle.com/fashion/a35286/beyonce-elle-cover-photos/

[54] Instagram, 1 Feb. 2017, https://www.instagram.com/p/BP-rXUGBPJa/?utm_source=ig_embed

[55] Vogue, 2 Feb. 2017 https://www.vogue.com/article/beyonce-pregnancy-twins-announcement-most-liked-instagram

[56] The Atlantic, 2 Feb. 2017, Beyoncé's High-Art Pregnancy Photo https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/02/beyonce-twins-pregnancy-announcement-image-art-awol-erizku/515400/

[57] Still, let us not forget that in, class terms, Beyoncé, like other rich women, hires staff, who remain 'invisible', to help her with her domestic routine.

[58] Vogue, 6 August 2018, Beyoncé in Her Own Words: Her Life, Her Body, Her Heritage, https://www.vogue.com/article/beyonce-september-issue-2018

her distance from dominant Anglo-European norms of beauty and acceptance. Through such unruliness (Petersen, 2017), both of them work to upset and, in tandem, to corroborate the model of 'new domesticity'. By availing themselves to public consumption, they fall prey to the waxing and waning of public adoration as evidenced in Kim's performance of pregnancy, as well as the buzz surrounding Beyonce's motherhood and corporeality.

Through a discursive analysis of the publicity surrounding the pregnancies of Kim Kardashian and Beyonce, this article has suggested that both women are characterised by 'transmediated continuity' (Jones and Weber, 2015) in the sense that they are being immersed in and surrounded by neoliberal discourses of self-management while pregnant and post-partum, across an array of media platforms and texts. Both Kim Kardashian and Beyonce produce and put forward gendered and race subjectivities, either through Kim's 'racial ambiguity' or Beyonce's 'crossover' text. In this way, they both show heterosexual women and non-binary persons how to do womanhood, amidst heated controversies surrounding their femininity, feminism, motherhood and entrepreneurialism, all of which accommodate the tensions and conflicts that women face in a postfeminist era.

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Embracing Maternal Eroticism: Queer Experiences of Pleasure in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I approach *The Argonauts* (2015), specifically Nelson's attention to maternal desire and eroticism through the lens of motherhood studies and matricentric feminism. I argue that *The Argonauts* provides a compelling contribution to a fairly new, but increasingly pertinent, discourse of empowered mothering. Nelson's accounts of the erotic experience of mothering, coupled with details of her sexual experiences within and outside of her relationship with her partner, Harry, address what has heretofore been a deep-seated contradiction between the maternal body and sexual and erotic pleasure and desire. Nelson makes space for the consideration of motherhood and the erotic not as antithetical, but deeply entwined realms of experience. By drawing on Audre Lorde's meditations on the erotic, as well as scholarship on maternal eroticism, I contend that *The Argonauts* exposes aspects of feminine and maternal experiences that transgress a patriarchal institution of motherhood which ultimately seeks to contain these experiences within the private sphere of the family.

Keywords: motherhood, neoliberalism, academic feminisms, mothering, eroticism

INTRODUCTION

In her genre-defying poetic/critical memoir *The Argonauts* (2015), Maggie Nelson explores the interstices of sex, mothering, and language in the age of North American neoliberalism. Nelson reflects on her experiences of family-making with her partner, artist Harry Dodge, through her journey of conceiving and giving birth to her son Iggy while learning to care for her stepson at the same time. She also provides readers with insight into her creative and academic life as a writer and professor. The book was received with great acclaim and was named as one of the *New York Times'* "Notable Books" in 2015. It also earned Nelson the 2015 National Book Critics Circle award in the category of "criticism," underscoring the text's fluidity of genre and its wide reach. Shortly after publication of *The Argonauts*, Nelson was awarded a prestigious MacArthur "Genius" Grant which further established her reputation as a leading writer in North America today.

Responding to a question about her relationship to mothering in an interview with *The Rumpus,* Nelson highlights her interest in thinking about categorisation and relationality, specifically in terms of the maternal. Nelson wonders:

> Can we talk about the maternal function, whatever that might be, without invariably tethering it to the maternal body? How can we have that conversation without eliding the maternal body? Should we be hanging onto something called "the maternal function," or should we be talking about an "ordinary devotion" that people of all genders can participate in? Should we be talking about forms of devotion and care that exceed and exist apart from the baby/mother/parent model? (Steinke, 2015)

Nelson raises questions about the contours of modern care and contemplates the position of biology in maternal and parental practice. This interview response reveals Nelson's interest in the physical aspect of care which also plays a central theme in *The Argonauts*. The memoir ties together a number of care narratives, including Nelson's meditations on Dodge's process of gender transitioning, caring for her stepson as well as her biological son, and her own partnership with Dodge. This article focuses on Nelson's reflections on her *own* maternal body and the implications of Nelson's writing on an understanding of the maternal erotic. While in no way is Dodge's

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identity as a trans man and his practice of care irrelevant to the memoir as a whole, the scope of this article is limited to my analysis of Nelson's relationship and attention to mothering and the maternal body.[1]

Alongside her own narrative voice in *The Argonauts*, Nelson weaves the words of other cultural and theoretical critics, artists, and writers—from the American poet Eileen Myles to queer theorists Eve Sedgwick and Michael Foucault—throughout the margins of her text. She refers to this multivocal group of thinkers that has profoundly shaped her own thinking about and experience of the world as the 'many-gendered mothers of [her] heart' (Nelson, 2015: 105). These 'many-gendered mothers' mark only one of the book's engagements with maternal influence and care. While a memoir so steeped in academic criticism may at first seem like a goldmine for academic critics who wish to analyse the text—Nelson already begins the work, delineating the critical conversations in which her text engages—on the contrary, *The Argonauts* presents an intellectual conundrum for the academic critic who may attempt to approach the text systematically. Reflecting on her experience with her newborn child Iggy, Nelson writes, "An erotics seems too heavy. I don't want an eros, or a hermeneutics, of my baby. Neither is dirty, neither is mirthful, enough" (2015: 20). Further along in the text, considering Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Susan Fraiman's discourse on women's 'anal eroticism' Nelson asserts:

> I am not interested in a hermeneutics, or an erotics, or a metaphorics, of my anus. I am interested in ass-fucking. I am interested in the fact that the clitoris, disguised as a discrete button, sweeps over the entire area like a manta ray, impossible to tell where its eight thousand nerves begin and end. (2015: 85)

In this article I intend to explore how a reader critically approaches a book so ripe with mesmerising prose, reflections on family, love, sex, and a queer woman's experience in academia without confining Nelson's writing, and in turn her life, to an academic theory, or as she puts it, an 'eros' or a 'hermeneutics'.

I contend that a book so resistant to categorisation in its content as well as its genre calls for consideration through a critical lens that is wholly invested in porousness and fluidity. As such, in this essay I approach *The Argonauts*, specifically Nelson's attention to maternal desire and eroticism, through the lens of motherhood studies and matricentric feminism. By reading this text as a matrifocal narrative, 'in which a mother plays a role of cultural and social significance and in which motherhood is thematically elaborated and valued, and is structurally central to the plot,' I argue that *The Argonauts* provides a compelling contribution to a fairly new but increasingly pertinent conversation of empowered mothering (O'Reilly, 2016: 6). Nelson's account of the erotic experience of mothering, coupled with details of her sexual experiences within and outside of her relationship with Dodge, addresses what has heretofore been a deep-seated cultural polarisation between the maternal body and sexual and erotic pleasure and desire. By drawing on Audre Lorde's meditations on the erotic (1984), as well as the (still scant) body of scholarship on maternal eroticism (de Marneffe, 2004; Kinser, 2008; Oxenahndler, 2001), I argue that Nelson's writing on erotic experiences in relation to both her child and her partner underscore the complexity of pleasure in its abundance of forms. In doing so, Nelson makes space for the consideration of motherhood and the erotic not as antithetical, but deeply entwined realms of experience. Further, the resistance to categorisation that *The Argonauts* heralds provides a model of empowered mothering that works to undermine a heteropatriarchal neoliberal order through the process of queer family-making.

Before I turn to my own reading of *The Argonauts,* it is necessary to provide a brief discussion of both the political and academic landscape of motherhood and mothering that shapes Nelson's text. In *Mothering in the Age of Neoliberalism* (2014), Lynn O'Brien Hallstein argues that "Contemporary American motherhood is shaped by a post-feminist landscape in which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" (Hallstein, 2014: 299). Contrary to a popular cultural belief that second-wave feminism had effectively resolved gender-issues and inequality, O'Brien Hallstein suggests, "One post-feminist hallmark is contemporary mothers' split subjectivity (…) between second wave feminist gains in the public sphere and ongoing patriarchal gender-based roles in the private sphere" (2014: 299). In other words, a neoliberal and patriarchal order conscribes mothers to actively participate in public markets through work outside of the home while at the same time requires them to fully participate in and fulfil motherwork in the private sphere. O'Brien Hallstein continues:

> In its foci on individual choice, personal responsibility, and privatization, neoliberalism intersects with the post-second wave contexts in ways that 'resolve' the post-second wave crisis in femininity by reinforcing, encouraging, and further entrenching a neo-traditional family configuration. (2014: 298)

The 'neo-traditional family configuration' as the basis for mothering in a neoliberal order results in the reproduction of the patriarchal institution of motherhood instead of providing women with opportunities to practice empowered mothering and care. As Judith Warner explains, post-second wave mothers have 'been bred to be independent and self-sufficient. To rely on their own initiative and personal responsibility. To *privatize* their

[1] Though beyond the scope of this article, a future project may consider Dodge's practice of care for both Nelson and his children as narrated through the lens of Nelson.

problems' (2014: 304). As such, the emotional and psychological experiences and practices of contemporary mothers are meant to be compartmentalised and privatised

The argument can be made that through her whiteness, financial privilege and job stability, as well as her relationship with a male-identifying individual, one could classify Nelson as a person who is responsible for perpetuating a heteropatriarchal neoliberal order. Nelson herself grapples with this issue of 'homonormativity' in *The Argonauts*: "If there's one thing that homonormativity reveals, it's the troubling fact that *you can be victimized and in no way be radical"* (Nelson, 2016: 26, Original emphasis). I contend, however, that Nelson's expression of erotic attachments to her children as well as romantic partners and the act of making these experiences public highlight the subversion of this order.[2]

Responding to this 'post-second wave crisis of femininity,' a key thinker in motherhood studies, Andrea O'Reilly, argues that "Mothers need a matricentric mode of feminism organised from and for their particular identity and work as mothers. Indeed, a mother-centered feminism is needed because mothers—arguably more so than women in general—remain disempowered despite forty years of feminism" (2016: 3). This matricentric feminism calls for mothers to practice empowered mothering. Empowered mothering functions as 'an oppositional discourse' to patriarchal motherhood (O'Reilly, 2016: 69). Patriarchal motherhood refers to the construction and practice of mothering under a patriarchal order in which the powers of the state subject mothers and mothering to oppression, essentialism, and institutionalisation. In *The Argonauts,* Nelson narrates a woman's experience of empowered mothering through her repeated insistence that eroticism is embedded in the practice of mothering. In this way, Nelson provides a valuable example of how underscoring multiplicity and messiness can begin to dismantle the neoliberal privatisation of motherhood and mothering. With her memoir, Nelson imparts her experiences of pleasure as well as those of pain in great detail to a public audience, exposing aspects of feminine and maternal subjectivities that threaten a patriarchal institution of motherhood that ultimately seeks to contain these experiences within the private sphere of the family.

As I have noted, in part because of its resistance to genre and categorisation, *The Argonauts* serves as an intriguing text for academic critics who wish to parse out Nelson's own academic and narrative insights. Relevant to my discussion are the critics who have considered Nelson's text in relation to issues of maternity, pleasure, and desire. Robin Silbergleid (2017), for example, suggests that *The Argonauts* falls under the genre of a queer motherhood memoir and questions the ways in which this text as well as other queer motherhood memoirs such as *Waiting in the Wings* by Cherrie Moraga (1997) and A.K Summers' *Pregnant Butch* (2014), attempt to highlight the 'queering' of motherhood practices. She cites Margaret Gibson to suggest:

> It is a mistake to think that queering motherhood is only and inevitably a matter of addition, of bringing parents who identify as 'queer' and/or 'trans' into existing unyielding frameworks (…) Queering motherhood can therefore start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components of 'expected' motherhood are challenged. (Gibson, quoted in Silbergleid, 2017)

The Argonauts not only brings queer-identifying individuals into a framework of parental care, but more specifically questions the use of the term 'queer' when it comes to motherhood and mothering (Silbergleid, 2017). *The Argonauts* asks readers to consider: "To what extent is maternal eroticism also the site of queer maternity? Is the maternal body always already queer and/or essentially conventional?" (Silbergleid, 2017). While Silbergleid is right in suggesting that Nelson certainly raises these important questions (and many others) about queer mothering, maternal eroticism, and the transgressive power inherent in motherwork, I argue that more critical work needs to actively attempt to interrogate these questions, rather than let our thinking remain at the level of speculation. My work here begins to fill in the critical gap in work on *The Argonauts* that fully considers queer maternal bodies, eroticism, and pleasure.

Constance Furey approaches Nelson's commentary on eroticism from a theological standpoint (2016). In "Eros and *The Argonauts"* Furey writes, "I invoke Nelson's *Argonauts* [sic] here because it explores the erotics of family creation through the erotics of language, in a text that explicitly foregrounds the interactive nature of language" (2016: 157). I agree with Furey in that "The intertwining of words and pleasure on the first page of the book echo Nelson's longstanding sense that words and the erotics of interactive pleasure are inseparable," however, Furey attempts to read the text through a "hermeneutics of intersubjectivity" using the work of Judith Butler (2004) and Amy Hollywood (2002). As a result, Furey falls into the particular temptation that Nelson asks readers and critics to resist—the temptation to fit her narrative neatly into an eros or a hermeneutics of motherhood, pleasure, or desire (2016: 158). This critical attempt to compartmentalise Nelson's work into a neat theoretical frame fails to embrace the writer's resistance to narrative and generic categorisation.

[2] For a more detailed discussion of 'homonormativity' in queer studies, see: Duggan, L. "The New Normativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism" (2002), in R. Castronovo and D. Nelson (eds), *Materializing Democracy,* (pp. 175-194). Durham, NC: Duke UP.

Unlike Furey, other critics have attempted to resist the impulse to categorise and theorise Nelson's text using strict theoretical frameworks or ideologies. For example, in her response to *The Argonauts*, Jackie Stacey comments on a similar question to the one that I have been grappling with here: How can one be a 'good enough' reader of the book? Picking up on Nelson's use of D.W. Winnicott's concept of the 'good enough mother,' Stacey argues: [3]

> If we take the centrality of the 'good-enough' in *The Argonauts* as our guide, then we should resist the temptation to idealize both the book and its author. To extend the good-enough to the dynamics between the reader and the author is to refuse idealizing relations between writing and its reception, and to welcome ambiguity and ambivalence on both sides. (2018: 205)

Instead of fitting the text into a theoretical purview or an ethics, Nelson challenges her readers to think between the lines of traditional academic discourse and to embrace the ambiguities inherent in *The Argonauts*. The book breaks down literary genres as well as relational genres and modes of reproduction and kinship so that 'even its break with citational conventions underscores the vision of the scrambled lines of descent that belong to the new improvised kinships of queer and feminist lives in all their *messy* and incomplete glory' (Stacey, 2018: 207, my emphasis).[4]

I want to latch onto Stacey's use of the word 'messy' as a descriptor of queer and feminist lives because the idea of messiness also proves productive for considering feminist *maternal* lives and bodies in particular. An embrace of messiness has appeared in much of the critical work by maternal theorists and scholars of motherhood studies. Amber Kinser, for example, considers the relationship between historical waves of American feminism, writing:

> For me, third wave thinking invites even more examinations of the *messiness* of feminist living than we have heretofore been situated to explore, partly because the strong second-wave ground on which we stand, and partly because the current political, global, technological, postfeminist, sociocultural milieu creates *messier* living. (2008: 119, my emphasis)

Both Stacey and Kinser invoke this concept of messiness in political and figurative senses. Yet, with *The Argonauts* Nelson points to the messiness of women's, specifically mothers' lives, in a more embodied sense. By emphasising the maternal experiences of pleasure and desire, Nelson literally and figuratively fleshes out the maternal body in *The Argonauts* which allows for broader visions of the physical and emotional tensions that arise from the intersections of woman/mother/partner/professor/sister/friend.

Adrienne Rich has (now famously) defined two different meanings of motherhood. One understanding of motherhood refers to the 'potential relationship' between a mother and child, while the other refers to motherhood as a patriarchal institution which requires and ensures that all women remain under male control (1976: 13). Rich argues that women 'need to understand the power and powerlessness embodied in motherhood in patriarchal culture' (Rich, 1976: 16). It is unsurprising then, considering that the institution of American motherhood has been constructed within patriarchy, that there is relatively little critical work that considers the erotic lives of mothers and the physical experience of mothering.[5] Further, according to O'Reilly, academic feminism has historically elided the maternal and 'the disavowal of the maternal in twenty-first-century academic feminism is deliberate and necessary, (…) enacted in order to protect and promote the illusion of the autonomous subject favoured by neoliberalism and celebrated in much of feminist theory (O'Reilly, 2016: 209). While economic, political, and social gains have been made for women as a result of decades of feminist activism and scholarship, the social and political realities of mothers and the motherwork they perform have been largely overlooked by feminism. Yet, to acknowledge the maternal (and the maternal body) 'is to remember that human beings are not self-sufficient, free-floating, and unencumbered subjects (…) who are championed by neoliberalism and celebrated in feminist modernity' (O'Reilly, 2016: 206). Instead, academic feminism must welcome a matricentric feminism that understands the social and historical construction of motherhood and the relationality inherent in its ideology and practice (O'Reilly, 2016: 4). [6]

[3] According to D. W. Winnicott, "A mother is neither good nor bad nor the product of illusion, but is a separate and independent entity: The good-enough mother (...) starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds, she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure. Her failure to adapt to every need of the child helps them adapt to external realities" (1967: 26-33).

[4] The genre and format of *The Argonauts* is unique in that visually, the body of the text is centered on the page and marginal references coincide with the relevant body text and footnotes appear throughout the text. The book is categorized by the publisher, Graywolf Press, as "Memoir/Criticism," merging genres that are often considered disparate.

[5] The exception to the general dearth of scholarship on the physical experience of mothering is the body of work that explores the sexuality of breastfeeding (Bartlett 2005, Giles 2004, Dettwyler 2017).

[6] Though O'Reilly contends that motherhood and mothering has historically been left out of academic feminism, it is important to note that in their writings primarily from the late-1980s to the 1990s, social reproduction theorists such as Barbara Laslett, Johanna Brenner, and Nona Y. Glazer have focused on the intersections of gender and labour (including motherwork), and the relationship to social reproduction.

Reading *The Argonauts* through a lens of matricentric feminism, a feminism that makes equal space for women who engage in motherhood and mothering as it does for women without children, reveals Nelson's interrogation of questions similar to those being asked by scholars of motherhood studies and maternal theory. For example, Nelson specifically illustrates an example of feminist resistance to the maternal when she recalls a particularly memorable seminar that she attended while in graduate school. At this event, art critic Rosalind Krauss responded to a series of North American literary theorist and amateur photographer Jane Gallop's photography that features Gallop and her young child. Krauss admonishes Gallop in front of an academic audience, calling her work 'naïve' and 'soft-minded' (Nelson, 2016: 41). The 'tacit undercurrent of [Krauss's] argument,' Nelson writes, 'was that Gallop's maternity had rotted her mind—besotted it with the narcissism that makes one think that an utterly ordinary experience shared by countless others is somehow unique, or uniquely interesting' (2016: 41). Krauss suggests that Gallop's attempt to bring the relationship between mother and child from the private into the public sphere of art and art criticism is offensive and reflective of Gallop's delusion by her child, further illustrating academic feminism's resistance to and distaste for maternity and the maternal body in general. Nelson highlights this problematic response to the maternal body and mother-child relationships and further notes that women, many who define themselves as 'feminist,' are often the most vocal advocates for women's cordoning off of the maternal from the public sphere.

As this special issue of *Feminist Encounters* dedicated to Feminism and Motherhood in the Twenty-First Century reveals, over the course of the last decade there has been a visible effort by many scholars to include critical considerations of the maternal in academic feminism. The field of motherhood studies has grown and continues to be increasingly recognised as a field in its own right in academic institutions. Still, even within the growing body of scholarship that embraces matricentric feminism, "Writers on mothering have largely stayed away from the topic of the maternal erotic, unable to locate their intensely sensual experience of mothering on a sexual continuum" (Kinser, 2008: 121). The maternal body, specifically its experience of pleasure, is still relatively undertheorised in scholarship on motherhood and mothering. In *Maternal Desire* (2004), Daphne de Marneffe points to the bifurcation of motherhood and desire as she writes, "As common wisdom would have it, 'mother' and 'desire' do not belong together in the same phrase. Desire (…) is about sex. Motherhood (…) is about practically everything but sex" (2004: 4). In the same vein, in *The Eros of Parenthood* (2001), Noelle Oxenhandler questions the origins of this hesitation to consider sexual and parental love together, asking, "But why (...) do we experience such a profound unease at the comparison of these two forms of love? Where does it come from, that sense of a frowning gaze bearing down?" (2001: 7). She cites the prevalence and criminalisation of pornography and media coverage of child sexual abuse and paedophilia as some of the leading reasons for this cultural unease. Concerns for the safety and wellbeing of children are all valid; yet, unintentional consequences of these concerns, such as the silence and repression of a mother's erotic pleasure that often derives from parenting, point to the messiness of maternal pleasure. Further, the risks of *not* articulating these experiences of maternal eroticism and desire are also grave:

> The consequences [of mothers' separation of desire and parenting] have been the denial of a lifeforce in mothering, an impoverished theorizing of the embodied maternal—yet another severing of woman from her body, another way of keeping mothers from narrating their own lives. (Kinser, 2008: 121)

The Argonauts serves as Nelson's attempt, as a mother and a partner, to 'narrate [her] own life' as a method of resisting cultural taboos about motherhood and mothering, sex, pleasure, and desire and to transgress the boundaries of the heteropatriarchal institution of motherhood.

The feminist and maternal scholarship that informs my reading of *The Argonauts* considers female pleasure and maternal eroticism in two distinct ways. One branch of this thinking defines the maternal erotic as the erotic pleasure a mother, or one who engages in the practice of mothering, experiences while caring for a child. For example, as Kinser defines it, "A maternal erotic is the depth of spiritual and bodily feeling and knowledge and groundedness that is rooted in the embodied mother sustaining and nurturing the embodied child" (2008: 121). Oxenhandler is also interested in exploring the overlap of erotic and parental love:

> Erotic love between adult lovers revolves around certain polarities: fusion and separateness, safety and danger, excitement and response (...) Each of these is a polarity that even in its simplest physical expression, is charged with emotion. And each of these is present already in the physical relationship between parent and child. (2001: 6)

In these terms, maternal eroticism refers to the physical relationship between mothers and their children and the pleasure derived from this specific relationship. Thinking about maternal eroticism in this sense helps to

For an overview of social reproduction theory and gender, see: Laslett, B. and Brenner, J. (1989). Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 15: 381-404.

interrogate the complex ways in which women experience the mother-child relationship. In line with this definition, the maternal erotic lends itself to biological motherhood and mothering. As I will discuss in more depth later in this article, Nelson frames her experience of giving birth to her son as an intensely erotic experience. As such, the question of the erotic feeling experienced between nonbiological mothers and children in their care is an area that still needs to be explored. While Nelson does privilege the relationship between her maternal body and her biological child in *The Argonauts,* she also acknowledges the physical experience of mothering her stepson. In this way, Nelson allows for the possibility of maternal eroticism in adoptive or nonbiological carers. In considering the potential for maternal care and practice outside of biological mother-child bonds, Nelson participates in queering motherhood, as O'Reilly contends that, "To queer motherhood, thus, is to destabilize patriarchal motherhood, particularly its ideological mandates of essentialization, normalization, naturalization, and biologicalization (…) Kinship is not defined only by blood" (O'Reilly, 2016: 101).

Another understanding of maternal eroticism that presents itself in the existing scholarship is not limited to bodily connection between mother and child. For example, in her influential essay 'The Use of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power', lesbian poet and theorist Audre Lorde argued for women's reclamation of the erotic which has historically been suppressed for fear of women's empowerment (1984). Though not speaking strictly about mothers, but women in general, Lorde claims, "Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex" (Lorde, 1984: 55). The relegation of the erotic to merely the realm of sex, according to Lorde, is a result of a patriarchal fear of women's bodily as well as spiritual, mental, and emotional power. Lorde goes on to define the erotic as:

> A measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. (1984: 54)

According to Lorde, all women can access the erotic as a method of empowerment in areas of their lives beyond physical sex. By harnessing the erotic, women can live inside themselves. For as Lorde notes, "When we live outside ourselves (…) when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's" (1984: 58). This understanding of the erotic includes a broader set of relations present in women's lives including, but not limited to, the relationship between mother and child. The maternal erotic, or maternal eroticism, then, can also refer to a mother that has fully realised and embraces erotic potential within and beyond the mother-child relationship.

While I employ Audre Lorde's theorisations of the erotic in order to think through maternal eroticism in Nelson's text, it is important to consider the different subject positions and historical contexts from which these two women were writing. As a cisgender white woman in a relationship with a transman, Nelson's relationship to the erotic is different than that of Lorde's. Further, Nelson's racial privilege as well as the potential to pass as a 'normative' heterosexual couple because of her decision to reproduce biologically with a male-identifying partner complicate her queer identity. Yet, because Lorde opens up the definition and understanding of the erotic, I suggest that while keeping race, class, gender, and sexuality in view, Lorde offers a productive frame through which to view the maternal erotic in *The Argonauts.*

In what remains of this essay, I intend to underscore moments in the *The Argonauts* in which Nelson explores the erotic depth of experiences that do not specifically derive from an experience of maternity in order to suggest that maternal bodies can and do experience sexual pleasure. I will also analyse moments in *The Argonauts* in which Nelson reflects on physical and emotional pleasure and fulfilment that directly result from the maternal experience. Altogether, Nelson's emphasis on erotic pleasure in *The Argonauts* underscores the imbrication of sexual pleasure and maternal eroticism. Nelson's text highlights the pleasures of motherhood as well as sex and in doing so, suggests that these pleasures are not always distinct from one another. Nelson complicates the idea of erotic pleasure, suggesting that sources of pleasure cannot always be singularly defined. As such, Nelson reminds readers that mothers are exceptionally multi-relational and embedded both in the lives of adults as well as their children regardless of the biological relationship between them.

Nelson opens *The Argonauts* with a scene in which she recalls the first time she has anal sex with Dodge. She writes:

> The first time you fuck me in the ass, my face smashed against the cement floor of your dank and charming bachelor pad (…) *What's your pleasure?* you asked, then stuck around for an answer. (Nelson, 2016: 3)

By opening with this exchange, Nelson renders all the writing that follows as an extended 'response' to the question that Dodge poses to her early on in their relationship. Nelson peppers the text with references to sexual pleasure in various forms, composing a compendium of her sexual desires and experiences. For example, Nelson recalls a memory of a college lecture in which she learned about French philosopher Luce Irigiray's well-known critique of binary and unitary thinking 'by focusing on the morphology of the labial lips,' then quickly jumps to a memory of a time when Nelson reached orgasm by pressing her legs together 'while waiting in line to see *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* at Film Forum on Houston' (Nelson, 2016: 62).[7] Shortly after she recalls this memory, Nelson writes of the time 'a few months before Iggy was conceived' when she and Dodge go to see an art porn film together (2016: 63). She thinks of her favourite parts of the film which included 'watching people hit each other during sex without it seeming violent, the scene of someone jerking off with a chunk of purple quartz down by the water, and the slow sewing of a feather onto a girl's butt' (Nelson, 2016: 63-64). By stringing these physically pleasurable experiences together Nelson fully illustrates her sexual desire. She is thoughtful about the sexual pleasure she experiences herself as well as the pleasure she witnesses in others, revealing her embrace of the erotic self. Lorde argues, "When I speak of the erotic (…) I speak (…) of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (1976: 55). Nelson wholeheartedly claims the erotic and fully incorporates the language of her own physical pleasure into her text.

Beyond 'ass fucking,' 'fisting,' and other sexual pleasures, *The Argonauts* include scenes of erotic pleasure that go beyond physical sex (2016: 85, 86). For example, much of the text includes Nelson's reflection and experiences of her partner's process of transitioning from female to male. She narrates her memories of the period in which Dodge undergoes top-surgery in Ft. Lauderdale while Nelson is pregnant with Iggy. Lying in bed in a hotel room together after the surgery, Nelson writes, "[Dodge] felt unburdened, euphoric, reborn (…) we were two human animals undergoing transformations beside each other, bearing each other loose witness. In other words, we were aging" (2016: 83). The erotic does not merely encompass physical pleasure achieved through sex. As Lorde puts it: "Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision, a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered" (1976: 55). Nelson literalises Lorde's words and enters a bed with her partner recovering from surgery. In this understated moment, Nelson highlights the pleasure she finds in witnessing change in oneself and a loved one through all the uncertainties and successes. The erotic experience of her relationship with her partner, within and beyond the body, demonstrates the uniting force of the realised erotic.

Nelson juxtaposes scenes from her erotic life with Dodge with moments of pleasure and discovery which derive from her maternal experience. After the long process of conceiving Iggy through multiple rounds of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Nelson's pregnancy is full of mystery as well as revelation. Visibly pregnant and on a book tour during the third trimester of her pregnancy, Nelson reflects on the shocking friendliness that she receives from strangers in public places (2016: 89). But at the same time, she notes the resistance and repulsion of many, often male, academics who attended her talks on her book tour for *The Red Parts* (2007)*,* a memoir about the murder of Nelson's aunt in 1969. She recalls the shock expressed by one attendee from a 'prestigious New York university' who asks how she is able to work on 'dark material' while she is 'with child' (2016: 91). Reflecting on this moment, Nelson writes, "Ah yes (…) Leave it to the old patrician white guy to call the lady speaker back to her body, so that no one could miss the spectacle of that wild oxymoron, *the pregnant woman who thinks"* (2016: 91). The confusion that the pregnant 'lady speaker' elicits from this male academic reiterates Krauss's disavowal of Gallop's work which places motherhood at its centre. This contradiction between kindness from strangers and the concern and disdain expressed by academic audiences suggests the fraught nature of the pregnant body. Nelson suggests that, "The pregnant body in public is (…) obscene. It radiates a kind of smug autoeroticism: an intimate relation is going on—one that is visible to others, but that decisively excludes them" (2016: 90). It is precisely the *erotic* relationship between mother and the unborn child that is unfolding before the public eye that confounds conservative onlookers. Yet, it is the sole access of the pregnant woman to this intimate relationship, despite its publicity, that makes the experience so pleasurable for Nelson and other women.

As I have touched on earlier, it is important to note that when discussing the physical relationship between mother and child, the erotic pleasure derived from this relationship does not depend on biology. Maternal eroticism can be experienced through the *act* of mothering, as mothering requires both mental and physical work.[8] Before Nelson includes Iggy's birth story in the text, and even before she details her own pregnancy, she explores the

7 The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (1972), directed by Rainer Werner Fassbender, 'is a berserk, angry, funny and exhausting analysis of sado-masochistic power games masquerading as loving relationships' and has become a classic lesbian film (Gibley, 2003).

8 In *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989), Sara Ruddick argues that maternal thinking is a 'discipline' in its own right (1989: 24). She suggests that those engaged in maternal thinking work to fulfill three key demands of a child: "These three demands--for *preservation, growth,* and social acceptability--constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training" (1989: 17).

physical relationship between mother and step-child. Nelson's descriptions of caring for her stepson pay great attention to the body, for example, making cocoa for him with 'as much powder as can fit in the rim of a fingernail' and playing a made-up game called Fallen Soldier (2016: 10). In a section addressed to Dodge, Nelson writes:

> I liked playing Fallen Soldier because it gave me time to learn about your son's face in mute repose: big almond eyes, skin just starting to freckle. And clearly he found some novel, relaxing pleasure in just lying there, protected by imaginary armor, while a near stranger who was quickly becoming family picked up each limb and turned it over, trying to find the wound. (2016:13)

Nelson revels in the experience of memorising her stepchild's physical features and growing into the role of caregiver for this child, expressing the pleasures of embodied care. De Marneffe asserts, "We may not recognize huge swaths of female erotic experience as such because they feel so diffuse. Motherhood is one such experience" (2004: 302). While the possibility for erotic pleasure may be more overt in the physical experiences of motherhood such as pregnancy, Nelson reminds us that maternal eroticism can take place beyond the physical body of the mother and child and in the *practice* of mothering and care. The erotic, as Lorde reminds us, 'is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing' (1976: 54). In these daily moments of 'doing,'—making a child food, playing silly games, laughing—maternal pleasure can be fully realised. By highlighting the erotic in the relationship between her and her stepson, Nelson opens the door for considerations of maternal eroticism between mothers and their adoptive or non-biological children.

Nelson's narration of her developing relationship with her stepson provides a valuable perspective in that it reveals that maternal relationships are neither immediate nor natural. She must 'learn about' her stepson's face, destabilising a popular cultural view that mothering is an innate and essential bond between woman and child. This learning is not only necessary for mothers of adopted or nonbiological children. Nelson suggests that she must go through a similar process of learning about her biological child's body as well. She finds erotic pleasure in this process, yet reveals her initial hesitation to fully embrace her sons infant body. She explains:

> I was so in awe of Iggy's fantastic little body that it took a few weeks for me to feel that I had the right to touch him all over. Before Iggy, it always startled me to see a parent stuffing a Kleenex in the face of an unsuspecting toddler, as if a kid were just an object whose physical autonomy could be violated any time some stray mucus appeared. I wanted to attend to Iggy, but I didn't want to *ambush* him. Also, the culture's worrying over pedophilia in all the wrong places at times made me feel unable to approach his genitals or anus with wonder and glee, until one day, I realized, he's my baby, I can—indeed I must!—handle him freely and ably. My baby! My butt! Now I delight in his little butt. I delight in pouring water over his head with a toy boat full of holes, wetting his blond curls, matted with butter from a plate he recently made into a hat. (Nelson, 2016: 42)

This hesitation illustrates the observation of the societal resistance to considering erotic pleasure and mothering alongside each other which de Marneffe (2004), Kinser (2008), and Oxenhandler (2001) elucidate in their work. Yet, Nelson's wonderful revelation of her physical maternal bond with Iggy and his 'little butt' ('I can—indeed I must!') allows her to overcome the stigma associated with mother-child touch. She later remarks on the physical pleasure of placing her face in the 'dark underspace' at the nape of Iggy's neck (Nelson, 2016: 45). It is 'dark and sweaty. His thin hair is damp, smells like candy and earth, I burrow my mouth into it and breathe. I don't ever want to make the mistake of needing him as much or more than he needs me' (Nelson, 2016: 45). This intensely physical moment, deeply breathing, inhaling smells, and feeling body heat evokes the inherent eroticism of motherhood. As Nelson continues, "There's no denying that sometimes, when we sleep together in the dark cavern of the bottom bunk (...) Iggy's small body holds mine" (2016: 45). The relationship between mother and child is not one-directional, but shared and continuous between both mother and child. Pleasure moves both ways, from mother to child and child to mother.

A common place to start considering the erotic relationship between mothers and children is the experience of mothers breastfeeding as the breast represents the intersection of socially fetishised female sexuality and maternal care and nourishment. In their study of female sexuality and breastfeeding through a feminist psychoanalytic lens, Susan Chase and Mary Rogers urge feminists to embrace various experiences of breastfeeding arguing that 'no mothers' experiences of breastfeeding [should] be written off as silly, perverse, or odd, especially when they involve erotic or sexual feelings' (2001:129). Nelson reflects on her experience of breastfeeding Iggy, writing:

> It is romantic, erotic, and consuming—but without tentacles. I have my baby, and my baby has me. It is a buoyant eros, an eros without teleology. Even if I do feel turned on while I'm breast-feeding or rocking him to sleep, I don't feel the need to do anything about it (and if I did, it wouldn't be with him). (2016: 44)

She acknowledges the physical pleasure of breastfeeding, even noting that it may 'turn her on.' But Nelson makes the important distinction that this feeling of pleasure while breast feeding is different than being aroused by a sexual partner. The erotic pleasure between Iggy and herself 'has no tentacles'. In other words, this pleasure is not attached nor does it attach Nelson to a sexual relationship. Through broadening the definition of pleasure and reinforcing the fact that pleasure is a complex experience that derives from many sources Nelson allows for a more thorough consideration of maternal pleasure and reveals its potential for empowerment and transformation.

The passages I have quoted up to this point characterise Nelson's experience of maternity paint a picture of blissful union, physical pleasure, and unbounded fulfilment. But it is important to note that Nelson underscores not only the pleasures of motherhood, but also feelings of pain, fear, and hopelessness that often derive from motherhood and mothering. Along with the time-consuming, physically difficult, and expensive IVF process which leaves Nelson time and again, 'frustrated, beyond hope' (2016: 78), Nelson's account of Iggy's birth emphasises the intense physical pain that often comes along with mothering. Nelson notes that before giving birth to Iggy, many people advised her, '*You don't do labor. Labor does you'* (2016: 134). She thinks, 'This sounded good—I like physical experiences that involve surrender' (2016: 134). But surrender seems far-off for Nelson during moments of Iggy's birth: when a 'pain luge' keeps 'going deeper' (2016: 128, 130), when a nurse inserts a stinging catheter into her, and when she begins vomiting 'tons of yellow bile' (2016: 129). However, while describing this world of pain Nelson also reflects on moments of extreme pleasure: "The doctor comes in, says he'd like to break the water (…) The waters are broken. It feels tremendously good. I am lying in a warm ocean" (2016: 132). Pain and pleasure do not, and Nelson suggests cannot, exist alone. It is through this mix of pain and pleasure that Nelson becomes a mother: "And then, suddenly, Iggy. Here he comes onto me, rising. He is perfect, he is right. I notice he has my mouth, he is my gentle friend. He is on me, screaming" (2016: 133). This staccato prose mimics the quickness of breath in this moment while maintaining a sense of ease and calm. Through the juxtaposition of these oppositions, ('gentle'/'screaming,' pain/pleasure), Nelson attempts to put into writing the often inexpressible experience, the pull-and-push, of mothering.

Beyond Nelson's juxtaposition of what seem like disparate sensations in specific blocks of text, Nelson complicates a linear idea of mothering by organising *The Argonauts* non-chronologically. It is not until the near-end of the text that Nelson includes the scenes in which she gives birth to Iggy and it is in the middle portion of the book in which Nelson writes about her pregnancy. In this way, Nelson destabilises a biological and patriarchal narrative of motherhood (conception, pregnancy, labour, infancy), and in doing so explores a non-linear development of the maternal self. De Marneffe suggests, "Motherhood calls for a transformed individuality, an integration of a new relationship and a new role into one's sense of self," and Nelson's memoir extends this contention, suggesting that motherhood requires a multitude of ongoing transformations (2004: 15). Nelson comments on the transformation of her physical relationship to Dodge after giving birth to Iggy. She explains:

> I had always presumed that giving birth would make me feel invincible and ample, like fisting. But even now—two years out—my insides feel more quivery than lush. I've begun to give myself over to the idea that the sensation might be forever changed, that this sensitivity is mine now, ours, to work with. Can fragility feel as hot as bravado? I think so, but sometimes struggle to find the way. Whenever I think I can't find it, Harry assures me that we can. And so we go on, our bodies finding each other again and again, even as they—we—have also been *right here*, all along. (Nelson, 2016: 86)

This passage serves as a stark contrast to the opening scene and the physical intensity and immediacy that marked the early days of Dodge and Nelson's partnership. The experience of child-birth, even two years out, has 'forever changed' Nelson's experience of sexual pleasure. Here, Nelson demonstrates how the erotic experience of motherhood as well as erotic experience of sexual intimacy collide.

In justifying her psychoanalytic approach to her study of maternal desire, de Marneffe writes, "[Psychoanalysis] helps us in understanding the desires women bring to mothering (...) It reveals to us that our desires, motives, and beliefs never have a single fixed meaning and that they are not always what they announce themselves to be" (2004:12). While *The Argonauts* points to the diversity of women's desires and erotic experiences, I argue that it does so *without* relying on psychoanalysis or other academic theories that ultimately erase the embodied experience of mothering. Scholars, critics, and theorists can surely inform the way women inhabit the world, but it is the intimacy between living, breathing humans through which desire is made visible. Referencing Eve Sedgwick, Nelson reminds readers, "One happy thing that can happen (…) is that pleasure becomes accretive as well as autotelic: the more it's felt and displayed, the more proliferative, the more possible, the more habitual it becomes" (2016:113). In the end, pleasure is as infinite as its sources. As Lorde explains, "There is a difference between painting a black fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love" (1976: 58). Reading *The Argonauts* as a matrifocal narrative through the lens of matricentric feminism reveals the possibility for physical and emotional empowerment that can be found in motherhood and mothering. She embraces 'erotic components

across relationships' through her love and care for her partner and children (Kinser, 2008:124). With this text, Nelson offers a rare example of a fully embodied mother and in doing so transgresses the boundaries of a patriarchal and neoliberal order which attempts to perpetuate an historical splintering of motherhood, pleasure, and desire.

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Glocalised Motherhood: Sociality and Affect in Migrant Mothers' Online Communities

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the importance of relationships between migrant mothers in Australia through the lens of Facebook groups created by and for migrant mothers, referred to here as glocalised maternal communities. The combination of migration and motherhood creates a dual rupture in mothers' social networks, leading to isolation and emotional challenges. Drawing on thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 41 mothers from a range of migrant communities (including Indian, Malaysian, Swedish, German, Brazilian and British), living in Melbourne and Sydney, I investigate why migrant mothers have responded to these challenges by creating and participating in locally-based, social media such as Facebook for mothers with a shared national or cultural identity. These communities provide resources and support for women's migrant maternal projects, for example relational settlement and cultural transmission, and also meet women's own needs for intimacy, friendship, and support. From an analysis of sociality, emotion, identity and relationality in these glocalised maternal communities, I develop a framework of multilayered and multimodal migrant maternal sociality, including a re-formulation of Haythornthwaite's concept of 'latent ties' (2005) to highlight the affective benefits of online communities.

Keywords: migration, motherhood, Facebook, sociality, social media, online communities

INTRODUCTION

New motherhood can be a lonely time, and new migrants often struggle to make friends. The combination of migration and motherhood creates multiple ruptures in migrant mothers' social networks, often leading to social isolation and the construction of new forms of belonging and community (Gilmartin and Migge, 2016; Manohar, 2013a, 2013b). This article explores how migrant mothers use online communities to build relationships and resources for themselves and each other. I argue that migrant motherhood presents specific challenges relating to emotions, identity and sociality, and that migrant mothers in Australia have responded by creating and participating in 'glocalised' online communities for migrant mothers.[1] They are 'glocalised' because their salience is rooted both in their new locality and a transnational maternal identity that links that new locality with a point of national, cultural or linguistic origin. These glocalised migrant maternal communities provide resources and support for women's migrant maternal projects, for example relational settlement and cultural transmission. These migrant maternal projects are forms of 'motherwork' (Collins, 1994) formulated in response to their migrant context. Maternal norms and practices are contextually specific and dynamic (Collins, 2000; Glenn et al., 1994) and may therefore change due to migration (Gedalof, 2009; Ho, 2006; Liamputtong, 2006; Manohar, 2013a; Manohar and Busse-Cárdenas, 2011). Migration may disrupt and reformulate maternal care practices (Erel, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997), facilitate maternal care (Ackers, 2004) or constitute a maternal care practice in itself (Westcott and Robertson, 2017).

To explore how and why migrant mothers use these online communities, this article draws on a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 41 mothers from a range of migrant communities (including Indian, Malaysian, Swedish, German, Brazilian and British), living in Melbourne and Sydney, who create and participate in

[1] 'Glocalisation' is a fusion of the words 'globalisation' and 'local', and highlights "the extent to which the global cannot be conceived of in opposition to or in isolation from the local, that both global and local are participants in contemporary social life" (Roudometof, 2016: 12).

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Facebook groups for migrant mothers in Australia.[2][3] It explores how the groups help women cope with negative emotions associated with migration and motherhood, such as failure, homesickness and guilt. Participating in and observing empathic discussions with other migrant mothers shifts these difficult emotions from barriers to belonging, to become the basis for meaningful connections with other migrant mothers. These connections in turn develop women's relational and affective settlement into their wider community and their role as migrant mothers.

BACKGROUND

In explaining the importance of women's community-building after migration, some feminist migration scholars have characterised it as 'a fundamentally gendered settlement activity' and 'an integral component of their care work' as migrant wives and mothers (Manohar, 2013b, drawing on Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Their implication is that this gendered labour is primarily for the benefit of partners and children. However, in line with the idea that mothers may sustain a 'selfhood outside of and beyond motherhood' (O'Reilly, 2016: 135), I suggest that migrant mothers' community-building is also designed to meet women's own needs for intimacy, friendship, and support (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018). The online groups are a means by which migrant mothers can rebuild their social infrastructure, facilitating casual social interactions and intimate friendships. Subsuming women's community-building practices entirely into a framework of familial care work risks losing sight of the 'horizontal caring' (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018) women do for themselves and each other. Similarly, explorations of migrant mothers' use of online technologies have focused on maintaining connections to children, husbands and parents from whom they have become separated by migration (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018; Madianou, 2012; Peng and Wong, 2013). In Australia, which has historically accepted family migration, most migrant mothers are co-located with their children and therefore this focus on 'mothering at a distance' (Madianou, 2012) is less relevant. Recent work by Francisco-Menchavez on the 'communities of care' developed by Filipina migrant domestic workers in New York City (2018), and by Rzepnikowska's on 'motherly conviviality' between Polish migrant mothers in Barcelona and Manchester (2019, forthcoming) have drawn attention to migrant mothers' relationships with each other, but have not thematised the role of online technologies in forging local relationships between mothers. For the mothers I interviewed, the internet, specifically social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp, are 'embedded, embodied and everyday' (Hine, 2015), and this article takes those sites as the starting point for an exploration of migrant maternal sociality and affect.

This article centres around concepts of sociality, emotion, identity and relationality, which are brought together in the concept of 'glocalised motherhood.' The term 'sociality' is deployed in a broad sense, encompassing interactions between people at various levels of intimacy, from casual acquaintanceship to intimate friendship, all of which are understood as having an affective impact. Friendship is defined more narrowly as a voluntaristic relationship characterised by personal affection, emotional intimacy, self-disclosure and trust, usually between two people or a small group of people (Wilkinson, 2019). Difficulties forming friendships constituted a prominent theme in participants' narratives yet is only scantily addressed in migration scholarship (Westcott and Vazquez Maggio, 2016). Although there is a significant body of work in friendship studies, little attention is paid there to the specific conditions of migration (Allan, 1998; Spencer and Pahl, 2018; Wilkinson, 2019). Mothers' friendship difficulties have also received relatively little sociological attention (Cronin, 2015), despite appearing frequently in blogs and lifestyle articles (Hartley, 2015; Petersen, 2018) and driving the development of mothers' friendship apps like Mush and Peanut (Prevett, 2018).

Friendship is one element of an individual's social infrastructure or 'social moorings' (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998: 172), which consists of 'affective building blocks' (Hage, 1997). Those 'building blocks' can be spatial or relational, proximate or distant, online or in-person, tangible or imagined. This social infrastructure is central to a person's sense of belonging and is usually a key source of support (for example information and empathy). It is dynamic and therefore can be disrupted, reconfigured and rebuilt. Diminescu uses the term 'relational settlement' in the context of online diasporic networks to refer to the facilitation of migrant mobility by relationships 'both remote and immediate' (2008: 570-572). Building on this original definition, I use 'relational settlement' to suggest that migrant settlement is also an affective experience, where feelings of belonging are facilitated by relationships built in a new place. The act of rebuilding their social infrastructure after migration is a means by which migrants 'settle into' a new place and build a sense of home and belonging. Community is, as Hage suggests, one of the 'affective building blocks' of migrant home-building (1997). 'Relational settlement' may also be relevant to non-migrant mothers who must reconfigure their social infrastructure and build new relationships to help them to 'settle into'

[2]Although generic migrant mothers' Facebook groups exist, with members from various countries, this research focuses on groups intended for mothers from a single national, ethnic, regional or linguistic origin, such as groups for Indian mothers in Sydney or Scandinavian mothers in Melbourne.

[3] Approved by the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (Project 2015/724).

their new maternal role (Bartholomew et al., 2012). Even in these digitally connected times, and despite the well-established concept of the 'connected migrant' who maintains ties with their social networks at home while being geographically mobile (Diminescu, 2008; Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2018), migration continues to disrupt migrants' social infrastructures. Studies focusing on the challenges of migrant motherhood often call for increased social support as a means to address them, but rarely analyse how that social support might be constructed (Benza and Liamputtong, 2014).

This article applies an emotional lens to migration and motherhood, drawing on recent scholarship focusing on migration as an emotional experience, which is a useful counterbalance to the 'dominance of economic and political analyses of migration' (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015). Research in this field tends to draw on scholarship that views emotions as embodied, social, and relational (Ahmed, 2004; Burkitt, 2014), a framework also applied in this article. This article looks at how emotions operate in a multimodal maternal community, exploring how mothers draw emotional sustenance from both online and in-person interactions facilitated by the groups. In enabling multilayered and multimodal social interactions and affective exchanges, the groups act as social and emotional safety nets.

Concepts of identity are important for explaining why migrant mothers seek support in these particular groups. Identity is viewed as relational and intersectional (Collins and Bilge, 2016), formed and enacted in relation to 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983/2006). The women recognise each other as people who share experiences of migration, motherhood and childhood, share narratives of what it means to be a mother with a particular national or cultural identity living away from 'home', and share maternal projects rooted in those narratives and experiences. As these descriptions suggest, relationality is a key lens through which migrant mothers' experiences are understood; their identities, experiences, emotions and plans are deeply affected by their connections with their family, national and ethnic communities, local communities and other mothers. These relations are central to the way migrant mothers understand themselves and their experiences. Women draw on these relationships and shared narratives to create the support mechanisms they need to navigate the challenges of migrant motherhood. Furthermore, in centring their identities as migrant mothers, they can position themselves within an imagined migrant maternal community, of which the online group is a manifestation. This article draws on Kanno and Norton's reworking of Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983/2006; Kanno and Norton, 2003). While Anderson used the term to describe a sense of belonging in nation-states that transcends tangible and immediate personal connections, Kanno and Norton link the concept of imagined communities to identity construction, suggesting that an individual's investment in an imagined community can drive choices and (re)frame experiences (2003: 248).

These concepts of sociality, affect, identity and relationality are brought together in the concept of 'glocalised motherhood'. Drawing on shared nodes of identity – motherhood, origin, current locality, language, culture – they manifest the relationships between each other into glocalised maternal communities, which are given a visible identity as online groups. Driven by the specific emotional challenges of migrant motherhood, these groups facilitate 'horizontal caring' (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018) between mothers and support migrant women's 'maternal goals' (Keller, 2010). Through an analysis of the ways in which migrant mothers make use of online affordances to obtain emotional sustenance online and facilitate in-person social relations, this article will outline a tripartite framework of migrant maternal sociality. The framework encompasses online and offline interactions and clarifies the significance of different modes of sociality produced by interactions in and around these glocalised maternal communities, including casual sociality, heartfelt friendship and 'latent ties' (Haythornthwaite, 2002).

This article follows women's social relations as they move between online and offline interactions, and it is important to note how integral online technologies have become to many people's experiences of motherhood (Arnold and Martin, 2016; S. Johnson, 2015; Lupton et al., 2016) and migration (Diminescu, 2008; Francisco-Menchavez, 2018; Komito, 2011). Studies of mothers' online practices suggest that a desire for knowledge and support from other mothers is a key driver of mothers' use of online maternal networks (Madge and O'Connor, 2006; Price et al., 2018). Although much has been made of mothers' fear of judgement from other mothers (Moore and Abetz, 2016), studies of mothers' online and offline information-seeking suggest that mothers prefer to seek information from other mothers with whom they have an 'experiential overlap' (Davis, 2015: 168). Experiential maternal knowledge is seen as trustworthy and relevant (Davis, 2015; Loudon et al., 2016). Scholars disagree about whether online communication is 'conducive to sociality' (Chambers, 2013: 16) or offers 'the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship' (Turkle, 2011: 1). Feminist scholars of motherhood online tend to agree that online networks offer the potential for challenging normative ideals of good motherhood, but as products of those same socially-constructed norms, they also reflect, reinforce and intensify normative gender relations and norms of motherhood (Mackenzie, 2017; Madge and O'Connor, 2006).

RESEARCHING MIGRANT MOTHERS ONLINE

This research on migrant mothers and online communities presents a feminist, qualitative, sociological study involving semi-structured interviews with 41 migrant mothers in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia. Women from ten countries[4] across three continents were interviewed between February 2016 and January 2017. All were members of Facebook groups for migrant mothers in Australia, such as groups for Indian mothers living in Sydney, or Brazilian mothers in Melbourne. All Facebook groups in the study were based around a defined migrant identity, either national (e.g. British), regional (e.g. Scandinavian), or linguistic (e.g. Spanish-speaking). Although the study approached the groups as online phenomena, they are examples of an 'embedded, embodied and everyday' internet (Hine, 2015). All groups facilitated offline encounters as well as online interactions, although not all participants availed themselves of these opportunities. Participants were aged between 30 and 49, mostly married (to men), and had been in Australia between six months and 28 years. Of the 41 participants, 27 had become mothers for the first time in Australia; the others had arrived as migrants with at least one child.

All participants had stable and documented migrant status. Most held Australian citizenship or permanent residency. The few who were on temporary skilled working visas[5] expected to become eligible for permanent residence in the near future. The participants were drawn from populations with diverse relationships to Australia's migratory history. For example, while migrants from Britain and Ireland have had a significant presence in Australia since its colonisation, and remain the largest group of overseas-born people, migrants from India and Malaysia arrived in large numbers only after the end of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s (Jupp, 2007).[6] The Indian-born population has almost tripled since 2006, now numbering around 455,388 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017a). Brazil represents a relatively small source of migrants to Australia, but sits alongside India, Pakistan and Nepal as one of the fastest-growing migrant populations in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). In 2017, Australian Census figures made headline news, with media outlets reporting that "nearly half" of people in Australia are born overseas or have at least one parent born abroad, and that the overseas-born population is now predominantly Asian-born rather than European-born (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Hunt, 2017).

While the Facebook groups are open to mothers of all social class backgrounds, the research participants were all broadly middle-class. In line with recent migration scholarship, I define the participants as 'middling migrants' (Luthra and Platt, 2016; Robertson and Runganaikaloo, 2014), that is, their migration was driven neither by economic necessity or escaping harm, nor by elite global careers. A third cited their relationship with their partner as a primary motivation,[7] and a further third cited their partner's work opportunities as their main reason for moving. Other common motivations included lifestyle, desire for travel and new experiences. Three women cited work opportunities for both themselves and their partner, and two had moved mainly for their own work. Broadening the definition of 'middling migrant' beyond the dominant labour market and migration motivation frameworks, the research also took into account factors such as their ease of access to mobile and internet-enabled computing devices, their ability to travel and make extended visits home, orientation to paid domestic work[8], and access to transnational knowledge networks.[9] [10]

Taking migrant mothers' Facebook groups as a starting point for this research facilitates an emphasis on connections between mothers. It also establishes a temporally open approach to migration and motherhood: because the groups are used by mothers of both infants and teenagers, and by recently arrived and longer-settled migrants, drawing participants from the groups broadens the scope of the study beyond the common research focus on migrant women's experiences of pregnancy, birth and early motherhood (Hennegan et al., 2014; Joseph et al., 2018; Pangas et al., 2019). While making for a complex sample, this diversity brings together the experiences of women often analysed separately, or not at all, offering the opportunity for new insights, connections and contrasts.

[4] India (9), Germany (9), United Kingdom (8), Sweden (4), Malaysia (3), Ireland (3), Brazil (2), Iran (1), Colombia (1) and Singapore (1).

[5] Migrants on temporary skilled working visas in Australia are usually allowed to migrate with their partner and children, with the right to work, study and travel (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2018).

[6] The term 'White Australia Policy' refers to a collection of policies operating between the 1880s and 1973, which effectively blocked immigration to Australia by people outside north-western Europe. The policy was racially exclusive in intent, based on theories of racial superiority, and aimed to embed an Australian national identity based around whiteness and Britishness. The migration-related elements of the White Australia Policy sat alongside the genocidal and assimilationist policies towards the Indigenous populations (Jupp, 1995: 207-8). The White Australia migration policy was officially ended in 1973, when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam declared Australia to be a multicultural society (p. 222).

[7] Including: marriage, settling with partner, love, and partner's desire to return to Australia.

[8] Participants were more likely to see themselves as employers of paid domestic staff than as domestic workers.

[9] For example, family and friends with medical knowledge, which they were able to draw on to supplement advice from local health professionals.

[10] Seen through this relationally-defined 'middling migrant' categorisation, the women in the research study presented an interesting contrast to the migrant domestic workers in Francisco-Menchavez's study (2018), whose migrant status, position in the labour market and ability to travel are much more precarious.

In this research, all participants, including me as researcher, shared experiences of migration and motherhood. Most participants were, as I am, middle-class, tertiary-educated, married to men, and had migrated to Australia for multifactorial reasons including work, study, love and lifestyle. We were all 'fluent in Facebook' and English, with easy access to digital technology. In other areas, however, there was less common ground. Ethnicity, nationality, length of time since migration, children's ages, mother tongue, and current place of residence, were among the points of difference which affected our experiences of, and perspectives on, the research topics. This meant that a straightforward understanding of myself as either 'insider' or 'outsider' was impossible to maintain (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Shared social locations may be consciously deployed by researchers to negotiate access or build rapport (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012) and this deployment may be challenged by participants or 'strategically rescinded' by the researcher during the research process (Manohar, 2013c).

Interviews were chosen over content analysis or participant observation, both commonly used online research. This decision was both ethically and methodologically motivated. Drawing on Nissenbaum's concept of 'contextual integrity', which states that decisions relating to privacy online should take into account 'entrenched informational norms' specific to a particular context and 'general ethical and political principles as well as context-specific purposes and values' (2011: 38), I determined that the groups' norms and structures indicated a reasonable expectation that members' posted content would be observed only by group members. Preliminary research also suggested the groups might be used by isolated and vulnerable people, and that a researcher's presence may inhibit support-seeking or be negatively perceived by members (A. Johnson et al., 2018). Moreover, talking to migrant mothers about their online and offline experiences, and the meanings they ascribe to them, was central to the purpose of this research. Interviews revealed insights into the participants' online behaviour that could not have been gained through observation or content analysis. Focusing only on visible content privileges the perspective of the writer, over that of those who read it (Sun et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2017). Interviews have limitations too. Memories do not always tally with the evidence of the site and participants may impute motivations to other members which may not be reliable. Nevertheless, qualitative interviews focusing on women's experiential interpretations aligned well with the project's research objectives.

MIGRANT MATERNAL ISOLATION, HOMESICKNESS, GUILT AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

To explain why migrant mothers choose to seek support in glocalised maternal communities, this analysis draws together extant literature and new data to discuss the specific emotional challenges faced by migrant mothers. Experiences of isolation, homesickness, guilt and the emotions associated with attempting to pass on elements of culture and language to their children are closely interconnected. The close association of motherhood with loneliness and isolation is well established (Lee et al., 2017; Rogan et al., 1997). Investigations of maternal mental health recommend increasing mothers' social support to reduce isolation, increase practical support and thereby improve mental health (Hetherington et al., 2018; Leahy‐Warren et al., 2012). Studies suggest that when migration intersects with motherhood, isolation and loneliness may be exacerbated. A 2014 meta-synthesis of fifteen qualitative studies relating to migrant mothers' experiences found that 'feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression from lack of support' were common (Benza and Liamputtong, 2014: 582). A 2011 literature review of studies on postnatal depression (PND) in migrant mothers in developed country settings found 'immigrant women are at particular risk of PND in their host country compared with women in the general population' with lack of social support cited as a key risk factor (Collins et al., 2011). The mechanism chosen by women in this study to fill this gap in social support – the creation of and participation in specifically migrant *and* maternal groups – highlights the salience of this particular combination of experiences and identities.

Online mothering communities have the potential to combat maternal isolation, and provide semi-public spaces in which women can interact even as they remain physically located in the private space of the home. Participating in locally-based groups increases the likelihood of frequent and repeated interactions with the same people, rather than relying only on physical encounters in local streets, shops, and playgrounds. For new migrants with few local attachments, those connections can provide a pathway out of isolation. Unlike many face-to-face mothers' groups, in which mothers meet during the day, online groups do not exclude mothers in full-time employment as they are accessible outside work hours, or during work hours using a smartphone, for example.

For women in this study, experiences of isolation were produced by differing intersections of elements including motherhood, migration and work. Women who migrated for their partner's work often found themselves experiencing an extended period as a 'stay at home mother' in a new country. Simran and Sunita,[11] both recent migrants from India, had left professional careers to have their first baby; soon after, they moved to Sydney for their partner's work. In India, as middle-class professionals, they would have expected to return to work after a

[11] Participant names in this article are pseudonyms.

few months, supported by family and paid domestic workers. Simran found the transition to sole responsibility for all domestic tasks and childcare exhausting. Before she found the Indian mothers' group, she felt lonely, spending all day alone with her toddler. An Indian mother she encountered in the local shopping centre told her about the Facebook group and also a local WhatsApp group for Indian mothers in her area. Simran joined both groups, using them to chat and find answers to questions. She has met up with mothers from the groups, with and without their children. What she likes most about the groups is "feeling connected to people, lot of information flow (…) you feel like you're not alone, there are more people who are facing the same challenges as you are…". Simran and Sunita both keenly anticipated a time when they would be able to return to work.

For the mothers, the simultaneous loss of working identities and networks centred around work, place, friends and family, created a strong sense of isolation, of having been 'cut adrift from the social moorings secured by affective ties of family and friends, as well as community and place' (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998: 172). Lisa, a white British migrant, arrived in Sydney pregnant with her first child. Her experience encapsulates the double-edged effect of motherhood as both disruptive and connective:

> With regards to an identity when I was coming over, I didn't feel as though I was the work person I was when I left, and then I was also pregnant, and I didn't really know how to handle that because it was the first time I'd been pregnant. And then I didn't have any friends here, so I didn't know how to handle that either! So it was weird. The first few months were really quite quiet, lonely, being pregnant, not wanting to do anything. (…) It wasn't really until I started my antenatal classes and going to meetings regarding the pregnancy that I started meeting people. So then I became that mum figure. I kind of fit into something then.

For Lisa, the combination of migration and emergent motherhood entailed a loss of her worker identity, and the removal of the workplace as a potential springboard for new social relationships. As the pregnancy progressed, motherhood provided her with a new source of social relations, focused around her new maternal identity. A secondary rupture in her maternal networks occurred when many of her new friends returned to work, making them unavailable as daytime companions. Lisa was unable to return to work, due to the cost of childcare[12] and lack of family support. Seeking new friends, Lisa joined the UK and Irish mothers' Facebook group.

Where women have become mothers after migration, motherhood has often disrupted the social networks they had begun, with difficulty, to establish. Women found their post-migration employment-centred social networks insufficient once they stepped outside the workplace as new mothers. Without a dense social infrastructure to fall back on, women found they knew nobody who could share their new concerns or the new child-centred rhythms of daily life. Young children's sleeping and eating routines limited women's ability to leave their home at certain times, meaning they often missed social events. As Tanja recalled, "you have a baby and all of a sudden you're not that mobile any more, or you have to stick to sleeping times." Some women found that differences in parenting styles, layered on top of broader differences in conversational and social norms, inhibited their ability or desire to make or maintain friendships with Australian mothers. Stefanie described "falling out" with her best friend, who was Australian, because of the differences in their parenting practices. In the German mothers' online group, she found women whose child-raising approaches chimed with hers, and had recently come to rely almost entirely on her circle of fellow German mothers for support on child-related issues.

Some women contrasted their isolation with the social support they imagined they would have had in their home country, particularly those who had witnessed more communal modes of motherhood, for example in India and South America. Even women from countries with similarly individualised and intensive modes of mothering to those encountered in Australia, imagined an alternative context with childcare and friendships on tap. For example, Lisa, Siobhan, and Gemma cited siblings 'back home' in the UK and Ireland who benefited from free childcare from their mothers, enabling full-time employment, socialising, and respite. Siobhan described how her mother in Ireland looked after her other grandchildren until they went to school, with her mother's house acting as a hub for the whole family. Her husband's family, and her dense network of friends stretching back to childhood, also live nearby. Her vision presents a stark contrast with the long days she now spends alone with her baby while her husband works long hours, six or seven days a week. She longs for someone to bring her a cup of tea or hold the baby for a moment. Even though she has never met up with anyone from the Facebook group, she finds it reassuring to know that she could. Observing online conversations reassures her that she is "not the only person feeling that way," that is, lonely and homesick.

Participants' sense of isolation was exacerbated by the sense that those around them (their husband, his family, and non-migrant friends) did not understand the emotional challenges they faced as migrant mothers. Finding others who shared their experiences empowered them to recognise the structural or contextual factors contributing to their troubles, which relieved their sense of personal failure. Winnie, who migrated from Malaysia to Australia

[12] Eligibility for government childcare subsidies in Australia excludes most temporary visa holders.

to marry an Anglo-Australian man, struggled for years to find friends. Her isolation was exacerbated by the lack of empathy in her partner relationship. Her husband, she reported, urged her to "try harder" to make friends, failing to understand the cultural and linguistic barriers, and racism, that Winnie encountered. When they moved from Queensland to Melbourne, Winnie joined the group for Malaysian mothers hoping to find "some quality friends that we can exchange heart." Winnie expressed a deep sense of relief on realising that other mothers in the group also found it difficult to make friends in Australia:

> Feel great, I feel [inhales] oh my goodness! After all these years, I finally feel that I find some friends. I'm not alone, and I'm not the one who has mental issues because I see everyone (…) has a common issue, in the sense of making friends in Australia.

Even women with migrant spouses who understood some of the issues were relieved to find a community of people who experienced similar challenges. Grainne explained that "it's like you're reassuring yourself that it's OK to feel this way; other people do." Katrin asked her German mothers' group about homesickness: "Is this normal? Will it ever go away?" The responses she received reassured her that it was a common experience and not a personal failure to adjust. Women who had become mothers after migration reported that motherhood had exacerbated their sense of homesickness. Gemma felt her Australian friends, while close, didn't understand her: "they're very close to us but I just feel sometimes that they don't fully understand our situation. Or how I feel sometimes." She compared them to the British and Irish mothers in her online group: "there's this supportive network of people who just understand, which is nice."

Women did not need to participate in such discussions to gain emotional sustenance from them. Some declared themselves "too private" (Siobhan) or too "internal" (Lisa) to initiate online discussions but derived a sense of relief or solidarity from witnessing others' posts. Women understood the importance of responding, even just clicking 'like' on a comment, "just to show I understand, I hear you" (Siobhan). Merely observing these exchanges, in some cases simply knowing the group existed, produced a sense of solidarity, belonging and relief. "It is comforting to know that there are so many mums living in Sydney from where I'm from," Rebecca explained. Priya noted that, as a migrant, it was "comforting to know that you've got people around you." Women described their group as a "comfort cushion", a "safety net", and "a bit of security." The participants' words resonate with the literature around homesickness, which indicates that that "social support acts as a buffer against the negative effects of homesickness" (Scharp et al., 2016: 1192).

As well as providing emotional support for challenges common to many migrants, such as homesickness, the groups also helped migrant mothers manage challenges specific to their status as migrant mothers. Issues around migrant guilt and cultural transmission were experienced as gendered and linked explicitly to their position as migrant mothers. Women's migration-related guilt centred around a sense that they were depriving their children of extended family relationships, depriving their parents of close relationships with their grandchildren, were unable to carry out family responsibilities such as providing care for sick or elderly relatives, or had failed to spend enough time with relatives before they died. Kavita described herself as "completely wracked with guilt" during her first six years in Australia, guilt which intensified once she had a child. Women also expressed pre-emptive guilt about family emergencies or bereavements yet to occur. Grainne's mother-in-law in Ireland had had cancer the previous year and they had chosen not to return home but she stated that "if anything like that happened again, we probably would just go." Although Grainne's language implied that her husband shared her guilt and worry, a few minutes later she differentiated their responses: "I think if it was *my* mum, I'd have gone." Kavita made a similar distinction:

> If it had been me, and if it had been my parents, once I found out that there was a malignancy in the biopsy, I probably would have just dropped everything and gone straight home. But boys are quite different.

Although Wilding (2006) has suggested that online technologies have overcome some of the gender divide in transnational family matters, because men's increasing involvement via email relieves some of the 'kinwork' traditionally done by women (p. 135), research suggests that female migrants still feel more responsibility for transnational caregiving, particularly in-person or emotional care, and that migration-related guilt may be gendered (Baldassar, 2015; De Silva, 2017; Vermot, 2015). Migrant women's guilt, Baldassar suggests, is 'a ubiquitous and ever-present feeling of not having adequately met kinship obligations to care' (p. 87). In my research, mothers felt responsible for maintaining intergenerational relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren, facilitating frequent video calls, sharing photographs and making visits 'home'. These forms of kinship contact could not assuage their guilt at having disrupted those intergenerational relationships by migrating. Migrant mothers found little empathy from their spouses who, in most cases, did not experience the same intensity of guilt and often refused to participate in this digital 'second shift of affective and domestic labour' (Ouellette and Wilson,

2011: 559). Archana's husband, for example, refused to join the WhatsApp groups she had created to communicate with their families: "he's someone who doesn't want to be in all that." In response to this gendered imbalance in the affective labour and emotional load linked to their role as migrant mothers (and daughters), they sought empathy from women in the same position.

For non-Anglophone or multilingual mothers, a desire to teach their children their heritage language was often a key motivation for joining the group, particularly those who faced incomprehension, indifference, or judgement from their Anglophone partner and his family. Women expressed a duty to pass on their language, similar to Manohar's concept of 'mothering for ethnicity' (2013a), whereby migrant mothers take on responsibility for ensuring their children grow up with a cultural identity that reflects their migrant background, as well as the key skills and knowledge that underpin such an identity. Mothers cited practical justifications for teaching their children their heritage language, such as communicating with family members, or increasing access to jobs and education. Similarly to the Australian-based Spanish-speaking mothers in Mejía's 2015 study, these mothers expressed a sense that their language 'is the most valuable thing that they can pass on to their children' (p. 32). In an Australian context in which there is little institutional support for maintaining heritage languages, where they are seen more as a hindrance to migrant assimilation than an important cultural skill (Eisenchlas et al., 2013), responsibility for linguistic transmission falls wholly on migrant parents and communities.

Failure to pass on their language had an emotional impact that was difficult for those who were not migrant mothers to understand. For example, while Sabina noted that fluency in Swedish might facilitate her son's access to free tertiary education in Sweden, her main motivation was emotional, or identity-based. Sabina recalled her Anglophone husband's assessment of Swedish as "an insignificant language compared to Spanish,"[13] to which Sabina declared, "you can't really say that about a language." Explaining the centrality of language to her identity, she said, "when I'm old and senile and have forgotten everything else, I'll speak Swedish." Teaching her son Swedish would give him a useful skill, which only she can provide, and it would establish a link between him and this core part of her identity. Many women expressed a strong desire to maintain a continuity between their own experiences and their children's experiences, and sharing a language was one element of this. The mothers' ambitions of raising bilingual children related to their aspiration to build a transnational identity (Utomo, 2014: 176) which would link them to their children through a shared language. Failure to transmit their language appeared to create a sense of rupture in their maternal narrative, eliciting feelings of sadness and loss.

The groups gave mothers access to advice on raising bilingual children, language-based playgroups set up by mothers in the group, and opportunities to maintain their own language proficiency. They provided solidarity and support for women encountering resistance or indifference towards this maternal project. Some described resistance from their children. "When I speak to [my son]," Katrin explained, "he's like 'nah, Mum, nah, I want to hear English, I don't want to hear German.'" Faced with their children's resistance, women pursued social relations with speakers of their first language to maintain the possibility of language transmission. As Eva stated hopefully, "we see Swedes every week, and at least it's there all the time." Some women's parents became "angry" (Annika) or "upset" (Katrin) at their grandchildren's refusal to speak their language of origin. This compounded women's feelings of guilt and failure. When Petra's son was excluded from the German playgroup, it felt like a personal failure, which her husband struggled to comprehend:

> Probably an Australian couldn't – like my husband struggles to [understand] why it was so important to me (…) He's like, come on, he will learn German anyway. (…) I felt, I tried to do this bilingual thing, and I kind of felt I'd failed or something. It was a sore spot.

In contrast to her husband's response, the German mothers' group understood the importance of language transmission to Petra and provided the emotional support she needed. Finding other migrant mothers committed to raising bilingual children in the face of Australia's 'persistent monolingual mindset' (Clyne, 2005: xi) validated their decision, and their identity as mothers with overseas heritage in Australia and supported their maternal linguistic project.

Establishing friendships is not a difficulty unique to migrant mothers, and in fact motherhood can, as discussed above, provide potential sources of new friendships. Nevertheless, the combination of these difficulties with the specific challenges faced by migrant mothers, such as time away from workplace sociality, the all-encompassing demands of young children, and their increased and unmet need for social support to help them establish and raise their families, exacerbated mothers' loneliness. In addition, the migrant mothers faced challenges around language transmission and the affective labour and emotional load that were specific to their position as migrant mothers. The online groups provided a source of support they were unable to find elsewhere. More broadly, the online groups make visible the existence of other people with whom they share important nodes of identity, past experiences, present challenges and future aspirations. The groups act as a material form of community, a means

[13] Born in Latin America and raised in Sweden, Sabina speaks fluent Spanish, Swedish and English.

by which they become visible to each other, can interact with each other and form relationships. In addition, the groups function metonymically, standing in for a wider imagined community who share their identity of origin, motherhood and migration. The existence of the group confirms that other mothers 'like them' exist, even if they are not all members of the specific online group.

MAPPING MULTIMODAL AND MULTILAYERED MIGRANT MATERNAL SOCIALITY

Based on the above analysis of the ways in which migrant mothers make use of online affordances, to obtain emotional sustenance from online interactions and to facilitate in-person social relations, this article proffers a tripartite framework of migrant maternal sociality that is multimodal and multilayered. In the interviews, women expressed the affective value of social interactions with other migrant mothers. That migrant maternal sociality can be differentiated into three levels of intimacy, all of which provide support, reassurance, companionship, and belonging. Firstly, women talked about casual contacts and interactions that functioned as entertainment. Secondly, they spoke about people who were neither family nor friends, but on whom they could rely for emotional and practical support. Finally, women spoke about the intimate friendships they had developed, or hoped to develop, from the group. In terms of modality, casual and intermediate interactions could take place online, offline or both, while intimate friendships were distinguished by increasing amounts of time spent together in person. Each mode of sociality contributes to an increased and multilayered sense of belonging: to a local community, an online community, and a transnational 'imagined community' of mothers drawing on common experiences and imaginaries of nationality, migration and motherhood. Distinguishing between these levels of sociality facilitates a nuanced analysis of the types of social relations and structures that have been disrupted by migration and motherhood, and of the different ways migrant mothers utilise the affordances of the Facebook groups to rebuild their social infrastructure.

Casual sociality could be dismissed as superficial yet the women spoke about it as a meaningful element in their social infrastructure. Migrant mothers felt isolated not only because they lacked intimate friends, but also because they lacked casual connections with whom they could gossip, exercise, go to the cinema, or whose quotidian dramas they could observe. New mothers missed being part of the sociality of the workplace, and wanted companionship during daylight hours when their friends were at work. While some women valued the ease of communication and common understanding that came from social interactions with people with a shared cultural identity or common language, for others that shared identity was simply a means by which they gained access to a potential social life. As Celine explained,

> It's just nice to know that you've got an invitation somewhere. So it's not that they are British, it's the fact that I've got an invitation and I happen to have got the invitation because I'm British.

Mothers felt their social lives had been severely curtailed by their child-raising responsibilities and lack of babysitters, so an invitation to a mothers-only gathering presented a rare opportunity to socialise without their children or partner. Even women who did not attend such events felt reassured that they could, if they wanted to, and enjoyed observing the plans forming in the online discussions.

Migrant mothers' groups present opportunities for light-hearted, playful chat, in online discussions and offline meet-ups. Although not necessarily intended to lead to deeper friendships, this chat was a significant form of culturally-inflected, everyday connection. Priya described the enjoyment of participating in online "chat or banter" with other Indian mothers, such as discussing plans for Valentine's Day, which she describes as "massive in India, even though it's not our festival." Her fellow administrator in the Indian mothers' group, Nisha, emphasised the importance of casual chat for encouraging women to participate in the group and thereby gain the confidence to ask for support on more serious topics. Susie recalled the "banter" from the offline British mothers' meet-up, discussing fashion, British clothes shops, and sourcing "real English chocolate" in Australia. Shared backgrounds make such banter possible. In turn, banter provides a familiar connection to home and culture that lends it more affective weight. As Francisco-Menchavez observes in her study of a Filipina migrants' community in New York, 'teasing, banter and laughter are just as important as the struggles' for producing what Manalansan calls 'diasporic intimacy' (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018: 115; Manalansan, 2005: 148). Even at this casual level, the groups are 'far more than a constellation of contacts and exchanges in social capital or a swapping of resources' (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018: 99).

At the other end of the spectrum of intimacy, the groups offered the possibility of close friendships, which many women had struggled to form since migrating to Australia or becoming mothers. When discussing whether people from the group had become 'friends', women usually mentioned meeting offline. "We're meeting up for coffee tomorrow" (Sherry); "We've done quite a few dinners and nights outs" (Eva). They also mentioned sharing important events such as children's birthdays, exchanging favours such as passing on children's clothes or cooking

meals for each other when their husbands were away, or celebrating festivals together. Kavita imagined the future of a friendship from the group, as it might move up the scale of intimacy:

> We've done a few things, we've been to each other's kids' birthdays, our blokes have met, we'll probably do more things together. You know, you just kind of get to that stage where you know, as your network or your foundation, relationship develops, you get more overlap, and then it just becomes really natural, doesn't it, after a while?

These examples make visible the developmental nature of maternal friendships, as they move from online interactions to in-person exchanges, drawing their children and husbands along with them. Kavita's friendship with the other migrant mother helps to build their social infrastructure by drawing their families closer together. Participants were conscious of the work involved in moving friendships along a scale of intimacy. Becoming 'Facebook friends' was also cited as a step on the pathway towards 'real' friendship. As a performative act, becoming 'Facebook friends' can be a ritualised public display of a personal connection, involving rapid and intense self-disclosure (Chambers, 2013: 166; Lambert, 2013). By contrast, members of the same group can interact for months or years, while retaining close control over personal disclosures. As research suggests people interpret self-disclosure online as representative of intimacy (Jiang et al., 2013), this move to Facebook friendship can be characterised as an escalation of intimacy.

Between the casual interactions and close friendships lies a thick level of intermediate relationships developed through the groups. Much of the significance of those intermediate relationships lies in the latent ties which underpin them. A latent tie, in this context, is a potential relationship of obligation, support, or empathy, derived from mutual membership of a group. It can be activated by a request for information or help but, before that request, has only a latent value. Haythornthwaite has established the concept of latent ties as connections which are 'technically possible but not yet activated socially' (2005: 137), for example potential connections created by a departmental email list. The shared visibility of online interactions in the Facebook groups creates awareness of those latent ties, and what those ties might offer, providing a significant source of comfort for the groups' members. That comfort builds a sense of security through interdependence. Gemma described it as "instant (…) support from people who you don't know." Immediacy is particularly important to migrants who have not had the opportunity to build trusting relationships. The support could be activated at any time, as Petra explained:

> You don't have to be, like, deeply connected at all times, but when there's someone needs, there's a connection. You know, someone needs us now.

By developing these mechanisms to produce 'security through interdependence', migrant mothers create a counterbalance to norms of intensive and individualised motherhood, an emotionally absorbing and labour-intensive mode of parenting for which mothers bear primary responsibility (Hays, 1996; Henderson et al., 2016). This maternal responsibility can feel even more intense in the context of migrant isolation. Members of one Indian mothers' Facebook group helped a newly separated mother find culturally appropriate accommodation. Another group delivered meals to a struggling mother who had contacted the administrator for help. Brazilian mothers helped find employment for members' husbands who had lost the jobs on which their family's visa depended. Locked out of her apartment with her two young children, Priya posted on the group and received instant offers of help. Drawing on their membership of the group, in turn based on mutual recognition of each other as mothers and migrants from similar geographical or cultural locations, women felt able to seek help from each other. Women observed as their fellow mothers offered and received tangible support in times of need, and felt comforted, even if they did not participate any further:

> It's just a virtual connection for me at the moment because I've not been to any meetings but I do want to. It feels like you've got a little fall-back, in a way, you have got that safety net, you know, if you are having a particularly hard time, you've got a safety net you can go to. (Gemma)

A shared identity as migrant mothers from a particular background intersects with the "mediated intimacy" (Chambers, 2013) of online sociality to create a glocalised maternal safety net consisting of latent, intermediate ties. In Sabina's words, "It's like a fire extinguisher – you might never use it, but you have it there. So you're happy it's there, right?"

CONCLUSION

Migrant mothers, at the intersection of maternal isolation and migrant loneliness, use glocalised online maternal communities to rebuild their multiply disrupted social infrastructure. This reconstructed infrastructure

encompasses casual, intermediate, and emotionally intimate forms of sociality. Each of these contributes to an increased and multilayered sense of belonging: to a local community, an online community, and a transnational 'imagined community' of mothers drawing on common experiences and imaginaries of nationality, migration and motherhood. These senses of belonging draw on attachments that are place-based, identity-based, experiential, and relational. Through these varying levels of social intimacy, migrant mothers gain companionship, reassurance, comfort, and belonging. In contrast to claims of a crisis of intimacy resulting from a reliance on technology and social media for social interactions (Turkle, 2011), analysis of this data suggests that migrant mothers use the affordances of social media to create and access forms of intimacy, support and belonging that are necessary to their wellbeing, and which their existing networks of family and friends cannot provide.

In these communities, the global and the local are mutually constitutive, shaping women's experiences of the maternal. Through their membership of these glocalised online communities, women position themselves within imagined communities of mothers whose experiences, practices and social relations carry significant affective weight. In contrast to the close-knit 'communities of care' in Francisco-Menchavez's research with Filipina migrant domestic workers in New York, in which 'fictive kin' relationships develop out of shared experiences of trauma, the online migrant maternal groups in this study should be understood as looser collectivities providing multilayered opportunities for sociality and emotional support. These opportunities are facilitated by the online groups but may take place either online or offline. Friendships that move more firmly into an in-person mode are characterised as more intimate than those that remain wholly online. However, the groups' online modality makes possible 'security through interdependence' through the creation of latent ties. This sense of security and readily available empathy and support provides emotional sustenance for women experiencing the challenges of migrant motherhood. Many women attested to this emotional benefit, even when their involvement was limited to observing the interactions of others in the group. The online modality of the groups enables women to participate at a level that meets their needs, whether that involves observing other mothers' interactions, seeking help or responding to others' requests.

This multilayered and multimodal framework of sociality has been developed out of the field research with migrant mothers, and provides insights into the mechanisms for 'horizontal caring' migrant mothers create, using the affordances of Facebook. The disaggregation of the different layers of sociality, and the identification of the emotional significance of the latent ties created by the ability to witness exchanges of support, might also be usefully applied to other contexts in which digitally literate but isolated people need to (re)build a locally-situated social infrastructure, for example university students leaving home or military families.

A focus on migrant mothers' relations with each other, and their potential to form an affective resource for each other, offers a perspective which honours their selfhood beyond their maternal identity and emphasises the importance of lateral relationships between mothers. 21st- century feminism would do well to attend to the significance of these sustaining relationships between mothers, particularly in the challenging context of migration.

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Speculative Obstetric Models: Remaking Historical Anatomical Models to Visualise Epigenetic Agency

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ABSTRACT

Nascent epigenetic enquiry understands that environmental influences can affect gene expression, often leading to heritable health adversity. Consequently, there is much focus on maternal bodies and maternal life circumstances. Increasingly there is a particular interest regarding mothers enduring low socioeconomic status as a causal explanation towards transferable epigenetic traits. Mothers have been 'biomarked' and made the soft target for society's ills across time, and while epigenetic environments may somatically materialize, negative maternal self-perception also has agency with real, material consequences. Medical illustrations and anatomical models culturally frame and reproduce what we see and how we understand bodies. Using conceptual materials that are loaded with meaning, I visually rewrite historical obstetric representations to introduce epigenetic themes in my artwork. Through this my work delivers a new way of visualising and perceiving epigenetic environmental agency imprinting upon maternal-fetal bodies to incorporate aspects of maternal experience and to challenge institutional concepts regarding socioeconomic status.

Keywords: epigenetics, maternal socioeconomic status, obstetric models, material feminism, contemporary art

INTRODUCTION

Positioned in what is obstetrically termed the right occiput transverse (ROT) presentation, a full-term infant balances within a maternal pelvis in preparation for an uncomplicated, 'normal birth'[1]. The infant's arms and legs are crossed and eyes closed. The pelvis is embossed with botanical impressions, and life-cast *melaleuca quinquenervia*[2] branches with fruiting capsules grow from the left and posterior pelvic bone creating a leafy cavity in which the fetus settles. The infant's umbilical cord is draped across its body, disappearing into a cleft of leaves rising from the right pelvic crest. Both the fetus and embellished pelvis are cast in bronze and silver-plated. A 19th-century oak plinth creates a medical stand, as is commonly used for the display of pedagogical medical models and specimens across time. This obstetric model is titled *Silver Spoon* (**Figures 1** & **3**) and a stainless-steel plaque on the oak stand reads:

And through the mother's gifting,

biophilia breathes abundance and

privilege into the unborn child.

Clare Nicholson, 2017.

By employing culturally esteemed materials to represent the safest birthing position and 'nature' embedded into the maternal corporeality, *Silver Spoon* challenges epigenetic discourses that define maternal low socioeconomic

[1] "The World Health Organisation (WHO) (1997) defines 'normal birth' as spontaneous in onset, low risk at the start of labour and remaining so throughout labour and delivery, with the infant being born spontaneously in the vertex position between 37 – and 42- weeks gestation, and after birth mother and infant are in good condition" (Anderson, 2015: 66).
[2] *Melaleuca quinquenervia* is a wetland tree species indigenous to eastern Australia (Kaufman and Smouse, 2001: 487).

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Figure 1. Nicholson, C. (2017). Silver Spoon, (detail) [Sculpture]. Photo Credit: Jessica Maurer.

status as a 'biological trait' playing through the maternal body, which disadvantages offspring health. Instead, *Silver Spoon* highlights beneficial environmental influences that can impress upon the body, and embellish the lives of mothers and fetuses in ways that have not yet been empirically quantified in scientific terms, and suggest the epigenetic embodiment of environmental influences that invisibly privilege future generations.

UNDERSTANDING EPIGENETICS

Epigenetics is a comparatively new line of scientific enquiry intendend to explain how environmental influences have the ability to impress upon the body, causing the alteration of gene expression and function, without altering the sequencing of the DNA (Rothstein et al., 2009). The body and its external environment are revealed to be interdependent and permeable, rather than discrete entities. Epigenetic expressions may be permanent or

reversible, and influential 'environments' can encompass many facets of life, such as diet (Landecker, 2011, Bunning et al., 2016), metabolism (Zauri et al., 2015; Bouchard et al., 2010), psychological states (Lee and Avramopoulos, 2014; Mulligan et al., 2012), behaviour (Rothstein et al., 2009; Su, 2016), socioeconomic status (Landecker, 2016; Wells, 2010) and toxicant exposures (Szyf, 2007; Mansfield, 2012). Arguably, this range of molecular mechanisms, which perform as causal triggers, ensure that the complexity of epigenetic enquiry is multifaceted, stochastic and to a great extent, indefinable.

Epigeneticists are particularly interested in maternal-fetal programming; how detrimental environmental exposures by women can induce transgenerational epigenetic fetal changes leading to childhood and adult-onset disease (Kenny and Müller, 2017; Heijmans et al., 2009). Gluckman et al., (2008: 61) outline these plastic fetal changes as '(…) the ability of an organism to develop in various ways, depending on the particular environment or setting (…)', while Burgio (2015: 2) clarifies:

> This model of pathogenesis is the so-called theory of the embryo-foetal origins of adult diseases (DOHAD: Developmental Origins of Health and Diseases).

However, Lock (2018: 459) outlines how: '(…) the environment in this type of research is effectively scaled down to molecular activity inside a single organ of the body – the uterus and its foetal contents'. It is this focused 'scaling down' that has prompted my work as an artist in the visual remaking of obstetric models as a way of visually articulating the entanglement and fusion of internal epigenetic somatic worlds, and the invisible agency of external environments that are not valued and quantified, such as being born into unsullied, natural environments.

Hopefully, epigenetic findings will lead to a better understanding of the adverse health effects that can arise from compromised environmental conditions, which then can instigate supportive or therapeutic interventions, and also introduce policies for the betterment of societal health. However, at present it is important to recognise that the complexity of exterior influences which can become heritable maternal effects are accurately contextualised and carefully conveyed, as incorrect or simplistic epigenetic interpretations are already radiating across public domains, targeting mothers and their life circumstances in unhelpful and stigmatising ways. For example, see the self-help book titled *Epigenetics. The DNA of the Pregnant Mother: How to strength [sic] Your Genes and Create Super Babies Conceived Naturally or by Egg Donation* (Toledo, 2017), a blog post advising mothers on how to think, eat and behave entitled *Garbha Sanskar, Nurturing the unborn child in the womb* (Vadakayil, 2014, January 22); and an article in *Rediscover News* (2010) entitled *Heal your brain by reversing intergenerational trauma* which represents a photographic matrilineal line up across three generations as a way of demonstrating where "intergenerational trauma" originates from. The intention of my obstetric model *Silver Spoon* is to rewrite such time-weary socio-medical prejudicial attitudes that can marginalise and blame mothers for their life circumstances, by representing the values of motherhood and rich environmental influences.

Low maternal socioeconomic status is considered a serious epigenetic trigger for offspring adversity, including being causal in debilitating chronic diseases (McGuinnes et al., 2012, Deans et al., 2009), cognitive impairment (Hackman et al., 2010), mental illness (Cunliffe, 2016; Swartz et al., 2016; Bradley and Corwyn, 2002), obesity along with failure to thrive (King et al., 2015; Thornburg et al., 2010), behavioural problems (Duncan et al., 1994) and even adult criminality (Walsh and Yun, 2014). When the maternal body is generally understood to be a causal 'site' for reproducing class-differentiated disadvantage, the focus often shifts towards a moral viewpoint on the individual woman and her lifestyle 'choices', as opposed to larger societal problems that create socioeconomic biopolitical inequity. As Lock (2015: 152) warns:

> Although involved epigeneticists acknowledge in principle social, economic, and political variables that contribute to the unequal distribution of health and illness, many, but not all, essentially set these variables to one side in order to conduct, standardize, and regulate their laboratory work. Hence, the consolidation of a newly assembled neoreductionistic approach to the human body is in the making.

Such selective scientific approaches regarding acquired molecular biomechanisms that impress upon the body not only frame and direct bodies in particular ways, but also create societal attitudes towards those who inhabit such bodies; culturally, politically, racially, geographically, legally, economically, medically, socially, ethically and philosophically. Aligning the epigenetic loci of the maternal body with low socioeconomic status as a heritable deficit is a reminder of prejudicial attitudes in medicine that have found mothers to be at fault and to blame for offspring adversity, identified from antiquated medical treatises onward (Park and Daston,1981; Daniels,1997; Sommerfeld,1998; Frost, 2001; Jackson and Mannix, 2004; Rolfe, 2008). To be clear, while I am not suggesting epigenetic enquiry is the location of mother-blaming, I am concerned that, if we are not careful, the foci of epigenetic interpretation could become a new site for rehashing old mother-blaming attitudes, which then become adopted within society. As Landecker (2011:188) states, "The idea of male/female or generational responsibility for the future health of generations is simultaneously in tension with the very idea that individuals could

meaningfully control their environments in such a way as to intentionally direct future phenotype." So with this in mind, I remake historical obstetric models to '(…) situate bodies in time and space, thus bringing to the fore the inevitable coalescence of material bodies in environments, histories, social/political variables, and medical knowledge of all kinds' (Lock, 2017: 5). The structural elements and the materials I have used in *Silver Spoon* are an attempt to outline the complexities of epigenetic enquiry in order to dismantle simplistic readings of embodied health aligned to maternal socio-economic status.

RESHAPING EPIGENETIC LANDSCAPES THROUGH OBSTETRIC MEDICAL MODELS

Through my artmaking I subscribe to material feminist theory, by using materials that are loaded with cultural meanings so as to conceptualise and contextualise the entanglement of histories with environments in the anatomical representations of female bodies. In this way my medical models bring epigenetic agency to the fore, by incorporating the materiality of the lived maternal experience; the porosity and mutability of not simply the body being imprinted upon by environmental factors alone, but between '(…) the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the environment (…)' (Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 7).

By remaking obstetric anatomical models that are embellished with 'nature objects', and by using materials that are considered to be loaded with cultural baggage, I want to suggest in my artwork the value of influential epigenetic environmental agency impressing upon and altering maternal bodies.

Renaissance medicine, and the anatomical models that ensued, are considered to herald the birth of Early Modern clinical empiricism (Wolfe 2010: 957-993), that is to say the scientific rational inquiry into the human body. Such 'rationality' was heavily contextualised by the cultural milieu of the day, positioning bodies to be viewed in certain ways (Rifkin et al., 2006). No amount of dissecting cadavers could reveal the physiological 'black box' of the living body, and consequently much speculation took place. However, the historical production and reproduction of anatomical knowledge developed a particular form of visual somatic legacy, which still exists today. Medical illustrations, anatomical models and 'phantom' protheses have become pedagogical substitutes for living bodies, which are designed to impart an objective, empirical, universal 'truth' regarding what are imagined to be stabilized and fixed bodies. Such practises of representation are perceived as tangible educational instruments, that effectively disengage subjective, emotional responses. These representations have become powerful cultural mediators directed towards what we 'know', how we 'see' and how we 'understand' bodies. However, epigenetic environmental influences are increasingly becoming understood as agents of biological change, that dismantle notions of the fixed, empirical body. By rethinking and visually remaking obstetric models I am interrogating corporeal meaning, in line with this epigenetic understanding. My work attempts to visually *materialize* epigenetic molecular reverberations that have biochemically imprinted maternal and fetal bodies, and in so doing, problematise simplistic understandings of maternal corporeality.

Throughout postmodernity, the semiotic practice of representing female bodies, let alone fragmented, flayed or dissected female bodies, was not only considered highly problematic, but also taboo within contemporary art. But as Haraway (1988: 580) argued:

> We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life.

This argument is as pertinent now as it ever was. By creating a nuanced visual literacy from historical medical constructions drawn around the gestating body, and incorporating latest molecular findings, questions what does epigenetics deliver and subtract when it comes to mothers and motherhood? My aesthetic and material techniques are intended to act as '(bio)markers' for embodied lived experiences; to critique complex epigenetic perspectives, since epigenetic theories are at a tipping-point, with a potential to create a new discourse of mother-blaming attitudes.

AFTER WILLIAM SMELLIE: QUESTIONING WHAT HIGH SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS MIGHT LOOK LIKE

William Smellie's 1754 *Set of Anatomical Tables* was a treatise designed to illustrate as accurately as possible a realistic female pelvis and fetus (**Figure 2**). Longo & Reynolds (2016: 138) cite Smellie as stating:

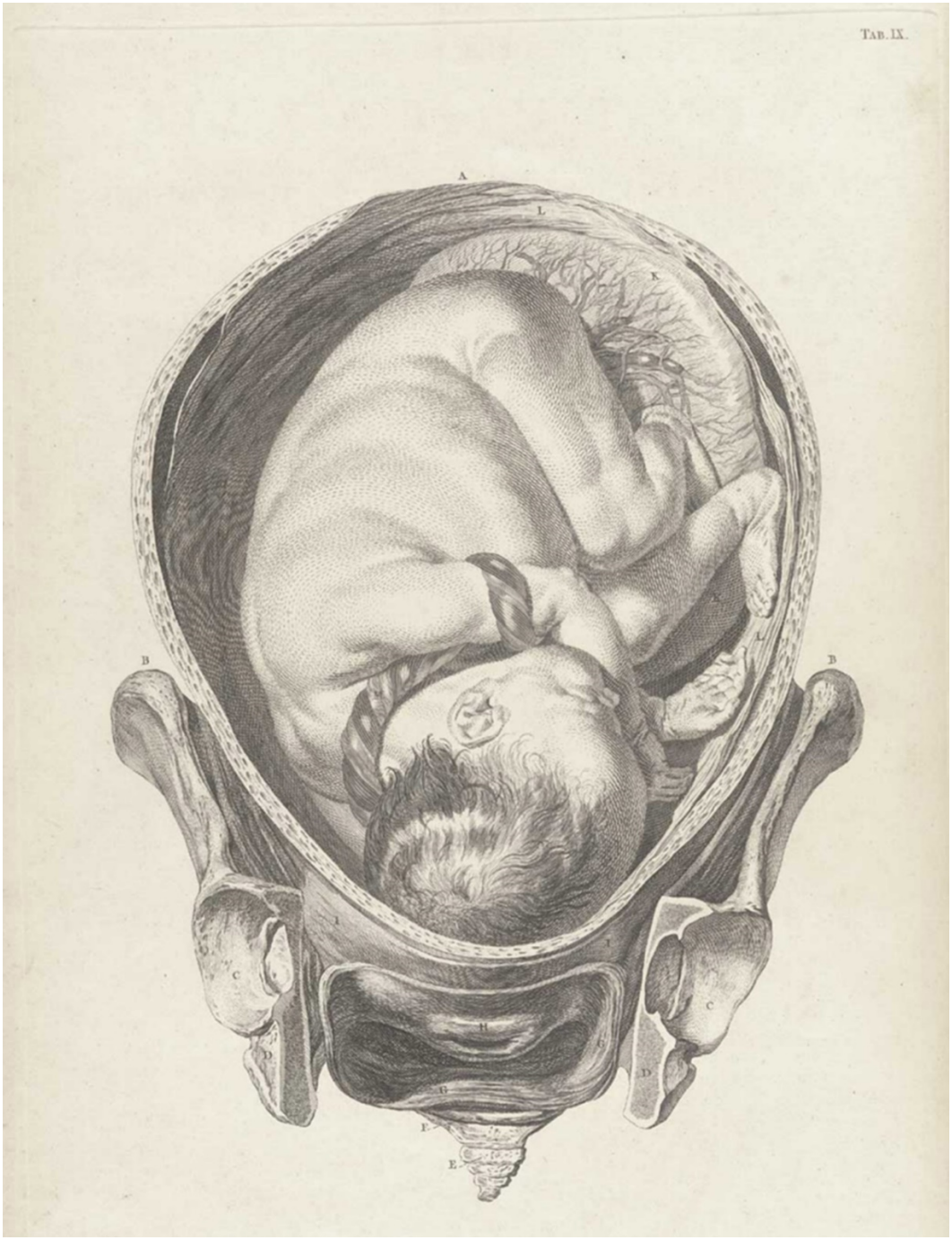

Figure 2. Smellie, W. (1774). Ninth Table [Etched plate]. Retrieved from University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Available at https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Smellie_09.jpg (Accessed 12 July 2017).

> '(…) I hope I may without vanity say, that I have done something towards reducing that Art, into a more simple and mechanical method that has hitherto been done'.

By 'reducing the art' Smellie was referring to the desire to eradicate artistic style in order to illustrate medical-scientific accuracy. Kemp (2010: 192) explains how artistic style in anatomical art spoke of the maker's mode of presentation, the production of this art, patronage, and the intended reception. 'Style' was not valued as a prime criterion within scientific models, although aesthetic style played a major part in historical anatomical art, as it still does today.

Figure 3. Nicholson, C. (2017). Silver Spoon [Sculpture]. Photo Credit: Jessica Maurer.

With this in mind, *Silver Spoon* (**Figure 3**) is stylized through aesthetics and the material form of bronze, silver-plate and antique oak. The use of bronze alloy has spanned many countries and cultures at different times. Glausiusz (2008: 3) discusses how the global trading of copper and tin – the ingredients for bronze, '(…) drove commerce between kingdoms of the second millennium BC and inspired a cross-border blossoming of art and technology'. Kleiner (2012: 493) explains the Chinese Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-1050 BCE) '(…) perfected the casting of elaborate bronze vessels… used in sacrifices to ancestors and in funerary ceremonies', and Bourla (2015)

writes about the Renaissance use of bronze écorché (flayed) statuettes for the accurate anatomical study of the muscles to be used in art and science. Historically and into contemporary times, bronze has been the ubiquitous, semi-precious metal of 'heroic male statutory', cast in order to memorialise the celebration of triumphant military and sporting battles (Beckstead, Twose, Levesque-Gottlieb and Rizzo, 2011; Inglis and Brazier, 2008; Holt, 2017; Osmond and Phillips, 2016). By utilising bronze for the model *Silver Spoon* I am acknowledging the enduring hierarchical cultural orthodoxies embedded within this metal.

Across time, silver has been established as a precious metal and employed for a variety of uses. Alexander (2009) explains that the medicinal history of metallic silver extends back to 4,000 BCE and folkloristically used to promote wound healing, as a blood purifier, and to treat heart palpitations. Silver was thought to reduce mortality rates during plague epidemics. However, Alexander also makes note that from the 1700's onwards '(…) privileged families used silver eating utensils and [they] often developed a bluish-gray discoloration of the skin, thus becoming known as "blue bloods" (2009: 290). This condition is called argyria, and can also cause tissue and organ damage[3].

Smith and Beentjes, (2010) state that from the 16th-century, silver life-castings of small reptiles or plants served as proof of rare or odd natural phenomena; such life-castings were used as stand-ins for perishable natural objects, but also to display the artistic knowledge and talent used in producing fine moulds and metal castings. However, these life-casts '(…) also possessed a more profound significance [of demonstrating] the human ability to imitate the transformative powers of nature" (2010: 140).

In 1825 'The English parliament passed the 'Sterling Silver Money Act' which legally made British coins the only recognised form of currency in Australia… Silver coins were shipped to Australia after being made at the British Royal Mint' (Royal Australian Mint website (n.d., para. 10). Counter to such governmental regimes, Pascoe[4] (2014: 137) explains that within Australian Indigenous cultures,

> 'one of the central tenets of trading was the sharing of resources (…) actively pursuing the opportunity to attract other clans into their country for the purpose of cultural and social exchange. The resource was more than a commodity; it was a civilising glue'.

The Eurocentric saying: 'To be born with a silver spoon in your mouth' means to have high social position and to be rich from birth (Cambridge Advance Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus, n.d.), but clearly such sentiments are highly problematic. This particular precious metal not only created insidious disease in the wealthy elite, but in many ways remains symbolic of a colonising mercantilism that invaded, denied and dismantled Australian Aboriginal custodian law.

Chwalkowski (2016:169) explains that historically oak was '(…) the raw material for every kind of human fabrication (…) [becoming] (…) a symbol of affirmation, strength, dependability, and endurance in many cultures. Ancient Druids '(…) traditionally associated [oak] with cycles of birth and death (…). Chwalkowski cites Ernst and Lehner (1960) who claim the oak was also a '(…) symbol of fecundity and immortality' for Nordic tribes. England has named the oak tree as a national symbol, believing there are '(…) more ancient native oak trees [in England] than the rest of Europe combined' (Ough, 2017: para. 4) while, America has claimed the oak as the national tree for its '(…) striking symbol of our nation's great strength' (Rosenow, cited by Nix, 2018: para. 2).

Generally, antique objects are considered authentic material conduits to previous generations. Symbolically they speak of valuing bygone cultural eras, familial and historical narratives and exhibiting a long-lost craftsmanship attached to particular milieus. Antique objects are also often read as tropes for iconic memorial, and used to symbolize the poignant affects of memory and caring.

By selecting these materials for the obstetric model *Silver Spoon* I am evoking all of these cultural associations: bronze for uniting a 'cross-border blossoming of art and technology' (Glausiusz, 2008: para. 3) and the subsequent iconic orthodoxies wrapped up in bronze memorializing statutory. By employing bronze in *Silver Spoon* I dismantle the gendered idealization concerned with the celebration of male achievement, in order to honor the achievement of women and mothers. Silver is used for its instantly recognisable cachet, and the casting of silver melaleuca plants in order to demonstrate the historical '…human ability to imitate the transformative powers of nature' (Smith & Beentjes, 2010: 140), and also to represent the way nature powerfully affects human ability, indicating the somatic changes that result through environmental imprinting. While the use of silver conveys the archaic medicinal understanding of healing, these prophylactic properties are also insidiously capable of causing detrimental adversity within privileged communities of higher socioeconomic status [5]. Silver use is representative of Eurocentric

[3] "… Silver can accumulate in the skin, liver, kidneys, corneas, gingiva, mucous membranes, nails and spleen (Sue et al., 2001, as cited by Drake and Hazelwood, 2005).

[4] Pascoe '… has a "complex" racial background, which includes Bunurong (South central Victoria), Yuin (NSW south coast) and Tasmania Aboriginal, as well as ancestry from Cornwall in the UK' (Tan, 2016: para. 15).

[5] Arguments that assume 'higher economic status' equates to improved health are often flawed. Adams, (2012: paras. 1- 2) for example clarifies eating too much is now claiming three million lives a year in the West– which is three times the number of individuals who die of malnutrition in developing countries untainted by Western diets. 'Poverty' in this instance is the safety-net against premature morbidity.

currency and emblematic of the devastating effects of imperialism within Australia. So in these ways I suggest that this salubrious metal has the ability to problematise and contradict cultural beliefs that higher socioeconomic status acts as a 'cure-all' epigenetic remedy.

Oak's evocative symbolism is tied up with strength, fecundity, dependability, endurance and wisdom, alongside antiquity as a means of valuing intangible cultural heritage. The use of oak is rapidly becoming obsolete in everyday life, as it is lost to mechanised technologies of mass-production as demonstrated in today's factory-produced medical models. By animating these materials through traditional anatomical artmaking skills in *Silver Spoon* I wish to problematise dominant cultural values that are tied to socioeconomic status; and link wealth to the epigenetic safety-net deployed against heritable disease and adversity.

The *melaleuca quinquenervia* twigs were sourced from my local Sydney environment. The Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (ABARES) (2017) outline 6.4 million hectares of native melaleuca forests that trap vegetation and debris deposited in coastal areas during floods, and provide habitat for fish and bird species, retain and filter water and reduce soil and sediment run-off. Kamenev (2011: para. 7) explains that the foliage from several melaleuca species contain medicinal essential oils, and the Bundjalung Aboriginal people from the east coast of New South Wales use a poultice of crushed leaves for wounds, and brew a tea for throat infections. Aboriginal Education Officer for the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, Clarence Slockee (2010: paras. 5 & 6) explains the Cadigal; ancestors of the Dharug and Eora[6] nations used melaleuca bark to create shelters and as bedding. Wet bark was used to wrap around fish, emu or kangaroo to prevent the flesh burning while cooking in the fire, and due to its softness, the bark was also used by mothers to make coolamons (bowls) for their infants[7]. But despite such a rich cultural heritage and the obvious environmental, social and medicinal benefits, many melaleuca forests have become listed as endangered within Australia due to agricultural pursuits[8].

Juxtaposing human anatomy specimens with European plants, especially tulips, was popularised by Vanitas from the Dutch Golden Age - a 17th century genre that was affiliated with still life paintings. Vanitas were loaded with Eurocentric social values and mores, intended to prompt the viewer's memory in order to connect through symbolism entrenched social and religious doctrines, such as *memento mori* (remember you must die) (Valverde, 2009: 508). By embodying the indigenous melaleuca plant over a cultivated European pant the artwork seeks to deny the Eurocentric valuing systems that "standardize and regulate" (Lock, 2015: 152) hierarchical epistemologies that fail to honour Indigenous-place, Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous spiritual connectedness to the land. In this way the artwork venerates instead the wealth of epigenetic agency and fecundity that resides in Indigenous cultural, spiritual and agricultural legacies (**Figure 4**). Such inclusion feels important given the forced invisibility of Australian Indigenous peoples by European colonisation and ongoing racism, which has persisted since white settlement (Anthony, 2016; Russell, 2005; Moses, 2005; Healey, 2011). Applying a thin white silver-plating wash over the life-cast melaleuca imparts a sense of colonisation; a veil to conceal that which is lost through Eurocentric sovereignty, because as Pascoe (2014: 158) states:

> To deny Aboriginal agricultural and spiritual achievement is the single greatest impediment to inter-cultural understanding and, perhaps, Australian moral and economic prosperity.

Consequently, *Silver Spoon* questions what exactly *is* high socioeconomic status, when colonial history has ensured invasive economic prerogatives have dismantled the wealth of Indigenous cultural legacies, limiting an ongoing ability to maintain an innate connection to the land.

[6] "It is generally acknowledged that the Eora are the coastal people of the Sydney area, with the Dharug (Darug) people occupying the inland area from Parramatta to the Blue Mountains" (Heiss and Gibson, n.d.).

[7] See Pearn (2005) for the ethnobotanical recording of Australian Aboriginal use of plants for child health.

[8] See the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy website (n. d) for clarification on which Melaleuca species are at risk.

Figure 4. Nicholson, C. (2017). Silver Spoon [Botanical life-casts]. Photo Credit: Jessica Maurer.

AFTER WILLIAM HUNTER: UNEARTHING BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE TO CONVEY PRIVILEGING FACTORS

> *Anatomical figures are made in two very different ways; one is the simple portrait, in which the object is represented exactly as it was seen; the other is a representation of the object under such circumstances as were not acutally seen, but conceived in the imagination.*
>
> William Hunter, 1774 (as cited by Longo & Reynolds, 2016)

In a further attempt to make epigenetic connections directly linked to the land, I use the primal material of earthenware clay to create an obstetric model "conceived in the imagination" (Hunter, 1774 as cited by Longo & Reynolds, 2016) and inspired by William Hunter's 1774 treatise *Anatomia uteri humani gravidi, Tab VI* (**Figure 5**). Jan van Rymsdyk was the artist responsible for the thirty-four life-size copper plates that made up Hunter's treatise[9] (Rifkin et al., 2006: 194). Van Rymsdyk was clearly an extraordinarily fine draftsman, capable of conveying the connection between delicate artistic stroke and visual impact. However, it is interesting that van Rymsdyk applied such visual sensitivity to the unborn child, but that such sensitivity is entirely lacking in the representation of the maternal body. The infant is intact whereas the mother's fragmented body resembles a butchered mass of meaty

[9] The drawings for this book were started in 1751, however publication did not take place until 1774 (Rifkin et al., 2006: 194).

Figure 5. Hunter, W. Artist van Riemsdyk, J. (1774). Tab VI. [Etching]. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine. Available at: https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Hunterw_table_06.jpg (Accessed 26 July 2017).

off-cuts, laid bare in a confronting manner. This juxtaposition causes a friction that both lulls and repels, imparting a sense of lurid medical-scientific scrutiny of the gestating maternal body, in order to reveal the untouched and perfect fetus growing within and reminds me of Richardson's (2015: 223) observation concerning epigenetic maternal-fetal programming:

> The maternal body is a transducing and amplifying medium necessary to get to the fetus, an obligatory passage point, not a primary endpoint or subject of DOHaD research.

As previously discussed, the fetus in *Silver Spoon* was inspired by the illustrations of anatomist and man-midwife William Smellie, who cared for disadvantaged and poor women (Roberts et al., 2010: 205-206). In contrast, Massey (2005: 77) explains:

Figure 6. Nicholson, C. (2017). Fertile garden [Sculpture]. Photo credit: Jessica Maurer.

> 'Hunter was the antithesis of Smellie (…) becoming a fashionable man-midwife to London's elite (…) with his career culminating as Physician Extraordinary to Queen Charlotte, wife of George III'.

With this understanding I closely reworked Hunter's anatomical plate using only earthenware clay in order to dismantle the cultural hierarchies associated with bronze, silver and antique oak. Historically, glazed ceramics signified high-brow culture and were employed in Vanitas to demonstrate luxury and wealth. So, by utilising unglazed clay, the obstetric model *Fertile Garden* (**Figure 6**) is the un-gilded lily, reliant only on an embellishment of structural form and the alchemy of heat to turn mud into 'rock'. I chose Keane's White 37 earthenware – a clay body that is formulated using a combined mixture of raw clay materials from Australia, the USA and Canada, and talc from China, with a small proportion of bentonite added to enhance the clay's natural plasticity[10] to make the work. This melding of natural, raw geological elements taken from disparate global environments and altered to enhance plasticity in order to enable reshaping and remodelling spoke to me of the agential epigenetics which entangle maternal and fetal bodies directly with the land.

Just like Hunter's dissected and fragmented *gravid uterus*, the abdomen and uterus in the model *Fertile Garden* are also dissected, but its anatomical elements are substituted with botanical components in order to demonstrate the interlocking entanglements which permeate through the mother's body to imprint upon the unborn child. The fetus is well-nourished, also presenting in the right occiput transverse position, but with its head engaged as a sign of imminent birth. Despite this impending event, the infant appears relaxed, resting, with knees gently bent, an arm outstretched, and hands semi-closed.

[10] (Keane's Ceramics (personal communication), October 30, 2018)

Figure 7. Nicholson, C. (2017). Fertile Garden (Detail) [Sculpture]. Photo credit: Jessica Maurer.

A midline surgical spinal incision creates a 'window' into the infant's interior body, exposing a hidden fledgling garden growing within (**Figure 7**), passed on from mother to child. These adornments signify privilege and hierarchical wealth, which is delivered symbolically through the embodiment of agential botanical materiality, permeating through the mother's body to imprint upon the unborn child. Despite such clinical intervention, *Fertile Garden* does not express the same level of butchery as Hunter's illustration. Anatomical details within the cross-sectional view of the amputated legs and the maternal genitalia are minimised or omitted to direct the gaze towards aspects of the maternal anatomy that are enhanced by alluring vegetation. For example, adipose tissue is renewed by blossoming clumps of *Croscosmia croscosmiflora*, which can be seen in the details of **Figure 7**. These plants create a lattice criss-crossing pattern – an ordered 'tangle' of growth, interwoven and spilling out from the anatomised

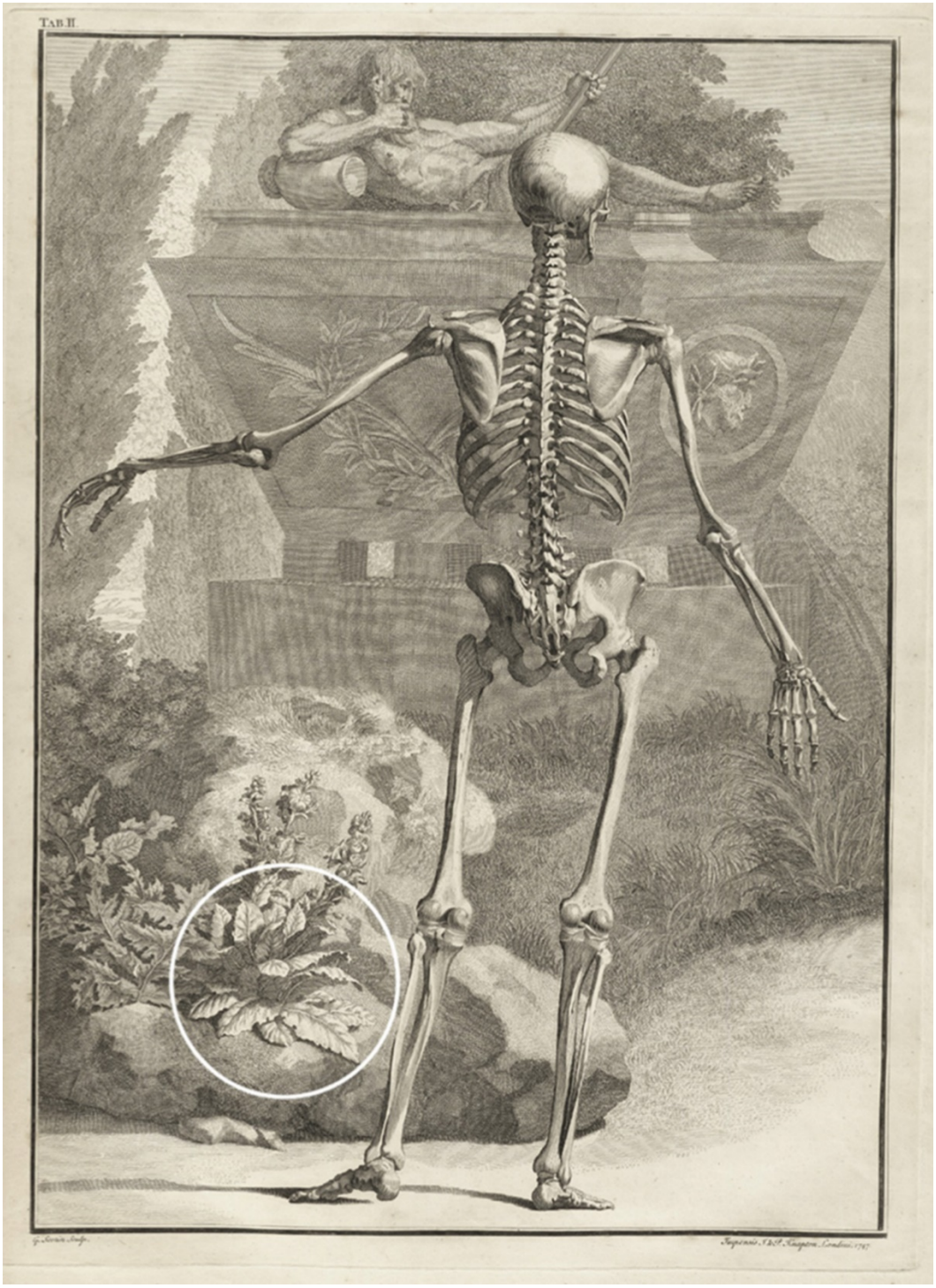

Figure 8. Albinus, B. S. Anatomical artist Wandelaar, J. (1749). Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani [Etching]. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine. Available at: https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Albinus_t02.jpg (Accessed 30 October 2018).

abdominal flaps. "Crocosmia, commonly known as Montbretia, is a member of the Iridaceae [Iris] family from South Africa" (Hankins, 2009: 2). Within folklore traditions, the iris symbolizes 'faith, wisdom, valor, hope, light and promise' (Lehner and Lehner, 1960: 118). The maternal torso height has been extended to incorporate the liver (an organ predominately known for its blood purifying qualities), which has been replaced by a wreath of *Acanthus mollis* instead.

Acanthus mollis was '(…) common in gardens during Roman times' (Stackelberg, 2009 as cited by Yilmaz, et al., 2013: 140) and '(…) considered to symbolize life, immortality, the horns of lunar crescent, and the veneration of the arts' (Cooper, 1987, as cited by Yilmaz, et al., 2013: 140). *Acanthus* also featured in historical anatomical plates, as seen in Bernard Siegfried Albinus' 1749 treaties *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani* (**Figure 8**). Within

Fertile Garden, *Acanthus mollis* also replaces the placenta, which in turn elongates to become an umbilical 'vine', connecting mother and infant.

By combining these botanical elements within the maternal anatomy and fetal *hortus conclusus*[11] I wish to suggest all of the meanings associated with the plants stated above, whilst also referencing historical socio-anatomical connections that indicate how the dissected body has previously been aligned with nature. However, I also want to infer the reciprocal epigenetic symbiosis between the ecological transgenerational imprinting of maternal and fetal bodies, which dismantles the historical externalizing parameters that separate nature from nurture. Utilising the fragility of humble earthenware clay implies the endangerment and need for a primal environmental human connection between such untainted, unmechanised and 'natural' landscapes. Materially uncomplicated, the fired mud which constructs *Fertile Garden* is intended to counter biological threats derived from the contemporary Anthropocenic burden of contaminated, toxic landscapes in order to represent 'wealth' in its purist form.

Kahn (1997: 2) discusses Wilson's (1984) belief that '(…) biophilic[12] instinct emerges, often unconsciously, in our cognition, emotions, art, and ethics …' Kahn proposes this hypothesis provides a '(…) framework by which new scientific ground across many disciplines can be charted that bear on understanding the human relationship with nature'. However, the exploitative and destructive treatment of natural environments and biodiversity (Yap et al., 2015; Koh et al., 2004), worsening ecotoxicology (Singh and Prasad, 2015; Griffin et al., 2002) along with encroaching urbanisation, leave many young people feeling a sense of disconnection with nature (Fairweather, 2014; Miller, 2005). Kellert (1996: 32) wrote:

> People can survive the extirpation of many life forms, just as they may endure polluted water, fouled air, and contaminated soils. But will this impoverished condition permit people to prosper physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually?

Over two decades later, the importance and urgency of this question continues to gather momentum, although muffled by conventional notions of what prosperity and capital are supposed to look like.

Wells (2010: 11) is concerned about epigenetic fetal adversity resulting from maternal low socioeconomic status, writing that:

> While the ghetto in its traditional sense reflects a form of social isolation, I want to extend this concept to a physical bodily dimension and use it to express the impact of economic marginalization on the physiology of reproduction. If pregnancy is a niche occupied by the fetus (Wells, 2007), then economic marginalization over generations can transform that niche into a physiological ghetto where the phenotypic consequences are long-term and liable to reproduction in future generations.

Wells (2010) has maternal and offspring wellbeing at the forefront of his mind, but his use of disparaging terminology to describe maternal bodies could easily be misunderstood, distorting societal attitudes towards maternal responsibilities. Singh (2012: 311) alerts us to a 'landmark warning' issued in 2011 by the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) that:

> '(…) certain demographic factors [such as] poverty, lack of community resources, lack of education, abuse and neglect (…) create stresses that are literally written into the biological processes of development (…)'.

The AAP have coined the term "toxic stress" (AAP, 2012, "Toxic Stress on Children: Evidence of consequences": para.1) for this 'aetiology', outlining that these traits start in the womb.

Attaching such labels to a gestating mother's life circumstances could surely have devastating outcomes as mothers refuse to seek healthcare support for fear of prejudicial labelling and stereotyping. As Alaimo and Hekman (2008: 7) point out, '(…) discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses'. Marginalised mothers enduring low socioeconomic status have been made very aware of their denigrated cultural and social placement (Flanagan, 1998; Kaplan, 1992; Keefe et al., 2017; Read, 2000; Rolfe, 2008). Bhatia et al., (2015: 9427) studied the combined effects of maternal perception of neighbourhood quality with preterm birth outcomes:

[11] *Hortus conclusus* is an enclosed garden, a '… potent sign within which art, religion, medicine, and social constructions of gender coalesce to produce meaning' (Corazzo, 1996: 132).

[12] Edward O. Wilson's 1984 book *Biophilia* provided an '…understanding of how the human tendency to relate with life and natural process might be the expression of a biological need, one that is integral to the human species' developmental process and essential in physical and mental growth' (Kellert, 1993:20).

> The risk of preterm birth among mothers who perceived their neighbourhood as of poor quality was about 30% greater compared to mothers who perceived their neighbourhood as of good quality; the risk was 12% greater among mothers with low resilience compared to those with high resilience.

This study strongly suggests that the human psychological response created by disadvantage and stigmatization epigenetically 'materializes' into somatic and physiological adversity, puting both vulnerable mothers and infants at risk. The use of clinical discourses which subjugate and abject maternity continues: a cursory look at birthing models for sale on the digital shopping forum ebay reveals this point. Crudely fabricated from cheap, stiff, plastic of a generic monochromatic Caucasian skin tone, one model consists of the severed lower torso of a gravid female body, with splayed amputated thighs positioned upwards and outwards, exposing a gaping keyhole as a 'stand-in' for the vagina, and surrounding genitalia. Plastic screws hold a gravid abdomen 'plate' in situ, and the leg stumps to the pelvis. With an expression of distress, an underweight, but otherwise 'intact' plastic neonate lays next to the fragmented maternal abdomen in a curled up semi-fetal position. Metal screws secure the arm and leg joints and a pliable yellow 'umbilical cord' connects the infant to a dark red, round plastic disc with embossed 'veins' to represent the placenta. This inadequate model does not speak of maternal lives, experiences or the passing on of women's knowledge, let alone the latest understanding of epigenetic influences, but instead imparts an abjectified, technological instrumentalization of birth, women's bodies and motherhood. The obsolescence of anatomical model making skills, combined with the mass-productivity found in contemporary obstetric models represents a devaluation of motherhood. How mothers perceive themselves is formulated from how mothers are framed and described within society and in artefacts such as this. The mass-production of three-dimensional medical models that are gruesome and barbaric subjugates and disempowers mothers in medical settings. It is important to challenge and reform such representations by portraying alternative maternal realities, that incorporate positive epigenetic influences which are passed on from mother to child; just as it is important for artists to create female anatomical models that represent something of the complexity and materiality of lived maternal experience. By animating the materials in my obstetric medical models I hope to deliver a visual criticality that can represent the interplay of socio-medical and environmental agency, compounding, complicating and materialising through the gestating body in complex ways. As Alaimo and Hekman (2008: 3 - 4) argue:

> the postmodern (…) retreat from materiality has had serious consequences for feminist theory and practice [but that] we need a way to talk about these bodies and the materiality they inhabit. Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration. It makes it nearly impossible for feminism to engage with medicine or science in innovative, productive, or affirmative ways – the only path available is the well-worn path of critique.

By remaking medical models that erase the line between the biosocial and natural worlds, I am speaking of maternal lived experiences in affirmative ways, which will hopefully ignite dialogue, because to date at least, the positive attributes which mothers imprint on their offspring appear to receive very little exposure or recognition within current epigenetic scientific enquiry.

Aligning low maternal socioeconomic status as epigenetically causal to infant ill-health fails to consider the complexity of the embodied 'cross-stitching' from societal inequity that may result in offspring adversity. As Singh (2012: 314) states:

> The idea that social class disparities have a biology, and that this 'biology' explains poverty is the sort of scientifically erroneous nonsense that gives developmental biology a bad name.

It is not 'social class' that creates a biological difference, but rather structural processes in which subjugation and injustice ensures those lacking the 'power of choice' experience marginalisation, and thus endure a heightened toxicant exposure, depleted nutritional intake, impoverished or dangerous living conditions and a range of adverse health effects that accompany such inequalities. While it is not my intention to denigrate epigenetic enquiry, it is important to address the sort of convoluted suppositions which are associated with reduced maternal socioeconomic status that are not always quantifiable or identifiable. My medical models are an attempt to rewrite the canonical perspective of how the maternal body has been medically and scientifically understood; they are intended to challenge these perspectives by introducing and foregrounding new epigenetic findings such as environmental influences that impress/imprint upon the maternal body. Outdated reiterations of derogatory institutional obstetric models that fail to consider maternal lived experiences and life circumstances, but instead convey inaccurate and invalidating social conceptualisations of motherhood perpetuate harmful messages. It is ethically important to address or challenge injurious epigenetic discourses for fear they become further embraced by the public, resulting in discriminatory ideas regarding marginalised or socially excluded mothers who are judged to be disadvantaging their offspring. Instead, *Silver Spoon* and *Fertile Garden* create a competing visual epistemology

that questions conventional hierarchies regarding economic status, and instead more accurately convey some of the complexities and entanglements that play through maternal and foetal bodies. My obstetric models are intended as timely reminders that maternal representations which quantify and value epigenetic influences that are based on economic status alone, fail to recognise the intergenerational privilege and importance of having access to a rapidly disappearing clean, natural environment.

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"India is our Twins' Motherland:" Transnational Cross-Racial Gestational Surrogacy and the Maternal Body in "IP Memoirs"

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ABSTRACT

Memoirs by women (from the Global North) who have employed a gestational host (from the Global South) to become mothers are situated in a force field of intersecting discourses about gender, race and class. The article sheds light on the characteristic dynamics of this special sub-genre of 'mommy lit' (Hewett), labelled 'IP memoirs,' with a special emphasis on memoirs featuring transnational cross-racial gestational surrogacy arrangements in India. These texts do not only present narratives of painful infertility experiences, autopathographic self-blame, and scriptotherapeutic quests towards happiness, i.e. (a) child(ren), but also speak back to knotty issues such as potential exploitation, commodification, colonisation and disenfranchisement, as well as genetic essentialism in the context of systemic inequities.

Keywords: India, gestational surrogacy, IP memoir, autopathography, matriography

INTRODUCTION

In April and May, 2015, two massive earthquakes and their aftershocks hit Nepal and caused not only terrible natural disaster, but also human and humanitarian tragedies; more than 8,000 people were killed, more than 24,000 injured, nearly 3.5 million lost their homes (Fuller and Buckley, 2015; Government of Nepal, 2016). Among the news coverage of this crisis, of reports of widespread destruction, of killed, injured, and missing people, collapsed buildings, cut off electricity, and diminishing clean water supplies, of humanitarian aid arriving, and rescue teams struggling to reach and assist as many people as possible, there were also accounts of a group of 26 newborn babies and their Israeli parents being airlifted from Katmandu to Israel,[1] while the women who had given birth to the infants – most of them Indian citizens[2] – were left behind.[3]

The earthquakes in Nepal, one of Asia's poorest countries, shook up and brought to the surface one node of a global network in which bodies, body parts and tissue are traded and transported worldwide. Every year, many people from the Global North seek reproductive services from women in the Global South – either as egg donors or gestational surrogates. That privileged Global Northerners and their children were airlifted out of catastrophe and misery leaving behind those who had laboured and suffered on their behalf is a very strong image for a cluster of central race, class, and gender issues, for concerns about transnational gestational surrogacy as an exploitative, racist, and classist practice that is contributive to the (re)creation of the subaltern subject, of victims of (re)colonisation efforts under neoliberal global capitalism.

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[1] Under the Israeli Surrogacy law of 1996, the practice of gestational surrogacy is only legal for married heterosexual couples and, since July 2018, also for single women; Prime Minister Netanyahu backed away from his earlier promise to vote for an amendment granting also single men (and thus implicitly gay couples) access to surrogacy (Azulay and Alon, 2018; Sharon and Weber Rosen, 2018; Staff, 2018).

[2] In 2013, India passed a first restrictive law excluding foreign gay couples and singles from entering into commercial gestational surrogacy contracts with Indian women; since 2016, all foreigners have been banned. Nepal was one of the few open doors for singles and gay couples seeking low-cost surrogacy services (ca. US$ 40,000 (Zeveloff, 2015) to create a family. Thus, many women from India, contracted for gestational surrogacy, crossed the border to Nepal to spend the time of their pregnancy and birth there. Nepal closed its doors to reproductive tourism in September 2015 (Abrams, 2016).

[3] Exact numbers on how many surrogates and commissioning parents were in Nepal during the earthquakes are unknown. According to media reports, close to thirty couples were in Nepal for the births of their children from Indian surrogates at the time of the first earthquake on April 25 (JPost Editorial, 2018).

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In the following, I will discuss in due brevity three memoirs by women/heterosexual couples who have employed a gestational host in India to conceive a child: *The Sacred Thread* by Adrienne Arieff (2012, USA), *Namaste Baby* by Susan Clare (2013, England) and *Baby Ava: An Irish Surrogacy Story* by Caroline and Niall O'Flaherty (with Antoinette Walker, 2012, Ireland). These memoirs belong to a special literary subgenre of 'mommy lit' labeled 'IP memoirs' (Zehelein, 2017 and 2018a). After some explanatory remarks on gestational surrogacy and how this procedure has revolutionised motherhood and mothering, I will briefly introduce 'mommy lit' and lay out the key characteristics of 'IP memoirs:' these texts are situated in an extraordinary force field, at the junctures of personal trauma narrative, autopathography, matriography, scriptotherapy and biography. By drawing on contextualising ethnographic studies on gestational surrogacy in India, my analysis of the memoirs also aims to show that and how 'IP memoirs' speak about and narratively construct maternal bodies, and how at the intersection of various discourses about race, class, gender and the effects of global neoliberal capitalism, the authors define and frame their own motherhood *vis à vis* the Indian birthmother.[4]

In gestational surrogacy, the surrogate is not genetically related to the child(ren) she carries. Intended Parents[5] use their own oocyte(s) and sperm or sperm and/or oocyte(s) from an (anonymous) donor. Through ICSI (IntraCytoplasmic Sperm Injection), one oocyte is fertilised with one sperm *ex utero* and one to three blastocysts are transferred to the uterus of the gestational carrier. Genetic and gestational maternity are disconnected. Thus, a second woman can 'be the mother, too': although she does not share in the pregnancy and birth process, she is genetically related to the child and can therefore claim the infant as 'hers'. To separate gestation and genetics allows for a truly revolutionary act in human history: the severance of the symbolic umbilical cord – the cultural convention that to nurture an embryo *in utero* establishes automatic and exclusive motherhood status and a unique natural bond between the pregnant woman and the embryo. The 'mother' is no longer 'only' the woman who gives birth; nurture is not necessarily nature.

Many women write about their individual mothering, that is, about their road towards being a mother and their experiences of childrearing within the broader context of the patriarchal institution of motherhood.[6] This proliferating literary subgenre has been labelled 'mommy lit' (Hewett, 2006) with the special subcategory 'mommy memoirs' (Brown, 2010: 123) or 'mo-moir' (O'Reilly, 2010b: 203). The core element of this genre is that woman 'tells it how it is', explores the 'truth' about being a mother and the challenges accompanying all practices of mothering. For Andrea O'Reilly – the spearhead of what she herself christened 'motherhood studies' some ten years ago – one aspect is central to these memoirs: a new ideology of motherhood, namely 'new momism' or 'intensive mothering.' "The new momism is a highly romanticised view of motherhood in which the standards for success are impossible to meet' since 'a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual being, 24/7, to her children' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004: 4). I concur with O'Reilly's assessment that the motherhood memoir as a discourse by presenting women as mothers actively engaged in intensive mothering 'naturalizes and normalizes the very patriarchal conditions of motherhood that feminists (...) seek to dismantle' (O'Reilly, 2010b: 205).

> Under the patriarchal institution and ideology of motherhood, the definition of *mother* is limited to heterosexual women who have biological children, while the concept of good motherhood is further restricted to a select group of women who are white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, married, thirty-something, in a nuclear family with usually one to two children, and, ideally, full-time mothers (O'Reilly, 2010a: 7).

Although motherhood memoirs aim to unmask 'good motherhood' by spelling out the truths and colorful facets of life as a mother, they fall short of challenging and rejecting gender essentialism.

'IP memoirs' – memoirs by Intended Parents, and, in this case, by women who have received a child via a surrogacy arrangement – are a rather recent literary and cultural phenomenon and even less prone to challenge a dominant cultural discourse of gender essentialism. Quite the contrary: the narratives of why women want children so much and how they finally become mothers are suffused with romantic(ised) notions of motherhood and mothering. These memoirs present a double-bind: on the one hand written against normative understandings of

[4] In this contribution I explicitly and deliberately focus more on how IPs construct and represent the surrogate from the Global South as the (birth) mother of their child(ren), than on how IPs view and talk about themselves, confronting infertility ("infertility narratives") and negotiating their own position towards the surrogate.

[5] The term "Intended Parent(s)" entered the vocabulary through the *Johnson v. Calvert* case (California, 1993). The Calverts, publicly presented as a white couple (they self-identified as mixed-race), had commissioned an African American woman, Anna Johnson, as a gestational surrogate. The relationship between the three deteriorated rapidly and after Johnson had given birth, both parties filed for custody. The final court decision rested on the understanding that the commissioning woman, the woman who intended to raise the child, is the legal mother and not the woman who has given birth to the child to whom she is also not genetically related (Johnson v. Calvert, 1993).

[6] Following Adrienne Rich, Andrea O'Reilly distinguishes between motherhood and mothering: "Within motherhood studies the term *motherhood* is used to signify the patriarchal institution of motherhood, while *mothering* refers to women's lived experiences of childrearing as they both conform to and/or resist the patriarchal institution of motherhood and its oppressive ideology" (O'Reilly, 2010a: 2).

motherhood by adding an intended parent and genetic mother to the mythologised mother-child bond they contest, or at least broaden both the definition of 'mother' and the practice of mothering, while on the other hand they reaffirm core tenets of patriarchal motherhood through depictions of 'new momism.' This double bind might be caused by the protean nature of 'IP memoirs.' They are framed by an extraordinary force field, situated at the intersections of personal trauma narrative, autopathography and matriography, as well as scriptotherapy and biography (Zehelein, 2018a). The authors work through their very intimate trauma of not being able to conceive their own children.[7] For these women there is no female agency, they do not 'own' their bodies and make decisions about when to be pregnant. If they possess any agency at all then only to the extent that they can try and conceive by opening body and mind to expensive, complex, invasive and painful medical interventions. Thus, they render their personal 'road to surrogacy' as a transformative performative process from 'whole woman' to 'unhealthy woman' to 'incomplete mother'. By detailing the medical aspects of ART (Assisted Reproductive Technologies) treatment and pregnancy, necessitated by their 'dysfunctional' bodies, they engage in normative discourses about health and disease. G. Thomas Couser (1997) was the first to suggest the term 'autopathography' for narratives about illness or disability that challenge socio-cultural discourses othering the writer as not-normal, deviant, or pathological. The biological becomes biographical when not only the technical aspects of modern conception through ART (including hormone treatments, genetic screening, ICSI, and embryo implantation) are detailed, but also non-pregnancies, miscarriages, still-births and D and Cs, the times of high hopes and utter despair. The 'IP memoir' as matriography is thus also a story of and about the sick body, the emotional hardships of becoming an intended parent and finally a mother to a child to which one has not given birth. In the face of the socially constructed and culturally mediated notion that there is a special natural / biological bond between birth mother and child, the texts inscribe the genetic mother into the motherhood discourse and broaden the definition of the performative act of mother(hood); they do not challenge but reaffirm the notion of the 'sacred' bond and simply yet powerfully add the genetic mother as a third term to the equation. The 'good mother' paradigm conflates with the 'good woman' assumption: it is natural that a woman can conceive; infertility is thus a disease and woman discursively framed as having a sick body. After intervention, she must strive to be the 'good mother' in order to justify the pains, ordeals and expenses she has borne on her rocky road to motherhood. In scriptotherapeutic mode *à la* Henke (1998[8]), working-writing through the trauma and undergoing a process of healing, the women reach motherhood and enter mothering after arduous times, justifying and accounting for the individual decisions made to eventually find closure.

As all 'IP memoirs' illustrate, (commercial) gestational surrogacy is for many individuals and couples the final stop on a long and painful journey towards parenthood. It has (had), however, wide-reaching socio-cultural, legal, and ethical implications, and is illegal in many countries around the world. In both the UK and Ireland, altruistic surrogacy is legal, yet commercial surrogacy is (UK) / soon will be (Ireland) prohibited,[9] and the law considers every woman who gives birth as the legal mother of the child(ren); parenthood, however, can be transferred by parental order and adoption (Government of the UK, 2014; Citizens Information Ireland, 2016). When the commissioning father is also the genetic father of the child, he can, via a DNA test, prove his status as legal parent and pass on his nationality. Due to the strong emphasis on birth as the decisive factor for establishing paternity, surrogacy arrangements require the crossing of a number of legal hurdles in the UK and Ireland, but also in many other countries, especially for commissioning mothers. Due to the liberal legislation in some states such as California, the USA is one of the few attractive destinations in the Global North for cross-border reproductive care (CBRC) – the 'practice of couples or individuals crossing national or state borders to access assisted reproductive treatment that is illegal, unaffordable or unavailable in their home jurisdiction' (Crockin, 2011 as cited by Hammarberg et al., 2015: 690).[10] Costs, though, are high. Costs are much lower in countries such as India (until 2016), Thailand (until 2015), Nepal (until 2015), the Ukraine, China and Guatemala, where transnational gestational surrogacy was/is/soon might be a flourishing multi-billion dollar business; Amrita Pande speaks of 'wombs sans frontières' (in Davies, 2017: 329).

Three fundamental lines of argument against cross-border commercial gestational surrogacy concern welfare and exploitation of the surrogate and commodification of both surrogate and gestated child(ren) (e.g. Humbyrd,

[7] For a discussion of causes and consequences of global infertility and future directions for infertility and IVF activism cf. Inhorn and Patrizio (2015). For a history of infertility as a transformative term cf. Jensen (2016).

[8] "The act of life-writing serves as its own testimony and, in so doing, carries through the work of reinventing the shattered self as a coherent subject capable of meaningful resistance to received ideologies and of effective agency in the world" (Henke, 1998: xix).

[9] In Ireland, surrogacy had been unregulated; in March 2018, the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill was submitted, making commercial surrogacy illegal (Tighe, 2018). In France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Finland and Spain, all forms of surrogacy are banned; the Netherlands, Portugal and Denmark allow altruistic surrogacy. Greece and Russia are among the few countries worldwide where surrogacy is fully legal.

[10] Inhorn (2015) has conducted a large anthropological study of CBRC interviewing 125 infertile couples from 50 countries who sought ART services in Dubai. She found that not only prohibitive laws, but also extremely high costs for fertility treatments in the home countries caused the couples' "reprotravels."

2009: 112). Academic discourse has framed the surrogates as either exploited and colonised victims of a capitalist colonising Western/globalised hegemony (e.g. Saravanan, 2018), or as at least in part active agents with reproductive autonomy and freedom, that is, with the right to self-determination and the right to enter a contractual agreement to 'sell' or 'rent' their bodies in order to improve their lives (Pande, 2014; Rudrappa, 2015). Krolokke even (in)famously declares surrogates as 'repropreneurs' (Krolokke, 2012). When a woman is paid to deliver a baby for someone else, the child might be perceived as a good, a commodity, exchanged for money on the basis of a capitalist contractual agreement. Thus, concerns for the welfare of the child but also of the gestational host pre-birth and – often neglected or outright forgotten – post-birth arise. After all, surrogacy involves for the surrogate invasive medical procedures, pain, physical risks, and possible death. The extent to which poor women with limited to no literacy and education living in a system of colossal structural inequalities can perform any practice of agency, or can willingly and knowingly enter contractual agreements, and how far the money earned is actually money they can use for their own improvement, has divided scholars as well. Ethnographic studies by Amrita Pande and Sharmila Rudrappa (2015), based on hundreds of interviews in Indian surrogacy clinics and hostels, have suggested to frame gestational surrogacy as a specific form of bodily labour which, despite all criticisms, provides otherwise disenfranchised and disempowered Indian women with at least some form of agency, i.e. the possibility to use their bodies for work which yields a much higher income than any other work they could ever find within their socio-cultural and economic situation, offering at least a chance for financial improvement.

In cross-racial gestational surrogacies, that is, in cases where a gestational surrogate carries a child of a different race for Intended Parents, race and genetic essentialism enter the stage as additional important vectors in the intricate power matrix. The cross-racial gestational surrogacy compact is based on and therefore cements the idea that race and ethnicity are 'encoded' in our DNA (Nelkin and Lindee, 2004), so that hegemonic ideologies of race and gender collapse with eclectic scientific discourses. This narrative also reduces the surrogate even further to a mere 'vessel' or 'carrier', separate and distinct from the child(ren) she bears. The emphasis on genetics over gestation – a facet of 'IP memoirs' I will return to – serves to discursively fragment the maternal body into that of the birth mother and the 'real' mother and glosses over how indispensable the uterus and the female body *per se* are in every pregnancy – as the fetus is part of and supported by the female body's blood and hormone systems, a pregnant women's diet and healthy lifestyle are central to the healthy development of the fetus.[11]

Arieff, Clare, and O'Flaherty write before the backdrop of intense and mediated moral, ethical, and legal debates, about the pros and cons of transnational cross-racial gestational surrogacy which crystallises a plethora of intersectional issues, among them first and foremost constructions of race and class, negotiations of gender (roles), and re-framings of kinship.

'...EVEN THOUGH WE WILL BE WORLDS APART' (p. 205)

Adrienne Arieff begins her narrative with the representation of India as the exotic other – 'the carnival of life in the street' (p. 1), the heat, the 'riot of sensation' (p. 2) created a 'foreign planet. A dry, screaming-hot planet with no cheeseburgers' (p. 2). Her trip to India was a 'new adventure' (p. 3), the exploration of 'a brand-new frontier of emotional and ethical hills and valleys, without a clue as to where I'm headed' (p. 4). In Anand, the capital of India's surrogacy industry, Adrienne and her husband Alex seek to become parents with the help of Dr. Patel of *Oprah* fame. After multiple miscarriages, Adrienne, who could not afford a US surrogacy arrangement, moves into Anand's 'Surrogacy Camp' (p. 121). The relationship to the surrogate is one of cautious friendship or courtship, complicated by the language barrier. The chasm between the white middle-class American from the Bay area who wishes for a family and a cold martini, and the poor illiterate woman from an Indian village who hopes for a home with clean running water and an education for her children, remains a constant presence. Yet in view of, and despite the contractual arrangement they have made, Adrienne seeks bonds, harmony, understanding, and togetherness. She envies the surrogate; she misses the feeling of being pregnant, of having:

> …that connection that only a mother can have with a child when it is within her body, when that baby is wholly reliant on its mother to feed, shelter and protect it (...) I try hard to remember that I am not a failure. Alex and I have only come to this place in our journey after being through death and sorrow. (...) Yet, it is a double-edged sword. (...) As much as I feel guilt for what I have asked of Vaina, I am also envious. She is having an experience of my children that I will never understand myself (...) my heart still wishes that I could have carried all my children to term (95-96; 154-155).

[11] Just think of the serious negative impact smoking (e.g. Cooper et al., 2018) and alcohol consumption (e.g. Lan et al., 2017) have on the foetus.

Adrienne has her audience in mind; repeatedly she writes that she 'worried about what other people would think' of her decision to go to India (p. 35[12]); on every other page she justifies her action towards potential critics. Framed by liberal feminist thought, she decides to lobby for the freedom of choice of infertile women:

> 'I don't feel that I have anything to 'defend'. It was a choice that Alex, Vaina, and I all made willingly, and there's no reason for anyone to call our motivations or actions into question, and I am constantly educating everyone I know about every minute detail (...) I believe more firmly than ever that each couple should be granted the respect and privacy to make the fertility choice that is right for them' (p. 99-100).

The book is thus a liberal feminist pro-choice pamphlet just as much as a personal story of becoming a mother. It also is a couched PR for the clinic of Dr. Patel which has prospered into a state of the art modern medical facility. Yet Adrienne fends off criticism of lifestyle choice and the exploitation of other women by clearly stating that she had suffered and more than anything wished she had been able to carry her child herself. The depiction of her three miscarriages provides a glimpse of the hardships she had endured emotionally and physically over the years and serves as justification for the road finally taken. And there remained enough ache: stimulation of the ovaries through hormone shots for eleven days, accompanied by nausea, mood swings, sore muscles and growth of her four uterine fibroids each to the size of an orange, oocyte retrieval under full anesthesia. After years of being told that she was not performing well, that her body was deficient, even the number of eggs retrievable after hormone stimulation became an indicator of prowess: "Carlotta, who is my age, has four eggs, which is pretty good. Lynette has six, which is outstanding, and I think I detect a note of jealousy in the crowd as she announces her stellar sum" (p. 58). Adrienne has five. She performs well. Four are transplanted into the surrogate's uterus – a very high number *verboten* by many reproductive practitioners due to the high risk of multiple pregnancies! – two hatch and grow into twin daughters. She admits she does not feel like a mother right after their birth – "I wish that my mother were here to tell me what is normal, what is to be expected (...) I don't feel like a mother yet, but I'm getting to know my daughters" (p. 189, 191). She detects physical similarities, though, between herself, her husband and the twins which facilitates the bonding experience and establishes her visible and emotional 'claim' to the children. As a counter narrative to the socially constructed 'natural' mother-child bond, Adrienne presents a sacred triad of herself as intended and genetic mother, the surrogate as birth mother, and the twins.

Adrienne returns once more to India after the twin's birth and the relocation of the family to the USA. "My life is everything that I had ever hoped it would be. But something is missing. Some*one* is missing. And that someone is Vaina" (p. 217). In view of the poverty she encounters it becomes clear that any future connection to the surrogate mother will be extremely complicated. The money Vaina has earned has been spent on a taxi for her husband that he has already crashed and so Vaina plans to be a surrogate again – out of free choice? Adrienne at first sticks to the liberal feminist creed: "Vaina has found a marketable skill that allows her to be an independent woman. (...) [surrogacy] allows women like Vaina to do the good work that they do, with respect and honor, as they deserve" (p. 221). But she realises that Vaina's interest in her is predominantly commercial, because the family needs the money. The depictions make it quite clear that Vaina performs different roles – submissive wife, altruistic and caring birth mother; she is much more than just a carrier of a child ('good mother'), as well as a business woman eager to find a new client for her reproductive labour services ('good worker') (Pande, 2014: 64, 75); as Pande writes, reproduction and production collapse into each other (Pande, 2014: 9). Adrienne Arieff tries to do justice to the surrogate and her situation, yet at the same time to herself and to her children. With *The Sacred Thread* she creates (also) a romantic genesis story for her twins. But to be 'worlds apart' is and remains much more than a topographical category here.

'INDIA IS OUR TWINS' MOTHERLAND' (p. 300)

Susan Clare, too, depicts her journey to mothering as a story of a sick and suffering and hurt(ing) body – psychologically as well as physically. She provides a heart-wrenching depiction of three miscarriages, elucidates how incomplete and inadequate her infertility made her feel, and how traumatizing it was to be pregnant and lose the babies ('universal angst', p.157). She depicts how she agonized over whose 'fault' it was, until finally, after years of hope and destitution, her medical identity comes down to this autopathographic shorthand: "'I've got antiphospholipid antibodies and a bicornuate uterus and have had three miscarriages. The first two were late and there was nothing wrong with the babies'" (p. 142).

"There was nothing wrong with the babies" – so there must be something wrong with the woman. McLeod and Ponesse (2008) have underlined that women often morally blame themselves for infertility (p. 127) and thus revert to the pro-natalist and patriarchal motherhood discourse in order to justify their reproductive activities,

[12] See also e.g. p.10 and 94.

simultaneously employing the liberal feminist standpoint. Here, Vimla, the 23-year old surrogate, married, and mother to a five-year old boy, is depicted as strikingly beautiful, beaming, and literate (pp. 162-64). The fact that she could sign the surrogacy contract makes Susan feel morally reassured that Vimla is capable of informed consent, although Susan is aware that Vimla's schooling and education have in all probability been minimal. Five (!) embryos are implanted, and Vimla becomes pregnant with twins.[13]

When Susan and her husband are saying goodbye to Vimla, Susan asks: "'I hope you don't feel bad about surrogacy?' and Vimla "laughed. 'This has made a big difference to my life. You know what is exploiting? Working on a building site for fifteen hours a day, and earning seventy rupees, like my husband'" (p. 269). Instead of exploitative hard manual labour on a construction site for little pay, she can multiply her remunerations by selling her reproductive labour and becoming a reproductive service worker. But it is because Susan has the money that she can have a child, and it is this cultural moment that enables a white married middle class woman with fertility issues (from England) to hire another woman (from India) to carry her genetic baby to term. And Vimla is financially really challenged – so how much free choice is there, then? Is this not yet another case of exploitation, a commercialisation of pregnancy and objectification of the female body and self? Is this a form of slavery, where a woman on the basis of pecuniary inferiority connected to hierarchies of class and race, labours and produces wealth/children as commodities to increase the wealth of her 'owners'? Rudrappa (2015) has pointed out that the situation is more complex and suggested to take a closer, perhaps anthropological, look; she argues that since many women in India have experiences with work in manufacturing, such as the garment industry (that is to say, of low wages, long hours, no protections at the workplace, and high disposability of workers), they move rather smoothly from the production to the reproduction industry:

> In Bangalore's garment factories, women constantly shift from being valuable workers to becoming waste. (...) Over time they felt used up, their physical and emotional health compromised, and their lives slowly destroyed. However, they need to pay the rent, put food on the table, and educate their children so they could hopefully escape a life of precarity. Under these circumstances Bangalore's reproduction industry offered hope" (Rudrappa, 2015: 91-92).

In all 'IP memoirs,' the gestational host is presented as a free and independent woman who has the right and ability to make decisions about her body; logically, if she wants to 'rent out her womb', she should have every right to do so. For Susan, the burden of guilt and failure caused by her infertility was finally taken off her shoulders (p. 132), the responsibility for the pregnancy and birth was no longer hers and, in contrast to Adrienne, who longed to spend as much time as possible in India with her surrogate during the pregnancy, the geographical distance turns out to be liberating: "When I was carrying my own babies, the daily scares of potential miscarriage kept me in a perpetual state of fear, but now I almost welcomed the separation I experienced" (p. 198f.).

The memoir makes no attempt to hide the chasm of class difference and power imbalance that exists between our author/now mummy and the gestational host. It does not gloss over another constitutive element of all 'IP memoirs:' the difficulty an intended parent often faces once the baby is materially there: it is yours, but you were not pregnant with it and you did not give birth to it, and you cannot breastfeed it – so how much of a mother are you? The role of the mother is conceived of as an assemblage of aspects or job descriptions, and Susan is 'incomplete', her gender role under-performed, her identity as a mother 'crippled' since she cannot fulfil all the parameters of 'being a proper mother'. In order to countermand this 'deficit', the genetic-as-natural bond between child and intended mother is accentuated. Since the intended mother is the passive part during both pregnancy and birth, she actively works on the narrative creation of her self as mother and the textual disappearance of the hired other. Although "India is our twins' motherland," Vimla, the Indian surrogate, has done nothing more than 'looked after Freya and Louis throughout the pregnancy' (p. 300). Her role as birthmother is downplayed as one of carer or kindergarten teacher.

> We paid a high price going to India – not only financially but emotionally as well. Our whole surrogacy journey cost us about £20,000 and was one that was fraught with complications due to the twins' early arrival and the bureaucracy involved with bringing the babies home. But we didn't feel that we had a choice. Our three months in India was a necessary evil [sic!] in our quest to have children. (p. 299)

At this point, the surrogate mother is eclipsed from the narrative, and the emotional price Susan had to pay is here reduced to the worries caused by the twins' premature birth, their health issues, and the bureaucratic troubles they must endure. Although Susan calls India the twins' 'motherland,' it seems there is no more than a light metaphorical meaning to this. After all, Susan is the mother, and she takes the twins home to England, and she has the authorial power to reduce the birthmother to a person who merely 'looked after Freya and Louis

[13] Freya and Louis had a difficult start; they were born prematurely, weighing 2kg and 2.2kg respectively, and Louis needed weeks of neonatal care.

throughout the pregnancy' (p. 300). Whereas Adrienne and Caroline emphasise the value and importance of the journey – literally and metaphorically – here the time in India is 'a necessary evil.' This was not by means an easy journey. And this memoir as a matriography also illustrates vividly how strong the desire to be a mother can be, and to what lengths women go to achieve this 'goal'. Part of the reasons given for this strong desire (bordering on an obsession) is certainly an intrinsic urge and desire to be a mom – not having children creates a 'void' and thus a child would 'make my life complete' (p. 112). However, underpinning her desire is surely a heteronormative value, that of the ideal woman who is just not fulfilled or lived up to without being a mother, too.[14] This idealised form of femininity manufactures competitiveness amongst women: Susan 'had passed every test and exam I'd ever taken, but I'd failed in the ultimate test – to be a mother' (p. 112). And secondly it produces envy: she 'felt more and more estranged from people who had babies. (...) I resented people who got pregnant and had children effortlessly and I kicked myself for feeling that way' (p. 111f.). In autopathographic mode, Susan others herself by depicting her own body as deficient, sick and 'letting her down,' and contrasting that with the 'normal woman' which is itself a discursively created ideal: "That was what I wanted more than anything in the world, to be like everyone else, to be like every other woman who watches in amazement as her stomach grows bigger as the weeks go by and then experiences the wonder of childbirth" (p. 129). By narratively constructing and idealising 'every other woman,' she ostracises herself; the glorified 'wonder of childbirth' is not granted to her, the 'deficient failure'. This narrative mechanism, so typically pervasive in 'IP memoirs,' is a serious, worrying matter. But for Susan, the 'quest' has been successful, and 'it was all worth it.' This story is not only one of suffering, but also one of resistance, resilience, reconciliation and healing (Harris, 2003: p. 1). "Even the pain from the miscarriages began to fade. (...) My determination paid off and I was given the greatest gift" (p. 299).

'IT'S JUST TECHNOLOGY' (pos. 1919)

Baby Ava follows the same narrative strategies in relating the long and excruciatingly painful journey Caroline O'Flaherty and her husband Niall had to make to finally be parents. Yet it is a special 'IP memoir' for at least four reasons: it also depicts a (failed) adoption journey, part of it is told from the narrative perspective of the father/husband Niall, it was a legal precedent case in Ireland, and mother Caroline and daughter Ava became a big newsmedia story, the 'Woman and Child Not Allowed Home' (Chapter 16, pos. 3316).

Caroline O'Flaherty was diagnosed with cervical cancer at age 27, underwent experimental and radical treatment and this deeply painful and devastating experience left its marks on her body and her psyche. Her only possibility to carry a child would have been IVF/ICSI, with all the accompanying strains and low chances of success; Caroline, deeply traumatised by her cancer experience, decided not to go down that road; instead, she and her husband Niall chose 'the adoption option' (pos. 754). Their 'bureaucratic expedition' is described as a *rite de passage* dominated by constant scrutiny and judgment by authorities; the ways and degrees of being vetted – 'medically, socially, financially, legally, you name it' (pos. 775) – became so humiliating and draining to the couple, that they finally withdrew from the process; the 'adoption option' had taken five years, weighed heavily on each of them and on their relationship, and come to nothing. When the couple saw a TV-documentary featuring Dr. Patel and her Indian clinic, they began to consider surrogacy in India.

Caroline does not really buy into any of the points of criticism that have been raised against transnational gestational surrogacy in the Global South. In great detail she presents the terms of the contractual agreement, and the processes at the clinic which all aimed to ensure that the parties involved were well-informed and the processes consensual. Her narrative normalises ART and surrogacy; she creates an atmosphere of rationality, transparency and organisational clarity which may serve at least two purposes: to criticise via positive counter-example the adoption process in Ireland, and secondly, to diffuse potential counter imaginaries of nebulous deals and exploitative practices in 'rundown,' unsanitary conditions in Indian clinics (pos. 1332). She also emphasises the diligent care Dr. Patel provides for her surrogates as well as for her commissioning clients. In Caroline's rendition, the surrogacy hostels are not luxurious from a Western point of comparison, but given the general situation in India, these hostels – with clean running water, electricity, good medical care and no physical work chores for the surrogates – are a comfortable hotel and thus a far cry from any orientalist stereotype of institutionalised surveillance, disenfranchisement, and objectified medicalised bodies. "The money end of thing" (pos. 1425) is important – after all it is 'cheap' for the Intended Parents and highly 'profitable' for the Indian women – but in her story and, as she retells it, also in the conversations with the clinic and the surrogate Nita, the narrative rhetoric of altruistic gift-giving is accentuated. Money needs to change hands to cover costs at the clinic and to compensate Nita, who clearly states that the money is essential for her family, but reassures Caroline and the reader that it is not the primary motivation. However, Caroline also reports that the relationship between her and Nita becomes difficult when Nita expresses her wish to serve as Ava's nanny (which the clinic strongly discourages), and when

[14] For in-depth discussions of infertility and infertility discourses in general please see Inhorn and van Belen (2002) and Jensen (2016).

she visits on various occasions the hotel where intended mother and newborn were to stay, and finally begins to request personal items, like clothes and toys for her two children and a mobile phone for herself; Caroline willingly buys some things and then 'gradually eased off' (pos. 2938). Just as with Adrienne Arieff's surrogate, there remains a low-key storyline involving the complex relationship between the rich visitors from the Global North and the poor Global Southerners in which both parties take on different, sometimes nearly contradictory, roles oscillating between difference and sameness. The IP performs as the woman not different from the surrogate, 'just infertile', and thus reliant on the other's (altruistic) help to become a mother, too, but also as the rich person hiring a gestational surrogate, as 'another form of development aid, with the hiring couple playing the role of brave missionaries battling all odds to help the needy' (Pande, 2014: 101). The surrogate accordingly shifts between what Pande has called the roles of 'good mother' – emphasising how much she cares for the child(ren) she carries – and 'good worker' – diligently abiding by the contract, but also trying to (re)negotiate some of the terms to her advantage.

However, despite the plethora of thorny issues surrounding the practice, for the O'Flaherty's there is nothing fundamentally wrong with commercial gestational surrogacy in India and when it comes to the surrogacy itself, they even follow a deterministic line of argument; surrogacy is 'just technology and you can't hold back the advancement of science, despite how hard you try' (pos. 1919). If it is 'just a technology,' then is the surrogate, too, nothing other than a cog in the machinery, a maternal body as receptacle, devoid of maternal attributes?

While Caroline remains in India to nurture the newborn child named Ava, her husband stays at home in Ireland fighting the legal battle against the courts; this may remind some readers of the classical heteropatriarchal role model. In Chapter 16, the narrative perspective begins to shift back and forth between Caroline and Niall. He provides a detailed explanation of the legal situation in Ireland, including the five essential pieces of legislation he has identified that supports the situation of his family, citing sections and clauses of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, the Passport Act, the Guardianship of Infants Act, the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. He also narrates that he wrote to politicians and Government departments explaining their case, the appropriate pieces of legislation, asking for support. "Despite my pleas for the individuals to respond in person, they never did" (pos. 3327). Through the courts, Niall and his legal team finally succeeded, Ava was issued an Irish passport, and Niall could fly to India to bring his family home.[15]

More than the other two 'IP memoirs,' this is written before the backdrop and experience of a legal battle and high media exposure. Caroline's brother had set up a Facebook page "Bring Ava Home," and even in India, there were many media teams trying to film and interview her, the surrogates, and clinic staff.[16] It appears as if these factors guided the compositional strategy of the memoir: in order to lobby for legal change in Ireland, the couple emphasises the deep trauma, the pains of infertility, the ordeal of the (failed) adoption process in Ireland, the transparency and decency of gestational surrogacy in India, their battle over Ava's human right to national citizenship, and the conventionally happy ending of finally being mom and dad. 'IP memoirs' write against notions that surrogacy is an 'opt-out' for the wealthy few who just do not want the potential discomforts of pregnancy and birth ('too posh to push') and who therefore simply wanto to 'buy a child in India'. The O'Flaherty's aim to disseminate information about surrogacy and lobby for legislative change in Ireland, so that finally, Irish citizens who become parents via cross-border reproductive care are no longer in legal limbo.

CONCLUSION

"There is a thin line between paternalism and exploitation when considering the surrogate's needs. Similarly, there is a thin line for the intended parents between reproductive autonomy and accountability" (Braverman et al., 2012: 304). Thus, all memoirs by intended parents are situated in an extraordinary force field. They serve to explain and justify the action taken to finally be (a) parent(s), being rather reminiscent of a confessional-meets-how-to-manual. The intended audience/implied reader might look for advice and support, but also be highly critical of surrogacy arrangements. The authors (re)present themselves, their bodies and their deficits, in a form of quasi-confessional, with extremely intimate health and medical details engaging with, contesting, yet at the same time also reinscribing the cultural norms of health and sickness as well as patriarchal motherhood and pro-natalism. To justify and explain why they want a child so much, the narratives often revert to notions of the sick body which deserves treatment, confronting the parents' own trauma of incapability (Marsh and Ronner, 1996: 252-253) through a scriptotherapeutic quest taking them from hopes to pain and ordeal to ultimate happiness: a child. They

[15] For an anthropological 'version' of this story cf. Deomampo (2015), providing more detailed background on national citizenship and family law (examples India, USA and Norway) and bringing together various previous research threads from e.g. Gupta, Imrie and Jadva, Pande, Krolokke, Spar, Steiner, Teman.

[16] Cf. also the BBC World Service radio episode *Your World: Womb for Rent* (2011).

idealise heteronormative mothering and motherhood as something they cannot imagine living without. This desire for a child is – as all needs and desires are – partly socially produced (Marsh and Ronner, 1996: 252) and infertility, a medical condition, is also culturally framed and deeply embedded in discourses about true motherhood and pro-natalist worldviews (Jensen 2016). But then a third term is added to the mother-child equation – the genetic mother. Despite the sacred/natural bond emphasised by the gender essentialists, an IP can also claim a child as hers. And because she is 'incomplete', she will do her best to make amends and be 'super mom', steeped in the romantic-repressive antics of 'new momisms' and 'intensive mothering'.

With transnational surrogacy arrangements the matrix becomes even more complex: we are confronted with a huge and multilayered subtext about various potentially exploitative practices made possible by systemic inequities – (post)colonialism, biocapital, neoliberalism and global trafficking in human bodies and body parts to name a few. Gestational surrogacy, understood as a very special form of bodily labour, is articulated via a veneer of altruistic rhetoric, with deep financial and emotional needs lurking underneath. To depict the practice as a 'win-win' (people desire a child and can pay, other people live in financially dire straits and offer to 'help') can easily gloss over many knotty issues such as potential exploitation, commodification, colonisation and disenfranchisement. But, as Pande (2014) and Rudrappa (2015) have cautioned, we must keep in mind the lived realities. Indian surrogates are dominated and controlled by patriarchal insititutions of family, clinic and state. They live in a culture where women are considered inferior human beings, frequently victims of gender-based abortions, child labour, prostitution, forced marriage, gang rapes and wife burning. Pande's and Rudrappa's intersectional analyses of surrogates' lives in India have exposed such reproductive oppression. The work of carrying a child for someone else can even carry moral value, as compared to the work of producing a T-shirt for, let's say, GAP, and a surrogacy hostel can be a 'curiously liberating place' (Rudrappa, 2015: 94), offering time free from familial duties and full of life affirmation. This complicates the narrative of exploitation and turns an 'unalienable life experience [in]to an alienable form of employment for which they received wages' (Rudrappa, 2015: 99). Such surrogates negotiate a form of agency in which they should not be deprived, after all. The 'IP memoirs' revert to this line of argument to justify reproductive actions and pathways towards parenthood and write against Western feminist neoliberal thought inclined to condemn surrogacy outright.

In the end, one crucial factor in all the discourses and debates should not be forgotten: the children. So far, they surface in public discourse primarily in the context of custody disputes, matters of nationality, and in their parents' reproductive stories. Although scholars such as W. Penn Handwerker had proclaimed already in 1990: "The birth of a child is a political event" (as quoted in Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998:1) although Sharon Stephens had pointed out that 'there is no way of insulating children from the 'culture politics' of everyday life' (in 1995; (as quoted in Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998: 2) and Scheper-Hughes and Sargent had four years later demanded a radical paradigm shift towards a child-centred anthropology, scholarship on reproduction and ART to date has hardly begun to move in this direction. In the medical sciences, research on the overall health and thriving of ART children is growing, and a priority should be to explore what it means to be gestated by a woman who is neither your genetic nor your social mother? And why, in view of the proliferation of stories by people so desperate to become parents that they undergo myriad cycles of treatments, revert to egg and/or sperm donation, and often also seek the assistance of a surrogate, is there no conversation, really, about why there is so much social pressure on people to be parents and mothers?

No matter what our individual take is on all of these issues – 'IP memoirs' are also about the first chapters of babies' biographies and maybe, despite all our academic abstractions, the children deserve that their personal creation and identity-constituting stories should also be enfolded by the warmth of a little romance, after all.

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'Motherhood in Childhood': Generational Change in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the changing place of 'motherhood' in the lives of girls and young women in Ethiopia, from a generational, life course perspective. It focuses on 'motherhood in childhood' in the context of rapid social change, drawing on multi-generational narratives from young women, their mothers and grandmothers, as part of *Young Lives*, a fifteen-year study that has traced the life trajectories of a group of girls growing up in poverty. Marriage and motherhood in childhood in past generations was the norm but has increasingly come to be seen as incompatible with the expectations for modern female childhood. A growing discourse of female empowerment suggests significant expansion of 'choice' for girls, but closer inspection of girls' lived experiences of marriage and motherhood suggests a more complex, uneven, picture. Girls face multiple, sometimes contradictory messages regarding the kinds of respectable life paths they should pursue. Their sense of expanded horizons in childhood is easily diminished when they become young mothers, highlighting the persistent influence of poverty and the feminisation of reproductive roles and the ambiguous nature of their agency across time.

Keywords: motherhood, childhood, Ethiopia, poverty, generational change

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the changing place of 'motherhood' in the lives of girls and young women in Ethiopia from a generational, life course perspective. It employs the concept of 'motherhood in childhood'[1] to refer to pregnancy, motherhood and mothering among girls under age 18, and as a lens through which to examine changing discourses of child wellbeing in the country.[2] The analysis centres on multi-generational narratives from young women, their mothers and grandmothers, as part of *Young Lives*, a fifteen-year study that has traced the life trajectories of a group of girls growing up in poverty.[3] These narratives make it possible to examine the social value given to, and roles of marriage and motherhood in, life trajectories towards womanhood, and to highlight changes in these values and practices across three generations (Thomson, 2008). In past generations, marriage and motherhood in childhood was the norm but has increasingly come to be seen as incompatible with expectations for modern childhood. In earlier generations, girls across Ethiopia were often betrothed during the early phase of middle childhood, or even before then, while marriage was generally arranged before puberty (Pankhurst et al., 2016). The current expectation that girls will delay marriage and motherhood until after the teen years represents a crucial revision in the 'temporal norms' of girlhood (Freeman, 2010, cited in Thomson and Baraitser, 2018: 68). Influenced by international advocates and organisations operating in Ethiopia, whose concern has been to promote children's and women's rights and endorsed by government policy, these changes reflect a growing popular discourse of female empowerment that claims significant expansion of 'choice' for girls. Nevertheless, closer inspection of girls' lived experiences, including their experiences of marriage and motherhood, indicates a more complex, uneven, picture. The concept of motherhood in childhood in this article is used as a heuristic device to

[1] See UNFPA 2013 and UNFPA 2015 where we first encountered this term.

[2] This definition of childhood, in which age 18 is the upper threshold, is the one endorsed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Ethiopian Government. Until recently, social definitions of childhood in Ethiopia did not refer to chronological age. But the government definition is employed widely in law, policy and practice, and therefore is increasingly influential in shaping popular understandings and discourse.

[3] The terms 'young women', 'young mothers', and 'younger generation' are used to distinguish between the young women in the core sample and the two older generations of women, termed 'older women', 'older mothers', 'grandmothers', 'previous generations'.

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think critically about the polyvocality of young mothers who straddle and navigate multiple social categories of girlhood and motherhood, these having been shown to be fluid, rather than fixed, categories in girls' transitions to adulthood (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). Our evidence suggests that girls contend with multiple, sometimes contradictory, messages regarding the kinds of respectable life paths they should pursue, and their choices continue to be constrained by many of the challenges related to poverty and to living in a patriarchal society that earlier generations of girls and young women faced.

Ethiopia offers an apt context for exploring these intergenerational and life course dynamics owing to its position as one of the world's fastest growing economies; recent improvements in access to public services; and the popularity of 'empowerment' programmes for girls and women. Despite these important developments, there is a dearth of first-hand accounts of women's changing experiences of marriage and motherhood and their relation to notions of childhood and adulthood. The Government has committed to end child marriage by 2025, and as a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, sets the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years; unions before this age are termed 'child marriages' in line with international policy.[4] The Government defines child marriage as a 'harmful traditional practice' and emphasises the victimhood of affected girls. With the aim of eliminating the practice through attitudinal and behavioural change and supported by international actors, it has prohibited child marriage in law and mounted awareness-raising campaigns.[5] Overall rates of child marriage have declined and maternal age at first-time birth has risen across Ethiopia, although the rate of change has varied by region (CSA and ICF International, 2012; Mekonnen et al., 2018; Teklu et al., 2013).

However, girls continue to marry and become parents during childhood and indeed are far more likely to do so than are boys. On the assumption that education is both a deterrent and a pathway to social mobility, measures aimed at eliminating marriage and motherhood in childhood are complemented by extensive efforts to promote girls' education.

'Motherhood in childhood' offers a window into the changing roles that girls play in rearranging the constraints under which they marry and begin child bearing (LeVine, 2011), for which we draw on a range of view points, including scholarship addressing critical perspectives on children's agency in global context (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012; Lancy, 2012), the standpoints of marginalised mothers (hooks, 2007), and feminist concerns around women's empowerment in developing countries (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010) and across the life course (Kabeer, 2018).

CURRENT STUDY

The article draws on survey and qualitative data generated with young women, their mothers, grandmothers and guardians as part of *Young Lives,* a comparative, longitudinal study of childhood poverty.[6] Young Lives has been documenting the life trajectories of two age cohorts of children and young people (girls and boys) in Ethiopia since 2002.[7] In addition to five survey rounds with 3,000 young people and their households across twenty communities, a nested subsample of 60 girls and boys and their families participated in four waves of qualitative research (from the age of 12 to 20) in five localities, plus a follow-up study on young marriage and parenthood in 2015. Repeat biographical interviews and group discussions with multiple generations explored everyday experiences of poverty, risk and childhood. 'Motherhood' was not a core aspect of the original research, but intimate relationships, and marital and maternal transitions began to feature in interviews as the cohorts reached their teen years. A wide yet strategic net is cast across the dataset to capture experiences of first-time motherhood, focusing on life course narratives and biographical 'timeline' drawings created with girls and their mothers, grandmothers and guardians.[8] Thematic and biographical analyses are combined within and across cases and for generational pairs of daughters and mothers. Survey data locate the qualitative findings in wider patterns of the cohort. More than one in three of the young women had married by age 22 (nearly half of them by age 18).[9] One in ten had given birth by age 18, rising to over 1 in 4 by age 22 (Woldehanna et al, 2018). The number of young women who bore children outside of marriage or co-habitation was extremely low (Briones and Porter, 2019).

[4] We acknowledge national legal differences and socio-cultural variation in the definition of a child.
[5] Growth and Transformation Plan II (2015/16-2019/20), page 56.
[6] www.younglives.org.uk
[7] We focus on the older cohort, born in 1994.
[8] Main data sources: qualitative longitudinal case study research (2007, 2008, 2011, 2014); child marriage and parenthood sub-study (2015); and a sub-study on children's work (2013).
[9] In stark contrast 7% of young men had married by age 18 and 2% had fathered a child by age 22.

HOW PATRIARCHY SHAPES WHAT IT MEANS TO GROW UP A GIRL

Despite the decline in marriage and motherhood in childhood, comparison of the experiences of the generation of females born in 1994 with those of previous generations of women makes clear that patriarchal forces have remained very strong across the years, these forces consistently challenging potentially progressive aspects of government policy. This is despite significant changes through the generations in what it means to grow up a girl. In essence, power is distributed unequally across generations and genders and gender roles are relatively prescriptive, particularly in rural areas, so that girls and women are assigned reproductive roles and responsibilities that are lower in status than the productive roles undertaken by boys and men (Heissler and Porter, 2013). Generally, girls and young women lack the authority to act independently, with the expectation that elder kin will influence the age at which they marry and the choice of partner, these unions creating economic and social alliances between families that are formalised through bride price, dowry and other transactions (Boyden et al., 2013; Chuta, 2017).

There are notable spatial variations in relation to marriage practices and forms of marriage payments and their implications for age of marriage and in structural societal differences between elites and wealthy families and commoners and the importance of alliances sometimes promoting child marriage. In Goody's typology (1976) comparing systems of Eurasian systems of dowry and African systems of bridewealth, Ethiopia being at the crossroads, exhibited both types, with dowry common in the northern part of Tigray and bridewealth in much of the south. There were also intermediary forms such as that commonly found in the central Amhara areas with an ideology of matching endowments from the groom's and the bride's kin. Recent Ethiopian literature raises some doubts about Goody's typology, such as Heran Sereke-Brhan's (2002, 2005) historical work on nineteenth century elite marriages that revealed the importance of marriages in forming alliances among the nobility and forging links across ethnic groups, and studies of earlier historical records of women's roles providing evidence of the degree of autonomy and agency exercised by certain categories of women (Belcher, 2015). The prevalence of early-teen and even pre-teen marriage was historically much more common in the north where dowry types of marriage were the norm. Rather than delaying girls' marriage while parents searched for a suitable match, this led to competition for arranging marriages early, with the nobility and more wealthy households seeking to arrange early betrothals. Among the Oromo, marriage by abduction or elopement was often considered a legitimate form of marriage particularly for poorer men unable to pay the bridewealth but requiring subsequent lesser compensatory reconciliatory payments (Cerulli, 1956; Holcomb, 1973). The ethnographic literature is not very explicit on early marriage, in part since age is often not considered a diacritical factor, though there are frequent references to girls marrying earlier than boys (see Boyden et al., 2013). There is scant ethnographic evidence on the age of marriage in southern Ethiopia, with more concern about prescribed and proscribed partners.

Older women in this study said that they had lacked agency in marital decision-making and several highlighted their suffering in these situations, and yet they often did so while also endorsing the ideal of marriage and motherhood in childhood. Haftey's grandmother (Tigray region), who was married at age 9, was keen to arrange her granddaughter's marriage when the girl was 16, despite recalling—with a mixture of pain and humour—the suffering her own generation experienced when married off young:

> "They just covered our faces, made us sit us on the mule and sent us to the men. Then, we cried when we went there [laughing]… we tried to escape, we'd hide ourselves and they'd beat us… You are called a bride and you just sit… you know that you have to sleep with a man, then you cry when you have pain [laughing]."

The pressure on women to conform is reinforced by the understanding, shared by women of all ages and across all research sites, that attaining social adulthood is contingent upon marriage and motherhood, this conferring enormous symbolic value on both transitions. Alternative sources of social affirmation were especially limited for older generations, as one mother emphasised, "during [my] time, a girl could do nothing better than marry. There was no other role for us." But even younger women reserved the status of 'woman' for those who mere married; one group in Addis Ababa did not regard unmarried females, no matter their age, as women. Others confirmed this, "in Ethiopian culture, it is difficult for a girl to live unmarried," so "a female has to get married and have children". Marriage also held significant instrumental value and was often cited as a solution to poverty, livelihood insecurity and social marginalisation among women, especially when the husbands were educated and/or older than their partners (cf Archambault, 2011). [10] For many women in the older generations, motherhood too was instrumentalised, insofar as having many children was taken as an insurance against infant mortality: "When you have a baby, you don't know what's going to happen to them. Some of them will be sick, but if [my daughter] gives birth to six children that's going to be the safest as it can compensate for the loss" (Older mother).

[10] In the Round 5 survey, the average age gap between young women and their husbands was seven years (Briones and Porter, 2019).

Given the centrality of marriage and motherhood to womanhood, parents are sometimes complicit in entrapping girls into marrying against their will. Chaltu's older sister died one year into her marriage; under the local custom of *membeto* (substitution for a deceased sister) the husband requested that his in-laws provide another wife. He was given another older sister, then aged 16. But she escaped before the wedding ceremony and Chaltu was offered as a substitute. When Chaltu objected, she was told that marriage is a 'chance' rather than a choice and that she should accept her fate. Eventually, her parents orchestrated her abduction by the man's family and she was married, aged 14, to a man of 40. Although Chaltu's case could be regarded as somewhat exceptional for the younger generation born in 1994, not least because of her age, there was no clear consensus among the younger women as to what age is 'too young' or 'too old' to marry. That said, unmarried girls occupy evidently an ambiguous status and if they remain single for too long risk being ridiculed as *arjitalech* ('she has become old') or *qumo qer* (unmarriageable, literally 'remaining standing'). "If a girl is late to get married, everybody says shocking words to her as if she is born to be dependent on her parents. Other people ask her why she doesn't get married and why she doesn't go out of the house." Unmarried girls may be ascribed behavioural attributes that are disapproved, as explained by young mothers in a rural village: "The community has a positive attitude about married girls because they are perceived as organised and integrated persons. If a girl is not married she is perceived as disorganised… going about, here and there, and is disrespected". They are thought to be liable to engaging in pre-marital sex, risking pregnancies that are neither planned nor socially endorsed, thereby tarnishing personal and familial reputations. Delaying marriage for too long is also thought to limit women's marriage options to divorcees, widowers, or polygamous arrangements.

As in the past, marriage and motherhood remain sources of respect and social recognition for the younger generation of women, and in some localities were said to also facilitate access to land and married women's groups. Accordingly, gendered expectations of this generation continued to centre on mastery of appropriate reproductive skills, as in previous generations. Valued moral attributes include responsibility, respect, obedience and modesty, and hard work and practical skills in the domestic arena are also prized (Boyden, 2012; Poluha, 2004). Teaching girls to learn domestic skills is considered one of the primary responsibilities of older women, as is the imperative to raise the young to be morally and socially acceptable to others (Ruddick, 2007/1983). A woman from Addis Ababa explained; "all girls at this time and in the past have domestic responsibility" and "if the girl fails to learn these things it reflects failure of the mother so they keep their daughters busy with housework". According to a group of urban older mothers, the window of opportunity to inculcate these skills must not be missed: "Unless a girl is shaped and let to know about all the household activities before she sees her menstruation, it becomes difficult to shape her personality after her period."

Mothering is also a valued form of labour (hooks 2007/1984), described by some as 'motherwork' (Collins 2007/1991, 2007/1993) to place emphasis on those aspects of mothering that have to do with ensuring the physical and social survival of the young in contexts of economic and social inequality. In Ethiopia girls typically begin preparing for 'motherwork' at around age 5, and by age 12 many regularly undertake domestic chores unsupervised, some also assuming responsibility for tending to ill parents and grandparents, occasionally taking time away from schooling. The skills young women are expected to acquire are very precise, and often focus on cooking, as one mother indicated with regard to her daughter:

> [P]reparing *injera* (flatbread), *tlews* (baking), brews good suwa (local drink) for her husband, making good *gogo* (local bread). She has to be a woman who is ready with boiled and cooked food when the husband comes home after farming and making good business in the market.

For some of the girls in the younger generation the pressure to fulfil domestic responsibilities in the natal household and the desire for independence were key motivations for marriage: "We served our family so far, so we need to marry early and build up our own family.' Haymanot (who married at age 15) compared herself to her unmarried friends: "They are still dependent on their parents, but I live independently… [L]iving an independent life is good, dependency is not good." Similarly, Tirhas felt that she had gained social status through marriage: "I could have a comfortable life with my parents but people respect you when you are married. It is not common for a matured girl to live with her parents." However, for some, marriage simply marked a shift from a childhood relationship constrained by parental authority to a marital one restricted by spousal control. That young women bear a significant domestic burden following marriage is supported by the survey data, which show that young married women, aged 19, were spending up to 8 hours a day on unpaid work and care (Crivello and Espinoza, 2018: 148). Such patterns reflected the naturalisation of rigid gender norms that assigned men the role of 'breadwinners' and women, carers. Young mothers in one community argued: "the man has the decision-making power and the wife has to be polite and obedient." The man "administers the family" and "the wife is administered by her husband." Their narratives also contrasted the substantial weight of maternal responsibility with men's abnegation of their obligations, some claiming that men were 'useless' at childcare. When asked if their husbands helped, one group replied: "Nothing! [laughter]… How can a man help?"

EXPECTATIONS AROUND FIRST-TIME MOTHERHOOD

Given this context, the issue was not so much whether girls would marry or bear children, but when. Once married, young women faced considerable pressure to conceive and failure to do so invited the castigation of husbands ("we didn't marry a wife to eat together") and in-laws ("she is infertile and she came just to feed herself"), with motherhood also cited as necessary in preventing divorce. Many respondents regarded motherhood as a vehicle for personal fulfilment, as giving life meaning and ensuring contentment. One mother envisioned her daughter's 'bright future' through the image of "her *mahzel* [traditional sling for carrying infants] and *lig'e* [the colostrum]" and commented "I just want to see her have children…" Similarly, a 'comfortable life' for a young woman was said to entail "having two to three cows, seeing her hair oiled with butter, drinking milk, carrying her child, remembering her mother..." Young mothers echoed: "Having a child is above everything. We get happiness for giving love and affection to our children"; "children are jewels to women"; "it is impossible to live without children"; and "I would like to have four or five children to make them fill the house… my mother has eight children and when we come together we fill the house to create a joyful family."

Motherhood was also thought to be central to a girl's sense of personhood and self-worth, "a mother has to live for her baby once she gives birth". Some women perceived their physical presence to be expressed through that of their babies. One had considered avoiding breastfeeding in a bid to retain her youthful appearance, but changed her mind on the grounds that "after giving birth, my beauty is my baby." The conflation of a woman's identity with her maternal role was institutionalised in some communities by naming new parents after their first born child. Many young mothers experienced this re-naming as a social affirmation rather than a loss of identity. Similarly, successful motherwork was conceived as a *social* practice rather than an innate personal attribute. For Chaltu, married at age 14, the measure of a good mother was not the quality of the dyadic mother-child relationship, but rather: "To become a good mother, a woman has to create good relationships with the community members. She has to perform different activities for her household and for the community members… Now I am a matured woman." Some argued that first-time motherhood was crucial for a woman's social maturation. Tirhas, who gave birth at age 15, reasoned, "[I] became mature especially after I gave birth. At the beginning, I was acting like a child. I got angry about little things and he [baby's father] used to just tolerate me."

Despite these abiding norms around motherhood, ideas about first-time motherhood are certainly changing and a sizeable proportion of women in the older generation thought that marriage and motherhood were incompatible with childhood. Only 14 per cent of surveyed parents/guardians expected their daughters (then aged 12) to marry before age 20, and most expected they would not have their first child until around age 21 to 30 (71 per cent). That said, the picture is very complex. For example, even though a group of young rural mothers identified 20 as the normative age for first time motherhood in their community, they had all given birth by age 16. In fact, the most recent survey (n= 366) indicated that by age 20, 1 out of 3 young women in rural areas had given birth before age 18 (n=59), while none of those in urban areas had given birth before age 18 (n=12). Only 3 girls in the sample (all from rural areas) had given birth below age 15.

In qualitative narratives, some women expressed doubt about the suitability of motherhood for very young girls. For example, reflecting on her own experience, a woman from Addis Ababa indicated:

> "As I was too young when I gave birth to my first child, I had little responsibility… My mother was responsible for caring for the child… I went out to play … Regarding my second child (I gave birth six months ago), I realized the beauty of having a child… Now my mother is not with me. I provide full support to the child. There is quite a difference in the experience between my first and second time of giving birth."

Mulu's mother also had a very mixed experience of marriage and seemed in no hurry to marry Mulu off. She was married off at age 10 to a 20 year-old man: "Our marriage was through our parents… He saw me and asked his parents if he could marry me… my parents agreed." She divorced him after three years, remarried at age 14, divorcing again at age 20 and remarrying at age 21. She had six children altogether. In contrast, at age 22 and intent on completing her education before starting a family, Mulu remained unmarried and was enrolled at university. For some of the older women, raising the age of first-time motherhood was important for breaking intergenerational cycles of suffering. Two mothers noted, "I have suffered a lot and I don't want her and her own children to suffer like me" and "I had nine children but I suffered a lot. So I don't want her to suffer like me."

THE PART PLAYED BY SCHOOLING IN REVISING GENDER SCRIPTS

Even though motherhood and marriage continue to be core to female trajectories through the early life-cycle, the teenage years of girls born in 1994 look quite different from those of previous generations. The expansion of

Table 1. Comparison of primary and secondary school completion by younger and older generation

	Primary certificate (grades 1-8)		Secondary certificate (grades 9-10)	
%	Young women	Mother/female guardian	Young women	Mother/female guardian
Urban	93.8	32.7	80.2	18.4
Rural	72.3	6	51.7	3.2

(Source: Young Lives Round 5 Survey, 2016)

formal schooling—especially at secondary level—signalled a major intergenerational shift in the Young Lives sample (c.f. LeVine 2011). Many of the older women had grown up in communities without schools. Others were excluded because girls' education was not valued: "if a woman tried to go to school she would be discouraged by being told that women's education means nothing" (Older women's group discussion). One woman explained that her parents were illiterate and saw no purpose in educating girls, so tore up her school notebooks. Another said: "My parents were not aware of the benefits of education. They knew only marriage and house work."

By contrast, all three generations of women held schooling to be fundamental to the lives of girls born in 1994; this generation was far more likely to go to school and to remain there through their teens. Whereas 21 per cent of the parental generation never went to school, this applied to only 4 per cent of the younger generation (males and females), and a quarter of whom reached post-secondary level, compared to just 6 per cent of their parents. As **Table 1** shows, differences in school completion between girls (n=433) and their mothers/guardians (n=431) were especially stark; the widest gaps being between urban young women and rural older women.

Regarded as the most important route out of poverty and towards better lives, education was cited as central to a 'good childhood' for the younger generation; 99 per cent of those surveyed at the age of twelve (n=980) saw education as being 'essential for my future life'. When surveyed three years later, 93 per cent (girls and boys) agreed with the idea that if they studied hard at school, they would be rewarded with a better job in the future (Tafere, 2014: 9). Girls' parents hoped that education would bring their daughters work in the future: "[B]eginning from her early childhood, I wanted my daughter to finish a university education and get a good job so that she pays back what I have invested in her. … She is the best of all my children" (Mother of 17 year-old). Fatuma's mother, in Addis Ababa, explained her hopes for her married daughter, "I wish for her to become an educated and self-sufficient women. I do not want her to stay at home but I want her to be in a modern family. She has to work as well as her husband."

So, while gender scripts for the younger generation continued to be moulded by powerful patriarchal norms, increased access to education appears to have heralded important changes in ideals around girlhood and female adulthood. First, education was recognised as broadening girls' horizons. Women in the older generations frequently characterised the younger generation as being more 'aware', 'smarter' and 'wiser' than they are. Haymanot's mother described her daughter thus:

> Haymanot is very wise and can work the work of a man and that of a woman … her knowledge is great. The mind of the children at this time is smarter than ours during our childhood … we were like *angotat* (unripe fruit) and that is keeping us back. Now, the government is educating everyone… the children are very smart even while they are inside the womb… [T]hey are more aware of things than we are…

Second, schooling was perceived by some in the older generation as having given girls new knowledge and skills, and also greater confidence—attributes that can be important for building a sense of selfhood and self-respect and for the realisation of personal agency. Yordi's mother had confidence in her 15 year-old daughter succeeding in school "because she has self-esteem [*ras-metemamen*]." It was argued that in the past "all life decisions were in the hands of parents", whereas young women 'today' decide for themselves, acting 'in their own interest'. Similarly, women across all generations agreed that "now is a better life for girls because they have freedom", with the younger generation perceiving girlhood in the past as a time when there were "no schools, girls were unaware of their rights, they were passive." Outcomes of increased self-assurance among younger women were said to include more open communication between mothers and daughters on topics considered sensitive, such as menstruation, more equitable spousal relations and decision-making, and greater gender equality.

Third, education seems to have been an important factor in changing views on the appropriate age for and social meaning of marriage and motherhood. In a 2010 study, Erulkar et al. found that 72 per cent of girls with no education had been married, in contrast with 22 per cent of girls with nine or more years of education. Schools in Ethiopia have been used as a significant channel for the communication of government policies aimed at 'modernising' society and eliminating 'harmful traditional practices'. One woman referred to this directly: "because of education, people have understood that [child marriage] is a harmful practice". The younger generation of girls were taught about children's rights at school, and in girls' clubs and empowerment programmes, including their

right not to marry and/or become mothers at a young age (Marcus and Brodbeck, 2015).[11] For most of the unmarried girls born in 1994 the ideal gender script for female childhood involved completing their education, taking up employment and saving money prior to marrying, this ideal script reflecting the intrinsic value placed on education as a good in itself, rather than the actual likelihood that education will be a route to formal employment and prosperity.

Fourth, the knowledge and self-assurance gained by girls through education nonetheless seems to have given some the confidence to resist being married off by their families during their teen years. Several cases were cited in which girls sought the aid of their teachers in convincing parents to abandon plans to arrange their marriage and allow them to remain at school. One mother admitted: "Now, if I marry off my daughter without her interest [consent], she will refuse and oblige me to pay back any bride wealth I take." In another case, having raised her orphaned granddaughter from a young age, Haftey's grandmother tried to arrange the girl's marriage when she was aged 16. The grandmother reasoned, "I wanted her to get married while I am still alive". But she was forced to abandon her matchmaking effort because Haftey would have none of it. The grandmother claimed: "When I tell my … granddaughter to marry, she gets angry and threatens to report me to the authorities" arguing (while laughing) that Haftey "wanted to jail me".

Marriage has now become surrounded by a discourse of 'choice' wherein girls are understood to formulate and act upon their own interests. One older mother commented: "During our age, the parents simply gave their daughters to husbands in their early childhood but now everything depends on the choices of the girls". Young women's accounts corroborated this view: "If she wants to marry she can marry at the age when she considers that she is ready for marriage. Marriage is based on the interest of the girl. The parents have little involvement in the marriage arrangement… [S]he decides on her fate." Many of the younger generation questioned the relevance of arranged marriages, perceiving them to be 'old fashioned'.

The generational differences described so far point to a revised gender script whereby the linear life trajectory marked by the feminised milestones of marriage and motherhood has been interrupted in the younger generation by aspirations to complete school, and to earn money, prior to becoming an adult. This view was clearly articulated by a group of young mothers in Addis Ababa, "Age should not be the major factor. Female children should start to work some jobs before they decide to marry." They saw very young mothers as being susceptible to poor self-image and ill-being: "[Y]ou will be overloaded with thinking. You become responsible…dirty. You feel inferior". Similarly, speaking about her fifteen year-old daughter, Beletch's mother said: "If marriage is concerned with an age, she is old enough to marry even now. My only concern for her now and in the future is that she will learn and finish her school… hurrying to marriage is not important." On the other hand, Netsa's mother reckoned that her seventeen year-old daughter should marry, "When she is matured… [L]ater is better … [I] don't want her to have a child before marriage and before she has her own job." Another mother maintained, "I cannot say this age or that age, we parents cannot force our children anymore. The time she wants to marry is all about her decision."

Quite a few of those in the younger generation aspired to delay their first pregnancy, space births and have smaller families. Continuing education, saving money and securing housing were all considerations: "I believe that in the future I will no longer be poor. I will use family planning and have fewer children [than my parents]. My parents have five children, which may be a reason why we are poor. I want to continue my education to university" (unmarried girl). A number of the young women were able to challenge social pressure around fertility by using modern contraception, an option that had become more feasible following government efforts to promote family planning through community health extension workers. Some girls in Addis Ababa were able to access contraception prior to marrying, although access remains constrained for unmarried girls and women. A few married women resorted to using birth control clandestinely, without informing their husbands, with the risk of discovery and marital discord:

> "I didn't want to get pregnant. I was taking pills during the first year because I wanted to save money before having a child. On the second year of the marriage, he figured out that I was taking the pill when I went to the health centre. He then forbade me from going to the health centre. He really wanted me to get pregnant. But I was very mad because I didn't want a child then." (Almaz, married age 17)

In rural areas, fertility decisions continue to be negotiated in a wider family context, including in relationships where young women had had a say in marriage decisions (Chuta, 2017).

[11] The Government reported, '10,652 children's councils and clubs were strengthened and 2.96 million children were given awareness about their rights' (Growth and Transformation Plan II (2015/16-2019/20), page 57).

AMBIGUOUS AGENCY

Education and associated notions of children's rights, individual agency and gender equality may be central features of modern childhood in Ethiopia, but there are challenges to achieving these goals in contexts where girls' lives and trajectories continue to be moulded by poverty and discriminatory gender norms. Ethiopian anthropologist Tatek Abebe has described young people's entrapment between the 'disparate worlds' of 'eroded tradition' and an 'unfulfilled modern life', this generating uncertainty in life choices (Abebe 2008, 23). In the Young Lives sample, the interaction between old and new values, and between norms, aspirations and material realities, meant that the younger generation of women confronted competing - and sometimes contradictory - expectations concerning 'respectable' female life paths towards adulthood, with direct impact on their everyday lives (c.f. Camfield and Tafere, 2011). Although seemingly they had greater choice in their pathways to adulthood than did previous generations, their capacity to make independent decisions and to follow them through in the transition from childhood to adulthood and beyond remained limited (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010: 2). For many, the challenges to exercising personal choice grew following the birth of their first child. This points to the continued efforts on the part of older generations to control the reproductive capacity of young women.

The term 'ambiguous agency' has been used to refer to:

> examples of agency amongst children and youth which is in stark contrast to established and normative conceptions about childhood and moral and social ideals about the kind of behaviour young people should demonstrate, the activities they should be engaged in, and the spaces and places deemed appropriate for them to inhabit. (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012: 366; see also Durham, 2000: 116)

In this vein, ambiguous agency is used here to characterise the ambiguities, dilemmas, contradictions and risks confronted by females in the younger generation in their efforts to shape their life transitions, and evidenced in their marital decisions. Despite the rhetoric around changed norms, values and practices, in the Round 5 survey only 60 per cent of married women in this generation (then aged 22) reported having been involved in deciding who they married and the majority felt they had married too young (Briones and Porter, 2019). Similarly, increased expectations of female independence associated with school education had not reduced the pressure to marry, as Haftey's grandmother highlighted; "The idea is that it is better to prioritise education *but not to live an unmarried life*". Indeed, girls who rated themselves poorly as students, had fallen behind with their studies, or left school early saw marriage as the obvious alternative option. Tirhas received her first marriage proposal at age 12, but her parents turned the offer down because she was still at school. However, she failed her eighth grade exam so had to drop out and feeling she could no longer decline proposals, married at around age 13; "I did not have the guts to confront [my family] because I failed my education and my fate was getting married." By contrast, in some contexts, the perception that education had failed to deliver on its promise to transform girls' lives elevated marriage as their next best chance in life; "Education is dead and girls do not want to die with education. They want to establish a family now through marriage. Many girls stay idle after completing grade 10… Girls should not die together with education."

Despite the continuing control by older generations over marital decisions, one of the most dramatic changes reported across the generations has been the rise in 'voluntary', or couple-initiated unions - also termed 'elopement' or 'voluntary abduction' - leading to (urban) cohabitation or informal unions. Generally organised by the couple without parental involvement, some respondents argued that a preference for informal unions reflects the diminished authority of older generations over younger generations and an increase in female agency. Certainly, older women bemoaned the perceived decline in respect for adult authority and knowledge and the weakening of intergenerational relations associated with the practice. Sometimes informal unions are seen as a solution to unplanned pregnancy,[12] and they often have special appeal for poorer young men who struggle to accumulate the bridewealth required for a formal marriage. And there have been some perverse consequences. For a start, enjoying greater autonomy in life decisions does not seem to have led to a rise in the age of marriage. In communities where young people are driving these decisions, the notion of underage marriage as a 'harmful traditional practice' does not seem to resonate. Strikingly, in some areas young people were said to be choosing to marry even younger, "[T]he time is fast …The youth are in a hurry to get married and to get divorced." In fact, given that in some young women's estimation gaining autonomy from one's natal family was an important goal, 'overage' marriage had come to be viewed as a greater social problem than 'child' marriage. "It is a shame to become an old woman without marriage."

Ayu's story reveals the increasing limits and possibilities around young women's decision-making as they advance through the life cycle, illustrating ambiguous agency. Although when she was age 12 Ayu hoped to have

[12] It is unclear from our evidence whether there has actually been an increase in premarital sex among the younger generation compared to earlier generations.

an arranged marriage around age 22, she had agreed to an informal marriage at age 15, despite such unions having lower status in her community. She had left school two years earlier, having only reached the second grade, and was happy to start earning money in agriculture. She met her husband at work and although she wanted to marry him, felt bypassed in the decision when he sent elders to ask her parents' permission to marry. She refused his proposal, explaining: "It was my right to decide my own fate," and that "he should have asked me first and go with my agreement before sending elders to my parents. My parents have no right to decide on my behalf. I have the right and capacity to decide about my future life." Ayu later consented to marry this man through a voluntary union; she thought this arrangement would give her greater say in her future. By age 21 she had two children, but married life had not given her the scope for decision-making she had hoped for. Her husband had not allowed her to continue working, she had lost touch with friends on moving house and her mother had made her give birth to her first child at her mother's house, despite her expressed preference to have the baby at a clinic. Nonetheless, Ayu described herself as happy and satisfied and felt her husband supported her plan to open up a small shop when the children were older.

Since informal unions such as Ayu's are seldom endorsed by clan or family, they carry significant social risk.[13] Some of the young women involved expressed regret at having bypassed arranged marriage and several felt they had been pressured into marrying in this way. Buzuneh married at age fourteen out of self-protection, to counter rumours that she had had sex with her then eighteen year-old boyfriend. She initiated the marriage through *litu/seena*, a local form of voluntary marriage where the girl enters the groom's parental home without permission, prompting his family to accept the marriage. In hindsight, she reflected that her marriage had been forced; having married to avoid the shame of a premarital relationship she experienced the shame of having married too young. Young men's promises of economic support were often broken: "We get married because the boys disturb us when they think that we are matured enough. They just follow us and promise that they would help us to live a better life… if they promised that they would buy us good clothes and live a better life, we say, 'ok' [laughter]".

Motherhood seems to heighten the challenges to young women's agency, especially for those in informal marriages. Concern was expressed about the likelihood of women being abandoned by partners following pregnancy and childbirth; having ignored traditional marriage practice, following abandonment women in informal unions are not necessarily able to count on familial support. There was scepticism about whether girls empowered to make decisions for themselves grasped the potential adverse consequences of this newfound agency. Indeed, many young women were uncertain in their maternal roles, and seemed to oscillate between co-existing identities --- 'child' and 'daughter' and 'mother', 'wife' and 'woman', these 'both/and orientations' (Collins, 1990) suggesting the multiple standpoints and shifting agency of young mothers (Harding, 2004). In this way, motherhood in childhood rendered motherhood and childhood fluid rather than fixed categories (cf Johnson-Hanks, 2002). Some of those who were married and/or mothers did not see themselves as adults. For example, despite being age 21 and having given birth three years previously, Asmeret insisted, "I am a young girl because my age does not make me a grown woman. I am a mother to my child, but by my age, I am still young." Nor did Tirhas (aged 18) consider herself a grown woman, although she had married at age 13 and gave birth age 15: "It is not a matter of age, but of attitude." On the other hand, 19 year-old Haymanot was resentful that she looked 'older' than her actual age. Even though she had two children, she stated; 'I see myself as a youth (*menesay*), but people think that I am an adult woman (*abay sebeyt*).' Her mother, meanwhile, referred to Haymanot as 'still a child'.

Assessments by some of the mothers in the younger generation of what it was like to give birth at a young age revealed a mix of joy, regret, gain and loss. Many felt they were not ready to become mothers so young, as one noted: "I gave birth to my first child at the age of 13… I did not know about motherhood, and I could not provide care for my child. My mother took the responsibility to care for my child. I couldn't even give breast milk for my child. I acted as a child even after I gave birth…." Yeshi, who had her first child at around age 15, felt guilty for weaning her baby too soon: "I really feel bad… but I was a naïve person with a childish personality". They gradually developed the capacity to provide maternal care and through this, new ways of thinking and relating to others (Ruddick 2007: 97). Meanwhile, some of the women saw motherhood as having exacerbated their poverty: "If your life is poor, you get disappointed to get pregnant and have a baby. You wonder what sin you did to be punished by poverty". Financial hardship clouded the potential joys of mothering, as childcare responsibilities constrained young mothers' efforts to get ahead (Ruddick, 2007: 98); "Now I am tied at home because I have to care for the children… We had a plan to improve our livelihood… however, I became busy with children and my husband became the only breadwinner for the family."

[13] Some of these unions are subsequently formalised through a customary 'reconciliation' process involving the transfer of gifts and cash to the bride's family.

CONCLUSION

This article has drawn on narratives of marriage and motherhood from three generations of Ethiopian women to reflect on changes in the expectations and experiences of female childhood. It argues that marriage and motherhood continue to be both highly valued sources of feminine identity and prerequisites for transitioning to full adult status for the younger generation of women. But in the context of rapid social and economic change the age and social meaning of these transitions are increasingly contested. In alignment with norms promoted by international actors, Government policy represents motherhood and marriage as incompatible with modern ideals of female childhood. Marriage and childbirth before the age of 18 are perceived to run counter to the goals of development and render teenage mothers victims of child rights violations. The evidence from Young Lives suggests that these norms are increasingly internalised by girls and their families since the timing and social significance of marriage and motherhood are changing, with the younger generation of women spending longer periods in school and delaying transitions to adulthood. These developments mark a changing gender script for young women, mapping a normative trajectory from childhood schooling, to adult employment, followed by marriage and motherhood.

Even though the revised gender script is accepted by many of the women in all three generations as the one to strive for, the majority of those in the younger generation were unable to achieve it. The lived experiences of the younger generation of women reveal complex, highly nuanced and at times contradictory expressions of female agency across the early life course. Marriage and motherhood continue to be a childhood reality despite policy approaches aimed to translate conceptualisations of modern childhood from the international level to local contexts. The notion of ambiguous agency highlights the contradictions confronted by the younger generation of women as they contend with the discourses and realities of marriage and motherhood. The expansion of schooling has heralded important shifts in Ethiopian girls' roles and imagined futures, and imbued many in this generation with a sense of expanded choice in their school, work and reproductive trajectories. Many of them were exposed to emergent social values related to children's rights and gender equity, cultivating for some a sense of agency and self-interest that played out in marital decision-making. Examples are given of notable changes in marital practices wherein teenage girls and young couples in some communities are deciding for themselves when and who to marry. But such expressions of agency are also shown to come with social risks, especially following motherhood. Although able to influence their marital choices, over time and particularly once they had children, these young women were increasingly subject to the influence of patriarchy.

The Young Lives findings resonate with insights from feminist scholars of development who, first, highlight the role of context in making sense of young women's choices and 'empowerment' (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010; Folbre, 1994). For example, attention to the everyday circumstances and material and cultural logics of motherhood in childhood would caution against simple attributions of either victimhood or agency to teenage mothers (Ansell et al., 2018). This requires moving beyond adult-centric approaches that tend to equate motherhood with women and that position children as dependent objects of adult care, these approaches reducing motherhood in childhood to problem, or even 'deviant', childhoods (Caputo, 2018). Second, a temporal perspective is attuned to life cycle dynamics, and can trace the non-linear pathways between choice – action - outcome that are too often oversimplified in mainstream development discourse (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010). One example of this is the case of informal unions arranged by young couples lowering rather than raising the age of marriage. Third, the rhetoric of 'choice' and agency that is often used in Ethiopia to characterise the current generation of girls and young women is only partially borne out in experience. Though it may appear that girls nowadays have many more possible life paths to pursue, their actual choices remain heavily constrained by poverty and by restrictive gender norms; given vested familial interests in women's reproductive capacity, seemingly these restrictions rise as they become mothers. This reality requires "more attention to both the structural inequalities that women face, and the lived realities of challenging these" (Chopra and Muller, 2016: 8). Addressing structural inequalities increases the likelihood that gains made early in the life course in terms of encouraging girls' expanded horizons and self-determination can be sustained through the transition to adulthood. Finally, the young women in this study became mothers at different ages within the second decade of their lives, a life phase everywhere "shown to be a critical time for examining the proximate interactions of individuals with the cultural models and norms transmitted to them in the re-creation of new generational norms and practices" (LeVine, 2011: 426). Young mothers have a vital role to play in influencing these processes of social change and in reshaping the norms of family life and social relations.

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Mothering in the Context of Poverty: Disciplining Peruvian Mothers through Children's Rights

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ABSTRACT

This article explores discourses surrounding poverty and mothering in the context of Peru. It specifically suggests that claims in the name of children's rights provide a more morally acceptable way to discipline economically disadvantaged mothers. Mothers are framed as 'bad parents' when their children fail to experience so-called 'global childhoods', spent in school and the home, and not in paid work. However, in Andean culture, children begin working alongside their parents at a young age as they learn to become active members in society. Rather than recognising motherhood as socially constructed, internationally-funded NGOs and government officials emphasise a need to teach mothers about the cultural dangers of work. However, I suggest that in doing so, poverty is reframed as a cultural problem, of which mothers are to blame. This overlooks significant economic inequality as well as different conceptions of motherhood and childhood. The article examines how mothers negotiate competing demands in the context of discourses of global childhood, and is based on field work conducted over 14 months in 2009 and 2010, with follow up research in 2011 and 2014.

Keywords: motherhood, children's rights, intersubjectivity, critical poverty studies

INTRODUCTION

This article explores discourses surrounding poverty and mothering in the context of Peru. Debates that put children's rights into tension with women's rights are not new within feminist literature. Children's rights have even been framed as a constraint on women's rights, and vice-versa (Burman, 2008; Ruddick, 2007). Children themselves are also portrayed as a burden or a limitation to women's opportunities. However, less research specifically examines the ways in which the idea of global childhood, framed as time to be in school and in play, rather than working, depoliticises efforts to discipline the poor mother. I argue that claims in the name of children's rights rely on problematic assumptions about what childhood *should* look instead of considering children's actual well-being or the tradeoffs that children (and their parents) make in the context of their daily lives. Instead, mothers are framed as 'bad parents' if children's lives do not mirror those depicted in discourses of global childhood.

As the most widely ratified UN Convention in the world, the Convention on the Rights of the Child represents a formal commitment from governments, child advocates, international organisations and others to actively strive to ensure children's rights. As such, it offers a framework for shared responsibility for children's well-being that extends beyond mothers (or even the family). However, children's rights regimes are critiqued for presenting middle-class Western experiences of childhood as universal (Invernizzi and Williams, 2008; Liebel, 2006). Different experiences, such as working or spending time in public spaces, are viewed as problematic indicators of children's well-being. It is beyond the scope of this article to rehearse all the debates about children's work (see Aufseeser et al., 2018; Bourdillon, 2006). Instead, I examine the ways in which mothers are blamed when their children fail to experience supposedly 'global' childhoods.

Drawing on over 14 months of field work in Lima and Cusco, Peru, I focus on how mothers of working children negotiate various practices of mothering in the context of poverty. Media articles, social services, and internationally-funded NGOs draw attention to the dangers of child labour and specifically vilify mothers who 'allow' children to work. However, in Andean culture, children begin working alongside their parents at a young age. In such situations, work is an important space in which young people learn to become active members in society (Bolin, 2006; Cussianovich, 2006). Child circulation, or the practice of sending children to live with

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wealthier connections or relatives, may also be part of mothers' strategies to help their children 'get ahead' (Leinaweaver, 2006). Among childhood studies scholars, it is now well-recognised that childhood is a socially constructed experience (Aitken, Lund, and Kjorholt, 2008). However, much less work extends this recognition to constructions of motherhood. This article argues that poor mothers are framed in problematic ways that overlook different conceptions of motherhood and childhood, as well as significant economic inequality and histories of exploitation. Over the course of my research, explanations for child poverty centred on mothers, especially indigenous mothers, depicting them as irresponsible, having too many children, and to blame for their children's poverty. However, these tropes are limited for two main reasons. First, by relabelling poverty as 'cultural', the structural conditions that contribute to poverty and exploitative work are overlooked. Second, because of the veneer of moral respectability that accompanies programs carried out in the name of children's rights (see Pupavac, 2002), actual understandings of what accounts for good mothering are not subject to much critique. In this way, children's rights regimes provide a new rationality through which to govern poor women.

'Women and Children' or 'Women versus Children'

Enloe (1990) argues that women and children are tied together to such an extent that they become the singular 'womenandchildren', which is reflective of women's greater role in caring for children, and a tendency to lump women and children's vulnerabilities together (Burman, 2008). Feminist scholars and activists critiqued this tendency for overlooking women's needs and subsuming them under children's needs. In contrast, they argue for the need to view women and children in distinctive categories (Monk and Hanson, 1982). Efforts to unlink the two, however, have ironically reinforced potential conflict between children's rights and women's rights. Portraying something as a conflict between women's rights and children's rights may divert attention from larger issues (Burman, 2008)—in this case the ways in which economic inequality and long-term societal exclusion actively perpetuate children's disadvantage. Additionally, as I elaborate below, these efforts overlook the interdependency of subjects.

Governing Poor Mothers

Social services have long been associated with the creation of particular subjects (Kingfisher and Maskovsky, 2008). In the context of addressing children's poverty, portrayals of children as dependent and vulnerable frequently intertwine with frameworks that depict mothers as ultimately responsible for their children (Rosen and Twamley, 2018; Cassiman, 2008). This link starts early. Imagery around pregnant women's bodies hold mothers accountable for the child's well-being, thus overlooking larger structural concerns (Ruddick, 2007). In the context of the United States, studies suggest that poor black women are particularly vulnerable to discipline in the name of their children's well-being (Roberts, 1991). Poor women must give up their own rights in order to secure benefits for their children (Cassiman, 2008). There are parallels between discourses about black 'welfare queens' and portrayals of 'dirty' indigenous mothers. In Latin America, research demonstrates how notions of 'bad mothers' overlook ongoing inequalities and exploitation (Leinaweaver, 2006; Swanson, 2007; Campoamor, 2016).

By adding the element of rights discourse as a rationality used to govern and discipline poor mothers, I expand literature that critically assesses the relationship between charity and morality. I employ Foucault's (1991) ideas of governmentality to draw attention to the ways in which ideas of 'global childhood' translate into notions of 'global motherhood,' operating and spread through what Pupavac (2002) refers to as international children's rights regimes. Such an approach allows space for consideration of the ways in which circulating discourses of global childhoods provide a tool for governmental agencies and NGOs to discipline mothers at the same time as such rationalities shape particular subjectivities about 'good' mothering. Conceptions of global motherhood overlook how ideas of motherhood, like childhood, are socially constructed and need to be contextualised. For example, in the Andean highlands, parents try to raise respectful hard-working children who learn through observation (Bolin, 2006). To do so, children accompany their parents and other community members throughout the day, rather than occupy separate spaces. However, since the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, NGOs working with impoverished parents increasingly employ a language of children's *entitlements*, positioning parents as responsible for failing to fulfil these entitlements (Nieuwenhuys, 2001). They impose Western views of what constitutes 'normal' childhoods on children of the poor. Internationally-funded NGOs emphasise a need to teach mothers about the dangers of work. If mothers, or organisations that support mothers, speak out against these efforts, they risk being vilified for not caring about their children.

The Peruvian Context

In the last 15 years, Peru has experienced rapid economic growth and poverty reduction. However, inequality remains high, with a long history of exploiting and devaluing indigenous populations (Thorp and Paredes, 2010). According to UNICEF, as of 2009, 78 percent of children whose first language was Quechua or Aymara lived in poverty, compared to 40 percent of those who spoke Spanish as their first language. Colonisers not only

dispossessed and exploited indigenous populations, they also established firm hierarchies about worth and value. White and mestizo populations were linked with modernity and development, in contrast to indigenous populations, who were framed as backwards (Thorp and Paredes, 2010). Even today, Peru's indigenous populations are associated with the highlands region (as well as the jungle region), and are presented as 'out of place' in urban spaces (Seligmann, 2012).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as a result of violence from conflict with Shining Path, an insurgent terrorist group, many Quechua-speakers migrated from Peru's highland region to Lima. Shining Path's violence and coercion, and eventual use of terror, devastated rural populations. The hardship they faced doubled as the military retaliated with their own violence. Discourses of the indigenous population's inherent inferiority provided the justification for more extreme forms of violence, and one leader admitted to using the indigenous population as 'cannon fodder' (Thorp and Paredes, 2010). By the end of the conflict, nearly 70,000 had died, 85 percent of whom were native-Quechua speakers. The violence heightened migration trends that were already well under-way in response to historical and regional inequalities. An estimated 600,000 to 1,000,000 fled their home town, and institutions, families, and livelihoods were destroyed. The influx of migrants into Lima only added to growing feelings of insecurity and fear, reinforced by beliefs that indigenous populations belonged in rural areas. Today, 9.1 percent of Lima's population speaks Quechua as their native tongue (DIDP, 2018) [1] and 39.1 percent migrated to Lima from other parts of the country.[2] However, policies still reflect a denigration of indigenous culture and suspicion around indigenous presence in public spaces.

During Peru's conflict with Shining Path, the country also faced an economic crisis, leading to decreased funding for social services and skyrocketing poverty and inequality rates (Leon, 2013). Then-president Alberto Fujimori implemented a series of structural adjustment changes in which markets were opened to foreign competition and tariffs were removed or drastically reduced. Real wages fell, with people reporting longer working hours just to make ends meet (Yamada, 2005). This had direct consequences on parents' ability to both earn money for the family and directly supervise their children. At the same time, already limited budgets for social services were slashed. Rather than emphasising education, health, and infrastructure as public goods, social policy shifted to target specific groups of poor people (Leon, 2013). Women (and children) stepped in to compensate for the withdrawal of the state (Hays-Mitchell, 2002).

In 1990, the same year that Alberto Fujimori became president, Peru formally embraced children's rights, ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In doing so, the government guaranteed all children the right to accessible education, health, and an adequate standard of living, among others. International children's rights organisations, and the funding that accompanied their campaigns, offered the potential to counter neoliberal policies' emphasis on individual responsibility for social reproduction. According to UNICEF, the state, institutions, community, family and individuals all share responsibility to protect and promote the rights of children.

However, in practice, both NGOs and state-run programs continued to emphasise mothers' responsibilities for their children's well-being, with the state and NGOs playing advisory roles. Social services frequently require behavioural changes or increased responsibilities from mothers to access benefits for children. Even *Vaso de Leche*, or Glass of Milk, which is one of Peru's oldest social programs, depends on mothers preparing food in their homes and then delivering food to daycares and schools (Leon, 2013). Further, the state only provides limited child care, focusing on children under the age of 3, with few available spots and limited hours.

In some situations, mothers did actively take the lead to address crises in their children's well-being, setting up public dining halls that provided affordable food and a space for women to organise. However, as public kitchens evolved and received more state and international funding, they also became a space in which the state could govern economically disadvantaged women (Schroeder, 2006). For example, social workers would require mothers to attend educational seminars, in which they were 'taught' about 'proper' hygiene and nutrition. Educational materials often implied that indigenous women were not concerned with cleanliness (Schroeder, 2006). Limited access to water and nutrients then became secondary to culture and a lack of proper education.

In 2005, following purported successes with cash transfer programs in Mexico and Brazil, the Peruvian government created its own cash transfer program, *Juntos*. As is the case with other conditional cash transfer programs, *Juntos* was premised on the idea that mothers were more likely to invest in their families and communities than were men, and therefore should be the official recipients of cash transfers. However, the transfers came with specific obligations. To receive financial assistance, mothers must send their children to school and to health clinics (Leon, 2013; Molyneux, 2006). If mothers miss appointments, they risk being viewed as 'bad mothers' who do not care for their children (Bradshaw and Viquez, 2008), with little discussion of factors such as the availability and quality of schooling or clinics. Further, program success is measured based on improved outcomes for children

[1] In contrast, in the region of Cusco, nearly 75 percent of the population self-identifies as Quechuan (DIDP, 2018).

[2] While migrants often have closer links to indigenous communities, it is important to note that these numbers represent total migration, rather than migration of the indigenous population, of which specific numbers are not available.

specifically. The guide for *Juntos* makes this distinction clear, stating that the intended beneficiaries of the program are children, and that mothers hold the responsibility of fulfilling certain duties to ensure their children's access to benefits. Further, the whole program is based on the inherent assumption that poor mothers are unable to properly invest in their children without 'guidance' from the state or international donors. Although not all families that participate are indigenous, the program initially targeted rural communities most affected by political violence of the 1980s, which led to a disproportionate number of indigenous participants. It is in this context that I analyse social services and discourses targeting working children and their families.

Methods

This project arose from a research project that examined the everyday lives of Peruvian children who worked or lived in public spaces. Over the course of 14 months of research in 2009 and 2010 in Lima and Cusco, Peru, it became apparent that children's well-being and mother's well-being were linked. Shadowing programme staff at NGOs, accompanying children while they played, worked, or hung out in the streets, and formally interviewing 69 children and over 100 social workers, educators, government officials, NGO staff, and police about the causes of children's poverty revealed a strong emphasis on maternal responsibility and morality, or a lack thereof.[3] I also formally interviewed four mothers whose daughters sold artisan goods and snacks in Cusco's main plaza. To elaborate on informal conversations, interviews and participant observation with children and their mothers, and learn more about how mothers themselves negotiated competing identities and obligations, I conducted an additional eight semi-structured interviews with mothers in 2011 and 2014.[4] I had met all the mothers on whom I focused over the course of earlier fieldwork, and all had children who worked in public spaces. Five had migrated from smaller communities in the Andean highlands and one had migrated from Peru's jungle region, and were of indigenous descent. Two women had grown up in informal communities on Lima's desert hills, and were children of migrants from the Andean highlands. I also interviewed an 18-year old woman who had participated in the study as a child, and had gone on to herself have children over the course of my fieldwork, as well as a 25-year old, who had slept on the streets from the time she was 8 until she became pregnant with her son. In addition, I engaged in critical discourse analysis of Peru's *National Plan for Children and Adolescents*, Peru's *National Strategy for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour, 2002-2021*, *Juntos*' cash transfer program manuals, and reports and programme statements from Peru's *Institute for Family Well-Being* (INABIF), as well as other relevant social policy plans and media accounts. Policies, laws, and media play an important role in particular forms of subjectification, shaping 'truths' about childhood, motherhood, deservability and responsibility (see Foucault, 1991). I analysed texts to look for similarities, differences and patterns in the ways in which statements and goals reflected certain assumptions about childhood, responsibility and poverty, based on the premise that language is used to affect certain agendas (see van Dijk, 2001).

Critiques of charities' role in disciplining poor mothers and holding them responsible for their children's poverty are not new. However, I argue that a language of children's rights depoliticises the blame and responsibility put on mothers. Because 'rights' are framed as progressive and empowering, they are not subject to as much scrutiny as are more directly punitive policies. Furthermore, discourses of mothering are powerful because they operate in ways that disadvantaged mothers themselves not only resist but also internalise. Through their actions, mothers challenge representations that frame them as uncaring and exploitative while simultaneously reaffirming other components of ideal mothering, such as notions of sacrifice. In the sections that follow, I show that while children's rights discourses offer the potential for shared responsibility for child well-being, in their implementation, poor mothers continue to be held primarily responsible for children's well-being. I then analyse ways in which anti-child labour programs provide a venue through which to discipline mothers. Finally, I discuss the contradictory ways in which mothers both reproduce and challenge representations of 'good mothers'.

Children's Rights: Shared or Individual Responsibility?

Through social policy and discourse, the Peruvian government sends mixed messages about who holds responsibility to ensure children's rights. While Peru's National Plan for Children and Adolescents emphasises co-responsibility of the state, civil society, and the family to safeguard children's rights, it also highlights the special role and responsibility of the mother. For example, it discusses a need to "orient the family, through the mother, to apply healthy habits of hygiene" (PNAIA, 2012, 41).[5] Further, it describes the family as "the fundamental nucleus of society, and the most adequate space for growth". Yet, it goes on to say that although the family has the potential to be a fundamental nucleus, it is also a space in which many girls' and boys' integrity and rights are violated. These competing statements reflect the tensions within society of both honouring the place of the family

[3] Interviews were semi-structured, and ranged from 15 minutes to 90 minutes. Field notes from participant observation and informal conversations with mothers provided further data.

[4] Names of mothers and children interviewed have been changed.

[5] All translations are mine.

and fearing it as a place of exploitation. In situations in which the state discusses co-responsibility, it is ultimately about a shared responsibility to implement one specific *type* of childhood, in this case, childhood spent in school and the home, and not working, especially outside of the house. Motherhood then becomes about creating this type of childhood, rather than entertaining multiple ways of mothering.

Peru's National Plan highlights children's labour as a risk factor, drawing special attention to labour that is carried out in the street and other public spaces. Although the Plan acknowledges that "poverty is the main cause" of children's work, it also formally highlights the role of culture and the positive valuation of work as key problems (PNAIA, 2012, 70). The National Plan to Protect and Eradicate Children's Labour similarly links children's work with culture. It explains that in some parts of Peru, traits of 'a good child' include the attribute of being hard-working. However, it goes on to say that parents' capacity to reflect on motives, consequences and alternatives to child labour is important. According to the plan, when this capacity is lacking, parents need to be taught analytical capacity to generate changes in their attitudes and behaviours. Such a plan implies that if parents continue to support their children's participation in work, it is because they lack reflective or analytical capacity.

FRAMING CHILD LABOUR AS 'CULTURAL'

Efforts to reform parents' behaviour were central to internationally-funded programs and projects focusing on children's rights—especially the right to be free from economic exploitation and the agreement to implement minimum age laws at which young people could engage in paid labour (reflected in Article 32 of the CRC). While stated policies and laws focused on both fathers and mothers, in practice most NGOs and governments targeted mothers exclusively.[6] In line with Foucault's (1991) studies of governmentality, I suggest that children's work in public spaces is framed as a problem to be addressed through social service and NGO's provisions and education. However, rather than target children themselves, many programmes target mothers, creating educational programs that teach self-discipline and the 'dangers' of child labour. The 'problem' of children's work can then be interpreted as a problem of poor governance of the family, rather than inequalities produced by structural adjustments, a lack of well-paid work opportunities, or historical exclusion, as mentioned above. Martinez Novo (2003) argues that practices that result from poverty, such as street vending or child labour, are problematically attributed to 'culture'. Indigenous women are then framed as 'bad mothers who exploit their own children' when children accompany their mothers to work as informal street vendors (Martinez Novo, 2003: 259).

Governance strategies increasingly frame mothers as clients with responsibilities to themselves and their families, and in doing so, place the onus for development squarely on their shoulders (Miller and Rose, 1990, as cited in Rankin, 2001: 29). Ironically, some dominant interpretations of children's rights facilitate this discursive shift of responsibility from the state to the family through their emphasis on narrow understandings of what childhood should look like. Representations of needy children, abandoned by their parents (Ruddick, 2003), are contrasted with supposedly universal images of childhood to justify increased regulation of both children and their parents. Such interpretations reinforce neoliberal understandings of poverty as the result of individual characteristics and allow elites in power to focus on helping parents reform their own behaviours (Nieuwenhuys, 2008), rather than adapting more relational approaches that look at the societal and economic relationships producing poverty. Yet, because children's discourses have a veneer of moral respectability around them, they are not subject to as much scrutiny.

In an article in La *Republica*, one of Peru's primary newspapers, the director of children's programs for Telefonica explained that poverty "is not the principal cause of child labour…there is a cultural component. The majority of parents of children who work also worked when they were children but what they don't *see* is that they are still trapped in poverty because when they had to study they did not (La Republica, 2013, emphasis mine). An emphasis on parents not 'seeing' shifts the focus of poverty reduction to educating parents; child labour and the importance of formal schooling (or lack thereof) are then reframed as values that parents do not appreciate. Such a framework suggests that if parents can learn new values, they will be able to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

At the end of the summer play put on by an NGO working to end child labour, the director opened the event with a speech about the importance of withdrawing children from work, and allowing them the space to play and to experience a 'real childhood.' The children then acted out a play in which a lazy mother sends her children to the streets to work so she can go to the beauty parlour for the whole day. She gruffly tells the children, "If you want to eat, you need to work." The message of the play was clear. The mother was lazy, exploiting the children so that she did not have to work. By the end of the play, the mother realises the dangers of her selfish behaviour, and changes, agreeing to work so that her children will not have to. However, the majority of working children I

[6] In one interview, one social worker said that there was no point in trying to reach fathers because they would not attend events. Another said that fathers drink, or have other families, and rarely educate their children as they should.

met had mothers who worked even longer hours than they did. By presenting such a play, economic need and the difficult decisions mothers face daily were trivialised.

Without a more comprehensive outlook, simply campaigning against child labour not only does not offer a practical solution but might have negative psychological effects. Ten-year old Sonya, who lived in a poor neighbourhood in the hills of Lima, had to constantly listen to the message that her childhood was not 'real' and that she should not be working. Unsurprisingly, Sonya and many other children were defensive when I would ask questions about their mothers. They would reiterate that they themselves chose to work; no one forced them to work. "My mother is not bad", Sonya insisted. "I don't like it when people talk. They don't know" (interview, 2010). Such comments indicate children's awareness of discourses promoting ideas related to maternal blame, and programs' increased efforts to regulate and reform the behaviours of poor mothers.

The paternalistic attitudes with which parents are treated extend beyond formal events. One day, I was walking with one of the educators from an NGO that also aimed to eradicate child labour. We ran into a mother of two of the girls who participated. The educator stopped her, explaining that she was worried about the 11-year old daughter's behaviour:

> Educator: Your daughter is withdrawn. She doesn't play like the other children. Maybe something happened. Maybe something happened at the dump [the daughter goes early in the mornings to look for items to recycle]. She should not be working there. It is an ugly place, filled with ex-convicts and other dangerous men.
>
> Mother (mumbling): I don't send her to work. She just goes.
>
> Educator: You say you don't send her but then you accept the money. You need to assert your authority as a mother. My two children stay home when I am gone because I tell them to. I don't have to lock the door.
>
> Mother (nodded): Yes.
>
> Educator: Your daughter has a right to be a child and to play. She will learn from you. You don't want her to stop coming home to sleep at age 15. As mothers, we want our kids to have better lives than us.
>
> (Aufseeser, Field notes, 2010)

The educator spoke in an instructive manner, telling the mother how mothers should feel and act. She pointed out inadequacies in the mother's parenting by comparing the mother to herself, who by implication, was a much better mother. She suggested that the daughter's work at the dump, along with her more withdrawn behaviour, were a sign of poor mothering, interpreted mostly as the result of ignorance. The educator made it clear that the mother was setting a poor example but appealed to the notion that because she was a mother, she would want her child to have a better life and would reform her behaviour. Impediments to, and different understandings of, motherhood, along with the actual context of the mother's life, were mostly ignored. After the mother had left, the educator explained to me that the younger daughter would wander throughout the neighbourhood. She clearly saw this as a sign that the mother was not appropriately caring for her. Although there was some recognition of difficult circumstances in her life (the mother's husband was physically abusive, and did not support the family much financially), the emphasis was on reforming the mother's behaviour so that it more clearly meshed with dominant understandings of motherhood. Additionally, the conversation reflected assumptions that child labour, compared to domestic violence or any number of reasons, was responsible for the change in the daughter's behaviour. The significance of disciplining mothers through children's rights is that it hides the unequal power relations that are more evident in other forms of coercion. If mothers are to speak out, they risk being branded as 'uncaring' or 'bad mothers'.

In another NGO, for the children to receive homework help or participate in sports and arts classes, their mothers must also attend bi-weekly meetings, for which they receive points. At the sessions, in addition to learning about cooking nutritious meals and proper parenting, mothers are encouraged to develop proposals for micro-businesses. The mother that earns the most points at the end of the program receives $200 to start her own business. While this clearly may be beneficial for one family, it does nothing to address a general lack of job opportunities, low wages, or other conditions which contribute to the near-universal poverty of the group more generally. Even more importantly, it reproduces understandings that with hard work, one can pull herself up. And through competition and rankings (reflected in the point system), it reinforces individual responses to poverty. Such values resonate with other studies documenting the way in which social services work to create entrepreneurial self-sufficient subjects (Kingfisher, 2002; Marquardt and Schreiber, 2015). They also re-enforce

attitudes that poverty is a matter of personal work ethic, rationality and individual skills, rather than the systemic processes of marginalisation.

Even in situations where educators and social workers expressed understanding of the complex factors shaping child poverty, they nonetheless focused on the mothers, or the families more generally, as primary obstacles to fulfilling children's rights. A social worker who coordinated an after-school support program for working children explained that the main limitation to the program's effectiveness was "resistance from the parents. Some families are accustomed to receiving assistance, three meals in the dining halls. It is difficult to say, 'leave this. Change.' They don't change" (interview, 2010). Even organisations that take a very different political approach to children's work, such as a Peru's Movement for Child and Adolescent Workers, shared the mentality that unless mothers are educated, their actions can be detrimental to their children's well-being. "Many mothers do not *care*. They do not want to attend events. But they want their children to have access to the dining hall and the activities. Little by little, we teach them the importance of participation and rights" (interview, 2011, emphasis mine). By refusing to submit to particular forms of governance, mothers are depicted as 'uncaring.' The educator did not reflect on the complex factors that shape how mothers, children and other family members spend their time. Instead, she, like other program staff, return to the trope of the 'bad' mother who fails to fulfil her natural duty to put her children first--with what putting children first means defined narrowly.

'OUT OF PLACE' IN THE STREETS

The regulation of poor mothers also reflects longstanding tendencies that link indigeneity with backwardness, and position indigenous women as bad mothers for exploiting their children by sending them to work in the street (see Aufseeser, 2014; Swanson, 2007). More established and wealthy Peruvians often made assumptions about women living in informal communities, depicting them as dirty and promiscuous, "unnatural mothers who do not hesitate to throw their young children to the streets to beg or work, instead of sending them to school and feeding them a balanced diet" (Barrig, 1982, 15, as cited in Alcalde, 2010: 50). Social workers and educators reflect such attitudes in the assumptions they make about indigenous women, and beliefs that they are culturally ignorant.

Elsewhere, I have argued how Peru's Bill to Protect Children from Forced Begging ultimately provided a tool through which the government could regulate poor children and their parents (Aufseeser, 2014). Although Peru's law against begging is now well over a decade old, little has changed in the language used to describe mothers 'exploiting' children on the streets of Lima. In *El Comercio*, a leading newspaper in Peru, Rosas (2018) writes about a group of four women who sit while their children run around begging for diapers, food, clothing and money. The article emphasises that the women 'utilize the little ones to earn more'. However, it provides no specific details about the women or children and their situations. The article quotes a representative of UNICEF-Peru, "With these activities, the children's rights are violated." Yet, the presence of children in public spaces in and of itself is not necessarily indicative of exploitation. The trade-off between leaving children home and bringing children to work involves negotiating risks in either situation. Thus, mothers are expected to be both breadwinners and primary caregivers but are limited in their attempts to do so.

Many assume that indigenous women have their children with them to gain more sympathy. In Cusco, foreign tourists commented that mothers tried to manipulate their emotions and use their children for financial gain. "It is hard to say no to a child patting her stomach," a French woman volunteering at a children's home said. "But the longer I stay here, the more I learn that these children have mothers, who just sit around while the kids work" (interview, 2011). Yet, mothers are rarely 'just' sitting around, but also may be watching their children work and play, making crafts for the children to sell, or are themselves also selling, as was the case with Anita. Anita had moved from a rural part of the state of Cusco to the city of Cusco shortly after her first child was born. Her husband was an alcoholic and stayed behind in their village. After Anita's daughters finished school, she would often accompany them to Cusco's main plaza. While the girls walked around, selling artisan goods to tourists, Anita would sit with another mother, weaving bracelets for her daughters to sell, caring for her youngest son, and actively watching to make sure her daughters were safe. She explained, "The girls sell a lot more. The [municipal police] take supplies from older women when we try to sell but they do not bother children…we don't come if they have school assignments or assemblies. If we haven't earned enough money, at night, I will come back out and work. I don't want the girls here at night" (interview, 2010). Anita's comments challenge simplified claims that mothers of working children are ignorant or lazy and instead indicate that decisions about who works, when and where, are part of complex family strategies, and involve frequent trade-offs.

Perceptions that mothers deceptively utilise children for financial gains extend beyond analyses of children's interactions with tourists. Police officers at the Family Commission in Cusco expressed nuanced, and sometimes contradictory views. One officer explained that most children picked up by the police were in the streets because of economic need rather than intentional exploitation. His partner, on the other hand, attributed children's presence in the streets to 'culture'. Yet, both discussed how children were not actually from the city of Cusco, but

rather elsewhere. They echoed discourses depicting indigenous children and families as 'out of place' in the city (Aufseeser, 2014). While these attitudes are not new, the prevalence of international organisations supporting anti child-labour campaigns in the name of children's rights provide moral and financial support to such views, and the means to reframe inequality as 'a cultural issue' (see Martinez Novo, 2003, for a critique of a link between 'ethnic practice' and street work in Mexico).

The majority of mothers with whom I spoke specifically emphasised that they did not want their children to work in the streets, and were aware of various risks that their children negotiated in the context of their everyday lives and work. Thus, project efforts that focus on teaching mothers about the danger of street work or reforming their behaviour are misguided, and fail to reflect the reality of the tradeoffs that mothers constantly negotiate.

COMPLEX TRADEOFFS: EXPLORING THE IDENTITY OF THE 'GOOD MOTHER'

Mothers negotiate competing discourses of what it means to be a good mother with efforts to meet their own, their children's, and other family members' needs. They are bombarded with images and messages that naturalise their role as their children's protectors. For example, in an interview in Peruvian newspaper *Redaccion Trome*, psychologist Vanessa Herrera explained that 'delinquents come from families without values':

> Interviewer: What should a mother do if someone assaults her child?
>
> Herrera: The mother is the pillar for her child, her role is protector. She cannot permit for any motive that anyone hit her child, even if they [the child] have done something very bad. Otherwise, the youth will grow feeling alone and abandoned.
>
> Interviewer: There are mothers who support their partners when they hit their children.
>
> Herrera: It is certain, in many families, mothers-and also fathers-are complicit with aggression. (...) the woman must be a mother before being a woman. (Parades, 2015).

In her role as an 'expert,' Herrera's comments reflected beliefs that women must put their identity as mothers before other identities and make whatever sacrifices are necessary to protect their children; if children are hurt, mothers share at least part of the blame for failing in their maternal role as protectors.

Many of the mothers with whom I spoke also reinforced ideals of 'sacrifice' and 'protection' as key components of motherhood. Thirty-six year-old Teresa had slept on the streets since she was seven years old. Both of her children were born due to sexual abuse. She explained, "I was afraid I would reject him [her first son] but when I saw him so defenseless, I had to protect him. I thought, 'God has sent him to save me.' To be a mother is to make sacrifices without hoping for anything. They [her parents] were not like that with me but I did not want to repeat history. I have made mistakes but when [my son] kisses me on the forehead and says, 'I love you, mama', it is the best reward." Her comments further reflect a common argument that mothers do not need any economic or material support for their social reproduction work because love or care should be reward enough.

Isabela, a 32-year old who had migrated from the highlands as a child, was living in a small rented room with her three children in downtown Lima. She reiterated the belief that being a mother is a blessing. She had spent much of her childhood in the streets and had a lot of anger towards her mother. "Some children work because their fathers leave, they drink, they start a new family (….) I was abandoned by a *woman*," she emphasised, "who did not know how to value the blessing of being a mother." Isabela held mothers to higher standards in terms of commitment to their children than she did fathers.

Even mothers whose actions arguably went against 'global' ideas of childhood frequently justified their actions by appealing to notions of good motherhood. I met 28-year old Fiorella, originally from Cajamarca, a region in the highlands, on the corner of a busy intersection in a lower-income neighborhood in Lima. Her son Paul sold candies to drivers stopped at lights. Fiorella said, "We need to pay for Paul's school fees, for food. His father left us. What am I supposed to do? There is no one to help me. What choice do I have? I must work all day to provide for my children." On multiple occasions, Fiorella would ask me for resources for her children, ranging from clothing and sneakers to money to buy food. Other mothers would make comments that Fiorella was 'always trying to get something.' However, Fiorella was actively working to provide for her children in any way she could. Rather than seeing her as enterprising, other mothers framed her as manipulative, and would try to differentiate themselves from her. "Fiorella is more focused on her new partner. She does not take care of her children. Paul skips school and goes to use the internet. She is teaching him to expect handouts" Andrea explained (field notes, 2011). Approaches that focus on the individual worth of mother's actions actively work to reinforce attitudes of poverty based on character and culture.

Mothers often find themselves in 'Catch-22' situations. On the one hand, in seeking social support for their children, women can reaffirm a vision of themselves as 'good mothers'. Yet, they must negotiate a subtle line: mothers need to be enterprising but not exploitative. Especially in the situation of indigenous women, some wealthier Peruvians and international NGO workers suggested that women used their children to seek more financial assistance. For example, a social worker for families in a village a few hours outside of the city of Cusco explained, "Some women have children just to make sure they are still eligible for benefits" (interview, 2010).

The idea of parental irresponsibility in the form of having too many children emerged in conversations throughout my time in Peru. Jose, a municipal police officer in Lima, explained that child poverty continued to exist because "parents don't plan well. They don't think about their limited capacities and instead breed like *cuy* (guinea pigs). They don't think about whether their money will be sufficient if they keep having kids… The *serrenos* [highlanders] come to Lima and think life will be easy but then they can't take care of all the kids" (interview, 2010). His comments, which are linked to stereotypes of Peruvian highlanders, are revealing in their tendency to blame poverty on the actions of 'overbreeding' parents, who do not *think* through their actions. Such comments fail to consider actual resource use, they also naturalise the current distribution of resources, implying that poor parents should work within the constraints of their personal economies when deciding to have children, rather than questioning the way goods are distributed in the first place. Such beliefs are influenced by growing interest of international organisations with population control (Rojas, 2004; Mitchell, 1995). Further, they overlook the government's history of regulating poor women's fertility, through programs such as Fujimori's Family Planning Program, which relied on the forced sterilisation of women in poor areas. While forced sterilisation no longer occurs, some women continue to avoid reproductive health service because of discrimination, disrespect and misunderstanding (Boesten, 2010). Further, poor women, especially adolescents, have more limited access to contraceptives than do their wealthier counterparts, and must often negotiate stigma and bureaucracy when trying to access available services. Yet, such factors and inequalities are overlooked in the tendency to blame women for having too many children and hence perpetuating their own poverty.

Beyond efforts to 'scam' *Juntos*, indigenous mothers are depicted as 'working the system.' Throughout the month of December, local politicians host *chocolotadas*, Christmas events in which they give toys and hot chocolate to children in the area while also attempting to gain electoral votes from Perú's poorer population. Yet, many government staff, along with wealthier mestizo populations, expressed concern about the number of indigenous mothers who would travel hours around the city to receive multiple gifts and snacks from various municipalities, despite little indication that such behaviours occurred on any wide scale. In categorising mothers' behaviour as immoral, they overlook how such behaviour may be a sign of pro-active parenting, as parents work to get more material items for their children. Such comments also fail to consider the complex and exploitative relationship of regional governments with indigenous populations.

On subsequent visits to Peru, some of the youth with whom I worked initially had themselves become mothers. In some cases, this shift in identity did not result in any immediately discernible changes in either youth behaviours, or the ways in which they were treated. But in others, becoming a mother, and the subjectivities that young people linked with good motherhood, did prompt a change. The ways in which this change manifested were contradictory. For example, in the case of 25 year old Ana, she stopped selling drugs because "Jose [her son's] father is in jail, and the police are doing more round-ups. If I sell drugs, I might get arrested and then Jose would have no one. Now I sell food during the day, and I bring Jose with me" (interview, 2011). In some situations, Ana would stay with the food cart, and Jose would walk up and down busy intersections, selling snacks to drivers waiting for the light to change. In theory, Jose could be picked up by police for his work in the streets. Yet, it is not actually clear what choices will lead to the best outcomes for children or their mothers. In Andean society, mitigating risks associated with poverty is a collective rather than individual responsibility (Crivello and Boyden, 2011).[7] In smaller villages, extended communities collectively keep an eye on young people. However, as newcomers to urban areas, some families do not have the same networks—they are faced with the choice of leaving children alone when they go to work, or of bringing their children with them. Further, snap judgments that equate streets with risk ironically may increase that very risk by minimising the importance of analysing actual conditions of exploitation. By this I mean that if the any child in the streets is automatically assumed to face exploitation, there is no need to further distinguish between the different situations in which children work. Mothers are then disenfranchised from making the best decisions for their children, and instead need to negotiate image and representation, while also mothering in a context of poverty, the neoliberalisation of responsibility, and active discrimination.

I met Cecilia when she was enrolled in a primary school for working children. At the time of my last visit, Cecilia had recently turned 18 and given birth to her second child. "For me, being a good mother involves protecting a child and teaching him by demonstrating examples. I often think that I should not have become a mother so young. But I am also blessed to have two beautiful children. And I will use whatever forces I can to

[7] In this sense, individual roles and expectations are strongly shaped by collective aspirations—yet, such an outlook contradicts Western conceptions of individual rights.

give them what I could not have during my own childhood… I worked since I was six. I needed to sell with my brothers to buy clothes or toys… sometimes we were dying of hunger, my mom the most. She would give us what little she had." Cecilia expressed not wanting to repeat certain aspects of her own childhood. At the same time, in her reflections, she frequently emphasised the sacrifices her mother had made to give them what she could. Throughout the time I knew her, Cecelia negotiated complex feelings of shame, pride and anger at her mother and Cecilia's own role as a working child. The teacher at the school Cecilia attended repeatedly explained that Cecilia's mother did not value schooling and did not know how to 'educate' her own children. "She [Cecilia's mother] cannot control her own children. She prefers that they work instead of study. That is why Cecilia got pregnant. This is why [the family] will continue to live in poverty" (interview, 2014). Her comments echoed common views that parents caused their children's poverty, expressed by a wide range of people, including government officials, elite Peruvians, and economically disadvantaged children themselves. Yet, in longitudinal research with Peruvians in Lima, Anderson (2007) found that a lack of opportunity and structural inequalities perpetuated intergenerational poverty much more than did parents' value.

Cecilia made the decision to leave her children with her mother or a neighbour when she went to sell. She did not want them to feel the same shame she had felt walking for hours in the streets of Lima's wealthier neighbourhoods. In other situations, women reported working to create care networks for their children. Thirty-two year old Sumaq was born in a small village outside of Cusco, where she explained, "I always brought [my daughter] to the fields with me. And we all helped each other. Here, in the market, I can watch her. When I am selling, she goes to Ursula's [one stand over]. Pedro [Ana's older brother] comes when he gets out of school and helps her with her homework. She sometimes watches the stand for me when I have to go to buy things or go back to the house to cook." Their comments also reflect ways in which children's well-being is integrated into family well-being.

Neoliberal forms of governance emphasis the individual over the collective (Gallagher, 2012). However, in doing so, they fail to recognise the interconnectedness of different family members' subjectivities. Viewing needs independently overlooks the ways in which children and mother's needs are different but also intertwined. Allowing children to work as selling artisan goods may be a practical livelihood strategy. In Cusco's main plaza, children are often more successful at vending than are their mothers—primarily because the municipal police confiscate supplies from adult vendors to prevent them from entering the plaza but are much more likely to allow children to sell artisan goods to tourists, as was the case with Anita's family. Yet, analyses of global childhood emphasise the negatives of labour, rather than recognising that all decisions involve complex tradeoffs (Aufseeser et al, 2018). Working in the plaza provides girls with a place to run around and play with friends, while under the supervision of their mothers, who sit nearby. While in most situations, the girls give the money they earn to their mothers, the money is used to purchase food for the family, pay the children's school fees and for other needed resources in the house. In Peru, although public schools are supposedly free, families must pay for school supplies, Parent Teacher Association fees, and school uniforms, which can cost up to the equivalent of $100. By allowing children to vend, mothers supervise their children while also facilitating greater economic income for their families. Theorising women and children's needs as either entirely separate, or intertwined as 'womanandchildren' overlooks intersubjectivity, and the way decisions are made within families (Punch, 2002).

Further, although campaigns against child labour are carried out in the name of children's well-being, multiple children in this study discussed how badly they felt when NGO staff criticised their mothers. In early conversations with twelve-year old Kimi, who lives in an informal community on the outskirts of Lima, she explained that her mother worked in a factory most of the day, so Kimi would help her aunt sew clothing after school to avoid being in an empty house. However, as we spoke more, Kimi explained that her mom was sick and unable to work, and the 'aunt' that she helped was a woman in the neighbourhood. "People don't understand. My mom wants me to study. She wants me to have a better future. She didn't finish school. But we also need money. My mom is a good mom" (interview, 2014). Young people are aware that their mothers are frequently viewed as the main agents of their exploitation. However, even in situations in which a parent does send a child to work, teaching the value of labour through practice may provide a more practical effort to prepare their children for the future than does keeping them alone in an empty home (also see Campoamor, 2016).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have shown ways in which children's rights discourses have been used to discipline and blame poor mothers for their children's poverty. In doing so, they obscure structural factors contributing to child poverty and instead reframe poverty as cultural. Mothers are assumed to lack the self-discipline and knowledge to act in the best interest of their children. Especially as it pertains to children's work, rights advocates and development practitioners alike make assumptions that children in the streets are at worst being forced to work by exploitative mothers, and at best, are working because their mothers do not understand the risks their children face in the

streets. Yet, because of the assumed progressive nature of children's rights, policies carried out in the name of children's well-being have not been subject to as much scrutiny as have other conditional welfare programs. Appeals to global childhoods are then translated into notions of 'global motherhood', defined on the basis that mothers should actively work to facilitate childhoods spent in school, with the family, and in play. If mothers fail to do so, they are branded as 'uncaring'.

The mothers in this study both challenge and reinforce these representations of 'global motherhood'. While actions such as permitting children to work in public space are framed as problematic, in many situations, mothers understand their children's work as part of an active strategy to supervise their children or facilitate more opportunities for them. Powerful discourses of what children should be doing and where hinder acknowledgment of the competing tensions that mothers must negotiate. Instead children's rights discourses provide a tool that policy makers, NGO staff, and educators use to focus attention on 'problematic' behaviours of mothers. Further, as demonstrated by comments from some of the mothers, they not only resist but also internalise representations of 'global motherhood', justifying their behaviours through appeals to sacrifice, child well-being, and some of the very same notions that shape ideas of 'global motherhood'. In this way, children's rights legislation and discourses provide a powerful logic not only shaping the ways in which poor mothers are disciplined, but also shaping mothers' own subjectivities and ideas about what motherhood means.

In practice, children's rights are often framed within a neoliberal framework, as something possessed by an individual, with an emphasis on the ability to become an entrepreneurial subject (see Nieuwenhuys, 2008). This not only shapes particular understandings of what childhood looks like, but also relegates the role of the mother to the background, as someone who fulfils, or in this case, hinders the fulfilment of individual children's rights. Yet, a neoliberal rights' based framework fails to reflect the intersubjectivity of rights. In the case of motherhood, the very identity of a mother can only come into existence in relation to others. Recognising this interdependency highlights limitations in trying to separate women's rights from children's rights, or subsume one under the other. Just as children's rights can only be exercised in the context of specific relationships, motherhood is also a socially constructed embodied experience. Such recognition calls into question the ability to invoke children's rights to discipline or punish poor mothers and instead necessitates a relational analysis of family well-being.

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'Mothers at the Malls': A Study of Glocal Aspirations and Mothering from Delhi

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ABSTRACT

This paper utilises findings from a short-term project titled *Mall: A Gendered Space*, undertaken by the Women's Studies and Development Centre (WSDC), University of Delhi, India, between 2016 and 2017. The project was aimed at examining the way newly-created, globalised spaces such as shopping malls (in this case a bustling mall frequented by different classes in upscale Delhi) are being accessed by women in India. Investigations into the Promenade Mall involved interaction with women accessing the space in two primary capacities: migrant women that constituted the majority of the mall workforce, and women visiting the mall as the predominant category of consumers. Women from different social classes appeared to have diversely adapted glocal shifts and practices typified by shopping mall use. While the migrant women employed there as security-personnel, or as housekeeping staff, took from it an aspirational framework of urban-living, employment, and education, the middle, upper-middle, and upper class woman as consumers appreciated and imbibed a self-development project of consumption and transformation (that included self-care, grooming and additional consumer practices). This article employs findings from the WSDC project on shopping malls to establish how processes of mothering in case of women-women workers of the Mall, as well mothers visiting the Mall as consumers, drew heavily from their exposure to the apparently emboldening forces of globalisation, while simultaneously resulting in further entrapment for these women through the very aspirational mother-functions they seemed to perform. Furthermore, such mothering practices exemplified why motherhood and its interconnections with materiality and consumption in varied forms, and with class dynamics, are indispensable to any critical understanding of women's lives today.

Keywords: aspiration, consumption, mothering, materiality, shopping malls

INTRODUCTION

Whilst 'malls' or 'shopping malls' were first anticipated globally in the form of super stores or mega stores in early twentieth century USA (1907 onwards) in places such as Baltimore, California, Kansas City (Singh and Srinivasan, 2012), shopping malls in India emerged only in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Their emergence and rapid spread in India has been widely interlinked with the market liberalisation policy adopted by the country in the 1990s, which included a relaxation in foreign direct investment (FDI) up to 51% in joint ventures in 2006 (Singh and Srinivasan, 2012). The subsequent boom in modern retail in the country has also significantly impacted its cultural and social institutions. In fact, the synthesising of material and cultural forces in urban, and semi-urban lifestyles has been acknowledged as a major goal of retail giants in post-globalisation India. In a book titled *It Happened in India* (2007), published quite early in India's economic trajectory of consumer-culture and retail expansion, Dipayan Baishya records clear goals of the retail icon Kishore Biyani, CEO, Future Group, India, who started out in the 1990s with the aim of conquering 'the entire Indian consumption space' (Biyani and Baishya, 2007). Biyani's group inaugurated some of the earliest 'super stores' in India, encompassing different aspects of consumer needs and aspirations - from clothes, to furniture, to food items, and even insurance. More importantly, Biyani's conceptualising of these giant stores (such as *Pantaloons*, *Big Bazaar*, *Central* owned by the Future group), or shopping malls, implicated consumption practices by social units particularly the family in the expanding retail business of the country. Biyani was of the view that malls served a purpose explicitly beyond shopping, catering also to the need for a clean, sanitised, safe and commercial space where families would get together (Biyani and

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Baishya, 2007). From the perspective of analysing employment, self-perception and furthering of 'neoliberal governmentality' through malls (and the retail industry in general), Nandini Gooptu's research provides insights into the way work in malls contributed to an ethos of self-dependence, hard work and an apparently apolitical agenda of self-growth, delinked from policy interventions/expectations from a minimised State. Gooptu saw this as a further step in the production of compliant workers who would carry forward a new work culture, necessary for forwarding the agenda of the corporate sector, in post globalisation India (Gooptu, 2009). Today, more than a decade after corporates such as Biyani conceived their retail arenas as a site of familial 'togetherness', and the young mall worker began her/his attempts at self-growth, the Mall has established itself as a critical 'place' of socialisation, aspiration and class-interaction, and is not merely a consumer 'space'.

METHODOLOGY, SCOPE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

In his writing, French Marxist Pierre Bourdieu seeks to do away with what he calls a set of 'meaningless oppositions' that exist in sociological research, such as those of the conceptual and empirical, microsocial and macrosocial, and theory and methodology (Bourdieu, 1996: 8). These 'oppositions', the French sociologist says, are especially inseparable for examining 'notions of social space, symbolic space, or social class', that are best captured through 'a discursive montage' of photographs, interview excerpts, statistical tables, as well as abstract language blended with the most concrete of records (Bourdieu, 1996: 7-8). In a similar spirit of attempting to examine malls as both social and symbolic spaces of intersecting social classes, the WSDC undertook a research study of a popular mall in the heart of India's capital, Delhi, during 2016-17. Additionally, the study was also intended to investigate malls as globalised spaces catering to the complex material needs of a large regional chunk of urban and semi-urban population near the city. The fieldwork for the study included collection of data through vox-populi, semi-structured interviews (about 60 interviews of diverse participants interacting with the mall), focus group discussions, and collection of photographic images and video clips, which were all subsequently analysed. The project involved ethnographic study of the Promenade Mall population conducted over a period of six months.

At the outset, it is crucial to delineate the parameters of the study. Limitations of time, resources and other logistics meant that the team undertook the fieldwork over a limited period of about six months. The study did not extend to a comparative analysis of different shopping malls within Delhi, or to a comparison of patterns of consumption, mothering and lifestyle shifts across different timelines. There were also limitations to the time that the staff of the Mall could provide for group discussions and interviews, with defined shifts of work and shortened breaks. Prolonged interviews with consumers visiting the Promenade Mall were difficult to obtain due to the leisured nature of shopping practices. It is also important to acknowledge debates existing in relation to the ethnographic method itself, the 'objective' role of the researcher in collecting data on the researched, challenges which Bourdieu broadly terms as 'objective limits of objectivism' (Bourdieu, 1977: 1). Besides delineating the limits of objectivity as early as the 1970s, Bourdieu speaks of the need to study 'the *dialectical* relations between the objective structures to which the objectivist mode of knowledge gives access and the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualized and which tend to reproduce them', a project Bourdieu remained committed to, through dissecting concepts such as 'habitus', 'field' and 'social class' (3). The debate on the ethnographic 'method', and the problematics of 'observations', is an ongoing one, and has been addressed in recent decades through the notion of 'intersubjectivity'- a term found in the philosophical postulations of Edmund Husserl, who employed it to suggest our "worlds of experience" though separated, "in fact become joined by concatenation of actual experience to make up the one intersubjective world" (Husserl, 1983: 108). Intersubjectivity, in anthropological discourse, has come to denote the complex relationship shared by the researcher(s) and the researched in the field, acknowledging the challenges of objective ethnography, and the presence of multiple subjects. In the context of Indian anthropology, multiple attempts have been undertaken to defend/understand/redefine the task of the researcher, such as explained in Meenakshi Thapan's analysis of the anthropological method, where Thapan asserts:

> …the constitution of the ethnographic text is always never a complete statement or absolute truth but only a fragment of understanding social reality, a contribution towards a deeper understanding of the whole, a movement towards an intersubjective understanding of social relations in everyday life. (Thapan, 1996: 2631).

The fieldwork for the Mall project was undertaken with a similar desire to contribute to a fraction or snapshot of a possible 'whole', while understanding that language, 'observation', and even accessing of the Mall space by academic researchers and subjects of particular social classes were complex elements that played out simultaneously in the field. The WSDC faculty and student-researchers undertook the study at DLF Promenade Mall, Vasant

Kunj, Delhi. The researchers interacted with Mall visitors across different age groups and gender, and with Mall staff across social hierarchies: from the Mall management to various teams on the ground (such as housekeeping and security teams). The families of some of the migrant housekeeping and security personnel were also interviewed. Lastly, the research team also conducted field trips to urban villages in the Promenade Mall's vicinity for studying the mall's inside/outside realities and the emergent socio-spatial dichotomies.

Considerable research has shed light on how the post-globalisation world is steeped in practices of consumption and lifestyle shifts, which are created by, and in turn propel, the liberalised markets globally. Since the 1970s, cultural theorists from Roland Barthes to Pierre Bourdieu have analysed consumer choices, goods and lifestyle practices in popular culture, to underline the centrality of the 'material' in shaping power-relations. Toril Moi in an essay assessing Bourdieu's contributions speaks of the critic's micro-theoretical approach, which enables Bourdieu 'to incorporate the most mundane details of everyday life …, -make sociological theory out of everything' (Moi, 1991: 1019-1020). Bourdieu investigates 'high' and 'low' elements of social classifications, unravelling how power is constituted and retained by a set of practices that define one's position in a particular social order. It is here that the notion of physical space as 'social space' also becomes important. Returning to Bourdieu's essay 'Physical Space…', the critical thinker underlines how a physical space shares its features with what he terms 'social space', stating:

> There is no space, in a hierarchical society, which is not hierarchized and which does not express social hierarchies and distances in a more or less distorted or euphemized fashion, especially through the effect of naturalization attendant on the durable inscription of social realities onto and in the physical world…(11)

It is in this sense that the shopping mall becomes a social space that endorses and upholds the social logic of consumption, taste, cultural capital, and consequently, new hierarchies.

Contemporary studies on materiality, social systems and consumption have found shopping malls to be pivotal sites of social stratification and even marginalisation. Malcom Voyce (2007), has argued that these quasi-public spaces by the very virtue of the commodities they engage with, the technologies they use and their spatial exclusivity, promote 'dividing practices' typical of neoliberal systems of power. Malls, according to Voyce, provide access and privileges only to the 'rightful spending middle class subjects, ironically, even before they set foot inside the mall space for the first time' (Voyce, 2007: 2055). A further category of complexity and stratification emerges with the introduction of women as the dominant group occupying commercial spaces such as shopping malls. The presence of women as the predominant category of consumers in shopping malls is well-established (Craig Martin, et al. 2007; Taylor and Cosenza, 2002). In contrast, available research on women and their interaction with globalised spaces such as shopping malls in India is scant, though considerable literature does address issues of women's mobility, particularly in urban and semi-urban locales (Kalpana, 2002; Shilpa Phadke et al., 2011).

The Promenade Mall research study undertaken by WSDC was an attempt to fill such existing gaps in the study of women's mobility (social and physical), shifts in patterns of consumption, and their conscious/unconscious negotiations of socio-economic forces in a post-globalised world. The project, *Mall: A Gendered Space* was conducted at a mall that captured consumers from what is now fashionably described as the new middle class in India. The DLF Promenade is located in South Delhi, in the upscale locality of Vasant Kunj. The Promenade Mall is close to the international airport of Delhi, as well as to some well-known educational institutions of the national capital. More importantly, the Promenade Mall is embedded in the midst of two distinct yet interconnected malls: the DLF Emporio on its left (housing luxury brands such as Gucci, Louis Vitton, Jimmy Choo, Armani), and on its right the Ambience Mall (known for its reasonably priced brands like Pantaloons, Westside, and Shoppers Stop, and a food court). The Promenade Mall serves as a spatial, as well as budgetary 'middle-ground' between the elite clientele and amenities of the Emporio and the popular and the pocket-friendly Ambience Mall. It boasts of a blend of imported/designer brands, along with Indian retail labels, which while not always affordable, offer a variety of choices to the consumer. The Senior Manager (Operations) of the Promenade Mall described this factor as primarily responsible for the niche that the Promenade Mall has carved out for itself, attracting consumers from the middle and upper middle classes of Delhi. He also shared that 90% of consumers of the Promenade Mall were women. The WSDC research team was able to interview a number of women visitors, and observed the large presence of mother-daughter pairs, as well as of new mothers with infants. 60% of the visitors to the DLF Promenade who we asked, were regular mall visitors. In terms of age brackets, the manager shared his data that 50% of mall-goers were between the ages of 15-24 years, 40% in the bracket of 25-40 years, and the rest, 10% were over 40 years of age. The mall management took cognisance of the gender and age stratifications of mall visitors, and selected and shuffled its brands and amenities accordingly. Though the Manager repeatedly stressed that malls were 'destinations' of socialising, relaxation, shopping and entertainment for all, he revealed that shopping and purchase of goods in the Promenade Mall was mainly done by the 10% of shoppers of over 40 years of age. Keeping in mind that 90% of consumers at the Mall were women, the Mall management had organised

90% of its retail brands and lifestyle arenas (such as a nail-art studio, spa, play-arena for kids) for targeting its women consumers. Each floor of the Promenade Mall had an architectural layout that ensured each mallgoer would compulsorily have to negotiate multiple brand stores and outlets, before she/he could arrive at any specific 'destination' within it. Security and upkeep of the Promenade Mall premises were two other aspects that emerged as critical priorities of the mall management. The Manager of Operations compared the security blanket provided at the Promenade Mall to that provided at international airports, and reaffirmed the fact the mall was a safe, and fully surveilled space. The ancillary team responsible for the functioning of the Promenade Mall consisted of 500-600 employees, and included a security team and a housekeeping team (apart from specific teams for event planning, advertising and so on). The Manager stated that about 90% of the mall employees were in fact migrants coming to the capital Delhi for employment opportunities.

This article attempts to analyse women shopper's presence in newly-created globalised spaces such as shopping malls, and highlights important strands pertaining to women's role as consumers in contemporary nations such as India. Additionally, the paper will interlink women's patterns of consumption and lifestyle preferences with the neoliberal aims of the retail market (Biyani and Baishya, 2007), which sought to transform familial practices, lifestyle choices, and socialisation mechanisms through women's own performance of 'mothering' and shopping. Motherhood and practices of mothering emerged as both the sites as well as forces of change in social fields, symbolised by the Promenade Mall. Issues of exclusion and stratification (as discussed by Voyce, 2007), with regard to the constitution, operation and marketing strategies of the Promenade Mall are addressed by incorporating into the study the participation of the Mall workforce, which challenges any easy categorising of what the Mall experience symbolises. Overall, the scope of the paper involves a study of mothering with regard to the women accessing the Mall as consumers (primarily from the middle and upper middle classes), and as security and housekeeping personnel (majority being migrant workers seeking employment and financial security) to understand how the aspirational project of lifestyle shifts and upward mobility are both shaped and realised with exposure to the Promenade Mall. The emergent practices of mothering are thus complex, further implicating women in the project of neoliberal consumption and what may be controversially described as gendered 'empowerment'.

MOTHERHOOD, MATERIALITY AND 'FIELD'

The discourse around motherhood in India has seen important contributions from scholars such as Samita Sen (1993). Sen undertakes a sustained analysis of the socio-cultural demands made on women historically, through the mother-function they have been expected to perform. In essays such as 'Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal' (with specific reference to 19th and early 20th century Bengal), Sen not only demystifies the 'general valorisation of motherhood', but also examines the ways in which issues of lack of social welfare policies and support - such as medical aid for infant mortality and maternal care - were collapsed into an ideological critique of 'careless' and 'neglectful' mothers (1993: 231-234). Similarly, with regard to the domain of workplace, employment and construction of motherhood, Sen's later essay (2008) points to recurrent attempts at 'resolving' the women's question at work, by viewing women primarily as mothers rather than professionals, with many people at the time putting forward claims of the adverse effect work was having on processes of mothering and housewifery (2008: 82).

Globally, the field of Motherhood Studies has grown. Samira Kawash (2011) notes challenges that the field currently faces-from fundamental questions regarding motherhood and its alignment with an essentially 'feminist' cause, to constant linking of motherhood with the project of familial values, to challenges offered by the emergence of post-structuralist thinking, and the reluctance to factor in issues of materiality and market in understanding motherhood (2011: 972). Kawash highlights the contribution of Andrea O'Reilly (2010), whose work appears to address some of the debates noted above, by explicating feminist underpinnings of motherhood studies, and interconnecting academic studies with the lived experiences of mothers. O'Reilly (2010: 4), describes the field of motherhood studies as a 'new and exciting discipline', that is shaped, and in turn shapes various forces of the new millennium. O'Reilly's book studies phenomena as varied as 'globalization, raising trans children, HIV/AIDS, the new reproductive technologies, queer parenting, the motherhood memoir, mothering and work, welfare reform, intensive mothering, mothers and/in politics, the influence of the Internet', among others, to investigate motherhood and its dynamic interface with the material and cultural (2010: 3-4). In recent years, materiality has emerged as central to cultural discourse. In the 'Introduction' to the book *Materiality* (2005), Daniel Miller sets out to unpack contemporary underpinnings of the 'material', locating material culture itself within wider 'conceptualizations of culture'. Miller uses a two-pronged approach to exemplify the 'material': (1) of 'theory of objects as artefacts' – as exemplified by Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of objects, their order, and positioning, as fundamental to our understanding of the world around us, and (2) of a Hegelian (1977) rejection of distinction between 'humanity' and 'materiality', asserting, 'we both produce and are the products of these historical processes' (Miller, 2005: 9). Mothering and consumption are both dependent on and contextualised by artefacts we create, as

well as 'artefacts' themselves that are in a complex interactive relationships with technologies, spaces, goods and capital of various kind.

Issues of material consumption, marketing, and doing motherhood, have also gradually ascended to the forefront of motherhood discourse. In their research article Sara Afflerback et al. (2014) assert how materiality is of singular importance to the constitution of motherhood for the majority of middle class American women:

> (…) acquisition of consumer goods is a significant aspect of the transition to motherhood in contemporary US society, used both for the practical care of the baby and as a symbolic marker of the woman's new status as a mother… this acquisition and arrangement of consumer goods occurs in ritualized fashion. We suggest that two prevalent rituals of motherhood—nesting, or creating a physical space for the baby to inhabit, and gifting, which typically takes place through events such as baby showers—are in fact "consumption rituals." By understanding them as such, we see how consumption is critical to women during the transition to motherhood…It also provides insight into the role consumption plays in perpetuating the gender system, in terms of gendering the child and reinforcing the culture of motherhood (2014: 2).

Such approaches to consumption move forward from the one-dimensional model of consuming 'goods', to a study of the complex interlinks between such goods and modern myths, performances, and rituals built around them (Barthes, 1972). Similarly, Janelle S. Taylor in *Consuming Motherhood* (2004) considers consumption and its allied forces as seminal in shaping lived experiences of mothers today, and hence endorses:

> … ethnographic and historical explorations of how ordinary women, striving to build and maintain relations of kinship in the context of globalising consumer capitalism, live out motherhood in and through, as well as against, ideologies and practices of consumption' (2004: 12).

Taylor's research undertakes such a task analysing mothering, consumption and familial shifts in the context of social life across contemporary North America, as well as Europe, focussing on reproductive technology, the industry of 'care' and the overall consuming of such market driven 'goods' that make/unmake notions of motherhood.

Returning to Toril Moi's analysis of Bourdieu's discourse on materiality, gender and power, Moi cites Rogers Brubaker (1985) to explain Bourdieu's concept of 'class' as 'so distinct as to be applicable to any social group whose members share a certain number of material and social conditions and thus also develop' (1991: 1029). Moi understands this notion of 'class' as both a category of materiality and of gender, applicable to relationships constituted by the dominant and the dominated. Gender, for most feminists, is a superimposition of socially produced power relations between the sexes' onto embodied lives (Moi, 1991: 1030). Furthermore, the category of 'Woman' in this framework, 'is neither an essence nor an indeterminate set of fluctuating signifiers, but an arbitrarily imposed definition with real social effects' (1991: 1033). This 'natural' division is established as unquestionable, and becomes part of what Bourdieu terms as doxa or common knowledge/philosophy that keeps power relations intact (Bourdieu, 1990). A further addition to the understanding of such classes and power dynamics is the concept of symbolic violence, through which Bourdieu explains dominance within class structures. This form of violence is camouflaged, 'soft', naturalised and resorted to when direct violence is difficult to exercise. Significantly, symbolic violence becomes part of direct/indirect practices that women themselves perform, and in turn, sustain their dominated status within a social field.

Bourdieu's concept of the field (1996) is perhaps most crucial of all, as it provides a site for the play of power relations, class practices, censorship, conformity and most vitally, of symbolic violence and symbolic capital. Elucidating Bourdieu's notion of the 'field' in his seminal work *Distinction* (1996), Toril Moi writes:

> … a field is a particular structure of distribution of a specific kind of capital. The right to speak, legitimacy, is invested in those agents recognized by the field as powerful possessors of capital … in the very act of engaging in battle, they mutually and silently demonstrate their recognition of the rules of the game … The different positions of different players in the field will require different strategies. … Legitimacy (or distinction) is only truly achieved when it is no longer possible to tell whether dominance has been achieved as a result of distinction or whether in fact the dominant agent simply appears to be distinguished because he (more rarely she) is dominant.... (1991: 1022-1023).

Bourdieu himself attributes the 'structure of the field' to the essentially unequal way in which capital is distributed, leading to the appropriation of power and rules pertaining to the functioning of the field in the hands of those with a greater amount of capital. Additionally, such rules and laws are also formulated to further the cycle of capital and its reproduction. (Bourdieu, 1986: 284). Moi also stresses the heterogeneity of agents in the field and on their variegated economic, social and geographical backgrounds. However, the appropriation of Bourdieu by

Moi is best reflected in her feminist critical self-reflexivity within the Bordieuan framework. Showing how feminist philosophers like Simone de Beauvoir were themselves a part of the construction of womanhood, while critiquing it, Moi declares that 'the would-be critic of the doxa [also] finds herself obliged to reflect on the conditions which produce her as a speaker", (1991: 1028), alluding to the self-reflexivity required by socialist feminist analysis.

MOTHERING, CONSUMPTION AND THE MALL-GOER

Stephanie O'Donohoe and others (2013) bring together critical studies on different aspects of mothering today, including ideologies of mothering, tropes and performances of mothering, as well as shifts in 'doing' mothering, to the backdrop of global market forces and an intensifying material culture under global neoliberalism. Alison Clarke's article (Clarke in O'Donohoe 2013) explores the way social classes, market forces, media and motherhood stereotypes have influenced and alter each other. Clarke studies the way images of the perfect mother have metamorphosed into the symbol of the 'consumptive mother', who draws her identity from commodities, fashion and lifestyle choices available. Clarke calls this nexus of materiality as 'the cosmology of goods and taste knowledges' (2013: 5). The present discussion similarly positions women both as users of consumer products (at the simplest levels), besides producing their own complex 'products', including mothering. What Bourdieu calls 'the whole universe of life-styles' (1996: 176) also finds parallels in Harman and Cappellini's article which argues for example that 'lunchboxes are understood as an artefact linking together discourses and practices of doing and displaying mothering', with mothers revealing anxieties of being 'on display' via the food they packed. (2015: 764).

The DLF Promenade Mall, Delhi, becomes an example of consumer spaces driven by women. The research team visually registered the presence of mothers in different roles and age groups at the Mall from mothers accompanying their school children to food courts at the Mall, to young mothers visiting the Mall with toddlers and infants, to middle-aged women undertaking 'serious' shopping accompanied by young daughters at the mall. It must be reiterated that the Promenade Mall has established itself as a place catering to the shopping and lifestyle practices of the middle and upper middle classes of the national capital. Incorporating wellness spas, nail-art studios, food-courts, and even a play arena for children called 'Kiddyland', the Mall is marketed as a leisure destination, rather than just another retail hub. Without claiming to provide a comprehensive, or conclusive picture of mothering practises in the retail space, we observed: (i) the consuming practices undertaken by mothers that seem to challenge and complicate traditional notions of 'doing' mothering (ii) projects of self-transformation via the mall's amenities that seem to take consumption beyond motherhood, and (iii) and how in performing consuming motherhoods, these mothers imbibe and display a sense of taste or judgement (Bourdieu, 1996), which establishes them as conscious/unconscious agents and producers of the wave of hyper-consumption. The Mall symbolises promises of the 'cosmology of goods and taste knowledges' (Clarke, 2013: 5).

Consumptive Practices and 'Doing' Mothering at the Mall

The photograph in **Figure 1** was taken in the play-area at the Promenade Mall called 'Kiddyland'. The arena boasts of a range of outdoor sports, slides and games on offer for children from preschool to around pre-secondary school age brackets. In the photograph, a young father is seen capturing his son's photograph, as the latter enjoys a slide at Kiddyland. Our interview with the father revealed that he was 'baby-sitting' his son, while his wife was finishing shopping in the shop outlets at the Promenade. The man also shared that as a nuclear family living in the city, the family undertook this routine quite often, where his wife would be free to shop, while he attended to the son playing in the arena. The availability of such amenities for play and relaxation (on a paid basis), was in fact, highlighted by the father as a crucial reason for their 'love' for this particular Mall.

Figure 1. Father and Son duo at the Promenade

The research team spotted several young mothers at the Promenade Mall accessing the mall with infants. The photographs in **Figures 2** and **3** document some of these mothers as they indulged in eating with family at food court, or strolled about in the company of other young mothers. The young mother photographed at the food court was accompanied by her parents-in-law, as well as a nanny for care of the infant. We traced the nanny seated on a separate table, eating by herself. In her interview with us, the young mother shared that visiting the Mall with her family for socialising and eating was one of her favourite activities, underlining that motherhood had not hindered her mobility and enjoyment through such spaces. The food court was also a popular location with school students who were seen at the Mall frequently. They were also often accompanied by their mothers to the food court. 'Hanging out' in the food court, and 'eating together' in such public spaces appeared to have become a regular practice with such mother-children groups, although it is notable that for the mother to enjoy herself, her labour was shifted onto a servant class. In addition to casually eating together (without the servants), the Mall also seemed to cater to intimate birthday celebrations hosted by mothers for their children, often attended by school mates/friends, and their mothers.

Figure 2. Young Mothers at the Promenade Mall

Figure 3. Young Mothers at the Promenade Mall

Craig Martin's research study (2009), offers data on children, their socialisation and consumptive habits derived from malls, and on American mother-daughter duos shopping together (see **Figure 4**). Martin points out how exposure to malls has emerged as a vital part of growing up for children, some of whom list 'going shopping' as their second favourite after-school leisure activity. Research from 30 years ago also referred to this trend(Schulman and Clancy, 1992), while underlining how children as young as age 10 can experience an average of 250 shopping expeditions annually (Dotson and Hyatt, 1994; Martin, 2009: 50).

The implications of performing such personal, familial celebrations as birthdays, 'get-togethers', and intimate bonding with parent in public arenas of the Mall, are complex, research into the material practices of mothering appear to challenge some of the most idealised conceptualisations of the role. Taylor et al argued back in 2004 that the merger of money and affection in the domain of mothering seems to arouse cultural anxieties, due to traditional perceptions of motherhood as a bond 'uniquely free of the kind of calculating instrumentality associated with the consumption of objects', as well as standing 'in opposition to the logic of the marketplace' (2004:3). The establishment of polemical values such as 'love' vis-à-vis 'money', 'care' vis-à-vis 'self-care' continue to be prevalent in cultural practices in India, where criticism of the material practices of 'modern' mothers by elderly women is

Figure 4. Mother-Daughter duo at the Promenade Mall

commonplace, especially within families. Traditionally, motherhood on the Indian sub-continent is a sacrosanct role women are expected to perform purely and sincerely.

Makeovers at Malls: Beyond Mothering

A number of women, especially middle-aged shoppers, preferred visiting the Promenade with their young daughters. The photo included above captures the semi-structured interview with a mother-daughter duo at the Mall. The mother introduced herself as a home-maker, while the daughter was a dentist. What struck the researchers about the duo were the similarities in their attire, make-up, and other markers of fashion, despite significant differences in age, education, articulation and the apparent body language of the mother and daughter. Though camera-shy, and uncertain of her English skills, the mother appeared to share the shopping and grooming choices of her daughter. The duo professed their love for high-street brands, and for frequent, 'serious' shopping trips to the Promenade, preferences that were corroborated by their groomed appearances, 'natural' make-up and attire. Relaxing at the Mall was also emphasised as a favourite activity by the duo. It remained difficult to ascertain whether the mother's aspirations had been manifested in the daughter's professional success. In examining social classes, gendered consumption and clothing, Bourdieu writes:

> Among women, who, in all categories (except farmers and farm labourers), spend more than men (especially in the junior and senior executive, professional and other high-income categories), the number of purchases increases as one moves up the social hierarchy; the difference is greatest for suits and costumes--expensive garments (...) (1996: 201).

Though Bourdieu's analysis focuses on garments and choices specific to French society that may not find direct parallels in the Indian context today, his observations find parallels in the mother-daughter duo at the Mall who positioned themselves as consumers and products of global market forces and brands. In doing so, the mother and daughter also became emblematic of a particular aspirational social class. A considerable number of Mall amenities and retail strategies, were in fact formulated to appeal to the self-transformatising zeal of middle-aged mothers, keen to match their confident, younger daughters.

Figure 5. Makeovers and Nail Art at the Promenade Mall

Figure 6. Nail-art at the Promenade Mall

The makeover sessions available at cosmetic stores, and health and beauty amenities such as wellness spas and nail art studio especially attracted the dedicated middle-aged mall-goer, aspiring to transform herself (see **Figures 5** and **6**). Significantly, while many of these mothers were accompanied by their young daughters, the realm of grooming, self-care and ultimate transformation undertaken within the mall seemed to have reversed parenting grooming roles between mothers and daughters. The daughters in such projects became both companions and motivations of a fashionable metamorphosis. Commodities at the Promenade Mall also catered for young and expectant mothers, facilitating their modern roles as working professionals, smart spouses and new-age mothers. The urban clothing brand 'W', we were told by salespeople, had introduced a line of trousers and other formal clothing for expectant mothers employed in corporate and business establishments, while the quality

British maternity brand 'Mothercare' had recently launched front-opening bras for lactating mothers, a product not available in the country before.

Yummy Mummies, 'Taste' and Symbolic Capital

Bourdieu identifies 'taste' or 'judgement' as 'the heavy artillery of symbolic violence' (1026), through which dominant classes naturalise control and reinforce power. The logical extension of this violence occurs in a stage in which the dominated adopts the taste and distinction of the dominant in a reproduction of dominant cultural values. Cultural capital (education), social capital (familial and social goodwill), and economic capital, all contribute to the establishment of such 'taste' behaviours, which in turn may lead to the generation of symbolic capital and symbolic violence. An understanding of Bourdieu's ideas on taste is critical for studying how preference for elite brands, 'taste' for fine dining/healthy food, indulgence in expensive spas and nail studios constitute the markers of those of the dominant class, whilst naturalising and furthering their control on such neoliberal spaces. Hence, to be visible in an exotic spa is a sign of economic capital and 'taste' through practices of exclusivity while accessing the spa is dependent on the precondition of being wealthy. The deepening of social stratifications, exclusionary practices and symbolic violence generated via the mall are further explored by investigating the 'Other' of such consumptive arenas- the migrant labour that underpins the Promenade Mall and its practices of mothering.

THE 'OTHER' MOTHERS: MIGRANT EMPLOYEES AND ASPIRATIONS

In an attempt to study the influence of neo-liberal spaces such as malls on different social classes the research team conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion with mall employees working as security and housekeeping personnel. The team also visited the ghettoes in which these migrant workers lived, interacting with their families as well. The subsequent section of this paper attempts to record how migrant mothers in the mall social research field negotiated the unequal distribution of various capitals within and beyond the physical domain of the Promenade Mall. The analysis seeks to understand the ways in which consumptive practices of mall-going mothers also propel aspirational projects of the migrant mothers working at the Promenade. The discussion focuses on the problematic aspects of such a commercial space, which on the one hand furthers dreams of urban living, employment and the acquisition of varied forms of capital, and on the other, leads to the inequality traps of market forces, consumption, and above all, of promoting the very doxa that contributes to the oppression of dominated classes and their exploited labour.

Toril Moi articulates a feminist understanding of the internalisation of social and consumer roles. Elaborating Bourdieu's conceptualisations on the subordination of minorities, Moi writes:

> A feminist analysis of the impact of gender on a woman's discourse and consciousness must also bear in mind that to be a member of a disadvantaged minority within a given institution or field in no way guarantees that one will develop a revolutionary or oppositional consciousness. On the contrary: ostensibly egalitarian institutions tend to breed consent rather than opposition, particularly among the *miraculis* - the miraculous exceptions. For the paradox is that members of minority groups who do succeed in such a system are at least as likely to identify with it as the enabling cause of their own success as to turn against its unjust distribution of symbolic capital (1991: 1037).

Moi further explains that while 'femaleness' might generate 'negative capital' in the class stratifications based on gender hierarchies, in the economic stratifications of class, this 'negative capital' might be balanced by the possession of other forms of capital (such as cultural and symbolic capital). Thus, within a given field, power relations between women as mothers, depend on a diverse set of factors, including their internalising of the mother-function, the distribution of a particular form of capital unequally in the specific field they are occupying, as well as women's overall possession of other forms of capital in different measures. Our article undertakes an examination of the paradoxical ways in which the migrant mothers employed in the Promenade seek to socially 'progress' by gaining inspiration from mothers of the middle and upper middle classes frequenting the Mall as consumers. This aspirational project of upward mobility, capital generation, and overall 'progress' implicates women in promoting the doxa that arguably furthers their subordination, and becomes manifest most clearly in the migrant mother's failed attempts at bourgeois embodiment in her transformation, grooming and change for the self and her practices of mothering dedicated towards children.

The DLF Promenade has attracted migrant workers from different states of India. The Promenade Mall's day-to-day functioning is dependent on a 500-600 member workforce that is constituted by a majority (90%) of internal (to India) migrants. Primarily working for the security and housekeeping teams of the Mall, these migrant workers belong to states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, among others. Most of these migrant workers are women who had left their home-states with their spouses, or in

Figure 7. Housekeeping Staff with 'Puff' Hairstyles

a few cases with their brothers or families. A majority of them were already mothers, while the remaining aspired to be mothers as soon as they would be 'well-settled'. Employment at the mall fetched them a salary of around INR 8,000, one weekly off day, and a more symbolic 'respectability', a term almost all of them used to answer questions on why they wanted to work at a shopping mall. Though not the most lucrative job, work at the mall was definitely perceived by these women as a sign of their 'progress' in social strata, especially when they compared it to their earlier roles as domestic help, servants, shop workers and the like. They argued that employment at the Promenade had opened vistas to them of multiple kinds. Having migrated from poor villages and semi-urban towns, the sanitised, air-conditioned and well-secured premises of the Mall represented improved working conditions to these women. The majority of migrant women claimed they had never been to a mall before, but now aspired to shop and eat at such places, particularly with their children, so the workforce aspired to be consumers themselves.

Entry into the Mall had altered the lives of these mothers, especially in terms of appearance, grooming, and body language. Such alterations were also essential to the nature of their job that required qualities such as a 'presentable' exterior and 'warm' demeanour (as commented upon by the woman-supervisor of the housekeeping team). It was striking that women working in the capacity of housekeeping staff and security personnel were required to use 'light make up' that included lip colour. The housekeeping staff had in fact received training in applying such makeup, and creating a specific hairstyle – the 'puff' (See **Figure 7**). This kind of expectation of

appropriate, conforming femininity is of course a required performance of much employment by women in service industries.

A number of mothers among these mall workers, expressed their awe towards women visitors of the mall particularly their mannerisms, groomed appearances, and the ease with which the middle and upper middle class women accessed and 'belonged' to the Mall, their embodied capital as a classed performance. Asha (name changed) from the village of Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh worked as housekeeping staff and spoke of how mothers visiting the mall would spend a considerable amount of time in restrooms providing final touches to their make-up. Asha found such habits fascinating, while pointing out that such mothers did not appreciate housekeeping staff playing or fondling their children, even as the Mall-going mothers were busy putting their look together in the sanitised restrooms. Asha also shared her own gradual liking for a well-put appearance on her outings, she articulated her own desire to buy clothes, while admitting that the she could wear 'pants' only at the Promenade Mall and never at home with her family. The joy of observing 'smart' women visiting the Mall, the ubiquitous spread of attractive commodities, and the overall respect she gained from her work, made Asha perceive the Promenade Mall as a liberating space. Similarly, Radha (name changed) hailing from Bakshi-ka-Talab, a village near Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and employed as a member of housekeeping staff at the Promenade, spoke of her expenses such as providing clothes for her children. On being asked about their consumption practices and recreational activities, the majority of these women mentioned shopping as a favourite activity, with the humble disclaimer of the fact that they could not afford this mall, but instead visited cheaper wholesale outlets.

Bourdieu in his writing assigns considerable importance to 'the inscription of social power relations on the body', as part of the 'Bildung' or education that promises power and change (as discussed by Moi, 1991: 1030). Such inscriptions include 'movements, gestures, facial expressions, manners, ways of walking, and ways of looking at the world' (1991: 1031). In the case of these mothers, this cultural education becomes critical to 'doing' mothering, and entails 'activities [such] as teaching children how to move, dress, and eat' (1031), in order to attain legitimacy within the field. As Moi states: 'The body-and its apparel such as clothing, gestures, make-up and so on-becomes a kind of constant reminder (…) of sociosexual power relations' (1991: 1031). Such an understanding of obtaining legitimacy through the bodily corroborates the seminal role that mothering plays in shaping 'Bildung' in a field, especially in the context of these Indian migrant mothers. Semi-structured interviews with such mothers working at the mall, indicated the extraordinarily aspirational nature of their schemes, largely derived from their interaction with consumer forces at the mall. Keen to uncover the complex components of mothering being undertaken by these migrant mothers, the team was given permission to visit their homes and localities. In the following sections, the lifestyle and consumptive practices of Radha are analysed in detail.

Like most migrant workers of the Promenade Mall, Radha lived with her husband and two children in one of the urban villages close to the Mall. These villages included areas known for catering to migrants descending on the national capital for employment, such as Masoodpur, Harijan Basti (roughly translated as Ghetto of the Untouchables), Mahipalpur, to name a few (see **Figure 8**). These ghettos stood in sharp contrast to the global ambience and shiny amenities of the malls nearby. Signs of aspiration and the desire to move-up in the field were visible in the numerous banners of tailoring shops, cheap English-speaking coaching centres, and even contacts for procuring fake educational certificates in the migrants' locales. One also came across children returning from affordable, government-run schools, accompanied by mothers (carrying their children's school-bags) in neat sarees and measured, affordable, make-up.

Figure 8. Scenes from a Ghetto near Vasant Kunj, Delhi

Radha's one-room home had no windows and was in darkness even in the afternoon when the team visited her (see **Figure 9**). She was dressed in traditional *salwar-kameez,* unlike in her westernized trouser and shirt at the Promenade. However, she had still kept the 'light-make up' intact, wearing it comfortably as a part of her persona, even in the strikingly different modest surroundings of her home. The huge building had ten rooms such as Radha's on each floor which are rented to individual families, and a common toilet and a bath. On being asked about the glittery streamers that beamed on a wall in the dark room, Radha smiled and shared that they were part of the décor for her son's birthday-celebrations held a few months ago.

Initially shy, Radha gradually opened up during the interview, revealing that her family belonged to the *Dalit*[1] community. This meant that they had never been treated with respect and equality at their village in Uttar Pradesh. Her relationship with her husband (also employed in a nearby mall) had also been abusive, and had remained so even after the birth of her children. Working at the Promenade Mall, according to Radha, provided her with an opportunity to gain dignity, financial independence, and a new lifestyle in an urban centre, far removed from the oppressive structures of the caste system in her village. Radha spoke of her desire to save up money and 'do things'

[1] *Dalit,* meaning 'untouchable' or 'broken' in Sanskrit, is a term associated with the oppressed sections of the Indian social class. The Dalits have been traditionally seen as the lowest people in the Hindu caste system.

Figure 9. Interiors of Radha's home

in life. This crucially included the education of her children. She had admitted her daughter to a nearby school and had even enrolled her for private tuitions at high cost, to boost her daughter's prospects of gaining education and her social mobility. Radha viewed these acts of mothering as integral to the project of gaining social legitimacy and material progress.

Explaining the paradox of the 'Bildung' project pursued by the dominated classes, Moi revisits Bourdieu to state:

> The function of the educational system … is above all to produce the necessary social belief in the legitimacy of currently dominant power structures, or in other words: to make us believe that our rulers are ruling us by virtue of their qualifications and achievements rather than by virtue of their noble birth or connections. The coveted diploma or exam paper becomes a token of social magic, the emblem of a transformational exercise which truly changes the essence of the chosen elite (1991: 1023).

Bourdieu's elucidations of the 'Bildung' project, specifically its interconnections with education, 'care', consumption and an overall trajectory of aspiration, make it an apt emblem for the complex project of mothering and its social dynamics today. Our research study *Mall: A Gendered Space* threw up several vital revelations regarding gender and mothering, performed unceasingly within the mall space. A product and bearer of neoliberal values, the Promenade Mall appeared to provide emboldening prospects to mothers accessing it: whether as consumers or as migrant employees. While new lifestyle practices, display of 'taste' and possibilities of self-transformation implicated mothers as pampered consumers of such arenas, the unequal distribution of capital in all its forms, also made them agents of symbolic violence onto another and lower class of women. The migrant mothers working at the Promenade emerged as conscious agents aspiring for change, through material performances of mothering - a fact that implicated them further in the traps of the regulatory and traditionally gendered mother-function. Together, both types of mothers appeared to be consciously/unconsciously endorsing the very 'doxa' that ensured their sustained gender subordination in and across different fields, even as they pursued the project of change through retail markets and complex forms of consumption. As part of our feminist methodology and ethics, the research team signed out of the Promenade project by requesting the mall's management to provide feeding-areas for the young mothers accessing the mall (a suggestion that was briskly implemented). It also met with Radha again, offering her help/encouragement for approaching women's forum to report domestic abuse.

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"How Could a Mother Do That to Her Children?": Filicide and Maternal Ambivalence in Croatian Media and Online Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Four filicide cases that occurred in Croatia in 2014-17 received wide national media coverage and caused strong public reactions. In each case, the mother of the child(ren) was the perpetrator.

This paper will analyse different representations of motherhood, the contradictions and inconsistencies between motherhood as an idea and ideology and everyday maternal practices and behaviours, with special attention being paid to the concept of maternal ambivalence and the expression of violent impulses towards children. Furthermore, the research will also paint a broader picture of the ideology and representations of motherhood. This will include the prescriptive norms of the ideal motherhood present in the public discourse, encompassing the official expert discourse of parenting, as well as the 'private' discourse of internet forums covering the issues of parenting and child rearing.

The purpose of this analysis is to show how the public profile of the mothers who committed filicide is created on the dichotomies of the ideal, self-abnegating mother and the monstrous 'non-mother' (Croatian: *nemajka*), with all of its horrifying, dehumanising characteristics, and how this influences the general construct of maternity, motherhood and the figure of the ideal mother in the patriarchal family and social structures.

Keywords: filicide, intensive motherhood, media, maternal ambivalence

INTRODUCTION

> On May 7 2014 I. P. R. (38) jumped from the 11th floor of her apartment building with her three-year-old daughter. Her seven-year-old daughter was also in the apartment at the time, asleep. Her husband, whom she was in the process of divorcing, had left home the previous evening.
>
> On July 6 2015 I. F. (29) and her five-year-old son went missing. I.F left a note on her Facebook profile, directed primarily at her husband, in which she described the motives behind her decision to leave with their son. Three days later, their bodies and their car were found in a nearby lake. Drowning was determined as the cause of death.
>
> On May 25 2017 C. P. R. (32), accompanied by her underage friend (14), suffocated her three-year-old son in their apartment. Following the murder, she left his body in a nearby cove, and then went to the police station to report him as missing, claiming that she didn't know what had happened to her child.
>
> On October 10 2017, a car with the burnt bodies of M. Š. (29) and her two children, a five-year-old daughter and an 18-month-old son, were found in the woods near their hometown. The police investigation showed that their deaths were both filicide and suicide.

The coverage of these four cases in Croatian media and the general discourse surrounding them could be described as typical and expected – public outcries of horror, rage and shock were mixed with sensationalism and attempts of explaining the mothers' acts by professional experts, usually psychiatrists, whose analysis placed the acts of filicide firmly in the context of mental illness and/or the psychology of criminal behaviour. In addition, the

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cases were used to showcase the failings of the Croatian social welfare system, whose professionals were not able to recognise the pathological patterns of some of the mothers' behaviour. A more nuanced and detailed analysis of the issue of filicide in general and these cases in particular was largely absent from the mainstream media which was preoccupied by moral panic. As defined by Stanley Cohen, moral panic occurs when '[a] condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (Cohen, 2004:1, quoted in Garland, 2008: 10), while 'its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media' (ibid.). David Garland identifies the mass media as

> typically the prime movers and the primer beneficiaries of these episodes, since the sensation they create – a kind of collective effervescence – sells papers, entertains readers, and generates further news and commentary as the story unfolds, the spokesmen take sides, and the deviant phenomenon develops (Garland, 2008: 15).

Furthermore, 'successful moral panics owe their appeal to their ability to find points of resonance with wider anxieties' (Cohen, 2004: xxx, quoted in Garland, 2008: 12), which in these cases included the existing general distrust of the social welfare system structures (especially in C. P. R.'s case), and the traditional, 'common-sense' ideas about motherhood in Croatian society being seen as threatened by the deviant practices and 'transitions in the social, economic or moral order of the society' (Garland, 2008: 14). The aim of this paper is to look beyond sensationalism and superficial interpretations and to analyse it from the viewpoint of feminist theories of the ideology of motherhood and the practices of mothering in all their complexity.

The editorial and linguistic strategies used in the media coverage of the cases generally perpetuate the dominant ideology of motherhood in Croatian society are analysed in this article. For this purpose, selected journalism covering the cases published in Croatian mainstream news publications were read and compared; this included the digital editions of the national daily newspapers *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list* and *24sata*, as the three publications with the largest circulation according to the results of the survey conducted by the National Competition Agency (Agencija za zaštitu tržišnog natjecanja) in 2017[1]. Minor websites which primarily reposted the articles from the bigger media outlets were also included, in order to demonstrate the uniformity in the approach to the stories.

Close textual reading of the discussions published on specialised Croatian online forums covering parenting issues contributes to a significant part of this paper. The focus is on the discussions devoted to perceived maternal failures and questioning of the unconditionality of maternal love, with the topic 'Nemajke' ('Non-Mothers') on *forum.hr* serving as the starting point. The real-life experiences shared online present a valuable addition to the theoretical discussion on rethinking and re-evaluating the ideas of motherhood, and help delineate the potential strategies for adopting a more nuanced approach to the multidimensional and often murky aspects of maternal love and mothering as caring, gendered labour.

THE ABJECTION OF FILICIDE

The current myth of motherhood, as American psychologist Shari Thurer points out, 'holds that the well-being of our children depends almost entirely on the quality of their upbringing' (Thurer, 1995: xvi). Since the mother is usually the one providing for the physical, intellectual and emotional needs of the child, '[a]n intense, prolonged loving bond between mother and child is essential' (ibid.). The figure of mother is perceived as the one who must be always 'there' for her child, a safe harbour to which they can return even if/when everything else fails and everyone else betrays them, the one and only person who is expected to put others, not themselves, first. This is why the mother-child bond is considered to be something sacred, existing in a sphere separated from the corrupted, alienating, often crushing reality of the outside world. Furthermore, the ever-present idea of motherhood as a fixed biological essence attributed to women, accompanied by all the attributes of what 'good' motherhood should entail (which supposedly comes to women 'naturally'), makes the women who do not fit this essentialist criteria, suspicious.

If women are 'naturally mothers (...) born with a built-in set of capacities, dispositions, and desires to nurture children' (Hays, 1996), for whom, according to the best-selling parenting manuals (that function as the permeating expert narratives of the institutionalised ideology of motherhood), 'maternal love and affection are not only vital, they also come naturally' (Brazelton, 1983, quoted in Hays, 1996: 57), who are 'programmed with a whole set of "reflex" responses' (ibid.) that leave them 'geared to lavish affection on the child' (ibid.) due to the 'instinctive nature of mothering' (ibid.), the only explanation for the failure of individual women to fulfil these natural, pre-given roles is attributed to that of a horrible flaw in their very natures. Since 'it is women's "natural" role as mothers

[1] Survey available at: http://www.aztn.hr/ea/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Istra%C5%BEivanje-tr%C5%BEi%C5%A1ta-tiska-u-2017.pdf

and carers that makes it so difficult for society to accept that women can harm children' (Jewkes, 2004: 123, quoted in Barnett, 2016: 13),

> …the killing of a [new-born] child by its mother was wholly inconsistent with normally understood and expected maternal feelings and was generally regarded as a wholly unnatural offence. (Kilday, 2013: 16, quoted in Barnett, 2016: 58)

Thus, mothers who commit filicide are 'judged to have transgressed two sets of laws: criminal laws and the laws of nature' (Jewkes, 2004: 111, quoted in Barnett, 2016: 15).

The phenomenon of filicide, and the figure of the murdering mother, fit well into the Kristevian category of 'abjection' (Kristeva, 1982) – a seemingly impossible opposition of limitless mother-love and physical and emotional violence of murder result in an unbearable tension, the ultimate inability to understand the causes and motives of the act of filicide, which 'disturbs identity, system, order' (Kristeva, 1982: 4) since it is 'immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles' (ibid). The inability to understand the 'true' causes of a mother's decision to murder her child/ren is clearly visible in the language of the newspaper articles covering such cases. The question 'Why?' repeats itself over and over, in the form of a single desperate front page statement, or interwoven in the statements made by family members, acquaintances and neighbours. What is symptomatic for the language of the media, as well as the public discourse surrounding these cases in general, is the impossibility of closure, of providing straightforward answers. Even in cases such as that of I. F., who left an extensive note on her Facebook account (Trupeljak, 2015)[2] detailing the reasons for her decision to end her own and her five-year-old son's life, an explanation eludes the public eye, as the trustworthiness of her words and point of view kept being questioned. Moreover, the mother's reasons fail to satisfy the public hunger for definitive answers; put simply, in filicide cases, no reason ever seems to be reason enough, which is why the notion of the monstrous mother functions as a short-term remedy for such public representations of trauma. Furthermore, in I. F.'s case, the very public nature of her detailed Facebook post in which she described occurrences of domestic violence and her loneliness and alienation, was contrasted with the testimonies of friends, acquaintances and neighbours whose contrasting narratives were filled with the combination of her smiles and their silence.

The reaction of the community in which this kind of traumatic killing occurs can then be perceived as a self-defence mechanism: the idea that an individual - a mother - who can commit such an unspeakable act is actually not a person at all, but rather a monster mimicking human form, is far more acceptable than the notion that the idea of a mother who is supposed to selflessly love and fiercely protect, can be overturned in such a way as to become its own dark and twisted negative. Due to the pervading myths of motherhood and the female nature, the woman-as-mother is perceived as:

> …beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood – that same body with its bleedings and mysteries – is her single destiny and justification in life. (Rich, 1995: 27)

Since motherhood myths are embedded most human societies and taken for granted as commonsense and a natural truth, occurrences of maternal infanticide are perceived as particularly uncanny and disturbing. In Western European culture, historically the dichotomy between witches and mothers has utilised religious metaphor for the delineation of evil women, as has the idea of the 'monstrous feminine' (Creed, 2007). Invoking the monstrosity of a murdering mother is thus necessary for the sanity of the community. As Sarah LaChance Adams points out, in filicide cases 'we would prefer to think that such instances must be rare and pathological, the actions of deeply disturbed or evil individual' (Adams, 2014: 12), while Sarah Blaffer Hrdy states that since:

> …killing one's own infant is so abhorrent to us (…) there is a tendency to compartmentalize the mother's actions as the intentional killing of her infant, and to consider her behaviour in isolation from her circumstances, even though they are functionally related. (Hrdy, 1999: 289-90)

The compartmentalisation can lead to a process of splitting or disidentification in which the 'conviction that the emotional ambivalence many mothers feel about investing in infants is 'unnatural', and hence very rare, and completely separate from more common, or 'normal', maternal emotions' (ibid).

Dehumanisation becomes necessary as a short-term coping mechanism; the problem is, however, this behaviour leads to the lack of a long-term analysis and deeper understanding of maternal filicide. The media presentation of the C. R. P.'s case is a good example of this type of dehumanization. Articles from different websites covering the case emphasised her perceived lack of emotion and regret during the trial, using the terms such as 'the mother from Hell' (ibid), and predicting that C.P.R. would claim insanity in order to avoid just punishment for her crime. As Barnett points out,

[2] Translations from Croatian into English were made by the author of the paper.

> … outrage media offered a means for journalists and commentators to reinforce the good mother myth through the ironic argument that maternal infanticide is a crime so horrible that any mother who committed it must be insane, but, conversely, the argument that insanity is a fake defense. (Barnett, 2016: 207)

Contemporary media narratives continue to 'situate maternal violence as rare, unfathomable, and unpredictable' (Barnett, 2016: 2). This approach falls in line with what Barnett describes as 'the news media's shift in focus – from a public service to a profit-making industry' (ibid), which includes encouraging 'superficial coverage of maternal violence as reporters look for stories that sell, not stories that explain' (ibid). The delineation of 'mad' versus 'bad' mothers who commit infanticide further complicates the cultural representation of these women. In their book *Mothers Who Kill Their Children: Understanding the Acts of Moms from Susan Smith to the 'Prom Mom'*, Michelle Oberman and Cheryl L. Meyer (2001) define the two categories in detail. According to the authors, 'mad' mothers are women who adhere to typical gender roles and the dominant social ideology of motherhood, so 'their crimes are considered irrational, incontrollable acts, usually the direct result of mental illness' (Oberman and Meyer, 2001: 69). On the other hand, 'bad' mothers are described as 'cold, callous, evil mothers who have often been neglectful of their children or their domestic responsibilities' (ibid, 70). The delineation of filicide-committing mothers is simplified through media and public discourse, resulting in what Williams (2017) defines as the 'nuts or sluts' argument, which also results in concrete legal consequences, since the 'mothers who are perceived as bad (...) receive harsher legal punishments' (Williams, 2017: 277).

Public opinion of mothers who kill their children is complexly interlinked with questions of class, race, and ethnicity, which are in turn deeply interwoven with the ideology of 'good motherhood' which in Croatia, as in Europe in general, is based on middle-class values and lifestyle. If the perpetrator adheres to the criteria of 'good motherhood' in her mothering practices prior to the filicide, this can shift her position in media representations of the story significantly. As Michelle Hughes Miller, Tamar Hager and Rebecca Jamremko Bromwich state in their introduction to *Bad Mothers*,

> mothers of colour, mothers with disabilities, queer mothers, impoverished mothers, Aboriginal mothers – all these groups and many others have faced disapprobation not because of their actions as mothers but because of their identity and social status as mothers who do not fit the narrow racist, classist, gendered, ableist and heterosexist standards of idealized motherhood in Western Culture (2017: 16-17).

Since the mothers in question were all Caucasian and of Croatian ethnicity, racial and ethnic factors were not ephasized in the media coverage of the cases. That, of course, does not mean that race and ethnicity do not play a significant role in the establishment of the motherhood ideology in Croatia – for example, when assessing the quality of mothering and child upbringing of the Roma population (see, for example, Tomšić and Bakić-Tomić, 2015), or when mothers belong to ethnic minority groups, with special emphasis being on the Serbs, who constitute the largest ethnic minority group (according to the 2011 Croatian Census[3]) and can be considered as the most significant ethnic minority in Croatia, due to complex historical and political reasons (see, for example, Babić, 2015).

Unlike C. P. R., the three other mothers were married; in cases of I. F. and M. Š., the testimonies of their family members, friends and acquaintances repeatedly positioned them as devoted, caring mothers. On the other hand, the media coverage of C.P.R.'s case focused heavily on her 'deviant' sexual history and enterprises; moreover, her intention to get rid of her child in order to be able to pursue a new romantic/sexual relationship was emphasised in media narrative as the main motive for her act. The delineation between the two categories of representation was prominent in the media representation of the cases of I. F. and C.P.R..[4] The online and newspaper articles covering I. F.'s case were mostly accompanied by the photographs of I. F. with her son, both of them smiling (*Jutarnji.hr*, 2015; *24sata.hr*, 2015) [5]; in contrast, articles dealing with C. P. R.'s case use more provocative

[3] Available at: https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2011/SI-1441.pdf

[4] Most of the images used to accompany the stories, both in print and electronic media, were taken from the social media profiles of I. F. and C. P. R. Since I find this practice, very common in Croatian media, ethically questionable, I have chosen not to include these images in this article, because I feel that by doing so I would reproduce their exploitation.

[5] See **Figure 1** at https://www.24sata.hr/news/prijatelji-ivane-fogadic-29-smijehom-je-skrivala-strah-427731 and **Figure 2** at https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/crna-kronika/cijelo-medimurje-traga-za-ivanom-i-patrikom-muz-u-cudu-stvarno-ne-znam-zasto-je-otisla-sve-je-bilo-normalno.../278713/.

photographs from social media (*Istarski.hr*, 2017; *Jutarnji.hr*, 2018)[6] or photographs showing her being taken into custody or to court, accompanied by headers implicating her inhumanity (*Večernji.hr*, 2018).[7]

THE PERFECT MOTHER AND THE IDEOLOGY OF INTENSIVE MOTHERHOOD

In *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood*, Sharon Hays describes the contemporary model of motherhood in Western society as 'intensive motherhood' (Hays, 1996), whilst in Judith Warner and Joan Wolf use the term of 'total motherhood' (Warner, 2006: 52; Wolf, 2011: 71). Hays describes labour intensive motherhood as a gendered model which requires an immense amount of time, energy and money spent on child-upbringing (Hays, 1996). This model positions the mother as the primary caretaker concentrated on fulfilling each and every need of the child, with 'methods prescribed by experts, which are demanding and expensive' (Hays, 1996: 21). The focal point of Hays's analysis is the ideological opposition of the public, rational sphere of work and business and the private, emotionally charged sphere of family and motherhood; this dichotomy positions motherhood as opposed to economy and politics, which is why it is perceived 'as something that stems from love or altruism and thus does not require any reward' (Glenn, 1994: 16); this reinforces the assumption that 'mothers should be completely self-abnegating' (ibid).

The mother-as-an-individual is thus rather seen through the lens of the mother-as-an-ideal; the role of mother diminishes all other roles that a woman can assume, as well as the woman's own subjectivity. This sterotype can be widely observed throughout Western culture and institutions. Motherhood seems to erase all other personal traits of an individual, effectively turning her into an embodied symbol. As Adams states, this kind of 'romanticization of mothering can be difficult to resist' (Adams, 2014: 25), since:

> …motherhood carries heavy symbolism and mothering/being mothered is a significant formative experience for most people. (ibid)

The perceived sacredness of motherhood demands a specific set of traits from an individual mother; on the other hand, the lack of such traits leads to condemnation. These expectations can present a suffocating burden for mothers who may be convinced by societal norms that anything less than total abnegation of their needs is unacceptable, leading to the undoing of their subjectivity. As Adams argues, 'in many respects, the birth of the child is the death of the mother as she has known herself' (Adams, 2014: 92).

Popular parenting manuals may function as the main sources of the parenting ideology, with this discourse being further appropriated and reinforced by other media sources, as well as the word of mouth. The 'expert' discourse in self-help manuals further cements the role of the mother as the primary caretaker whose duty is to respond primarily to the requirements and challenges of child-rearing and care. In the Western world, expert narratives function as 'authoritative knowledge' (Jordan, 1997, quoted in Miller, 2005: 29), that 'will shape individuals' expectations and experiences [regarding pregnancy, childbirth and mothering] and ultimately how sense is made of them' (ibid). Thus forms of 'cultural scripts' (ibid) which are 'socially constructed, historically specific and culturally varied' (Miller, 2005: 28) create an ideology of intensive motherhood and shape the 'context in which women become mothers' (Miller, 2005: 62). However, this scripted expert knowledge is neither unambiguous nor necessarily empowering. Due to multiple, often clashing expert narratives existing in the public space, it is often extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine the 'right' parenting technique, which can result in additional maternal insecurity and anxiety. Even though the contemporary manuals, with Sears and his 'attachment parenting' ideology being the prime example, insist on returning to 'natural' motherhood, the very prescriptiveness of the expert discourse undermines the narrative of motherhood as intuitive and instinctive, so 'motherhood becomes a calling that demands skill training, professional development, systematicity and self-scrutiny' (Vidmar Horvat, 2017: 113). Faced with demands and prescriptions, many mothers 'try to achieve Sears' ideal of nursing, baby wearing and co-sleeping but fall short for some reason and find themselves immobilized by their seeming parental inadequacy' (Pickert, 2012). Thus, exposure to the scripted expert discourse does not automatically equal with the increase in the perceived maternal competence nor the personal feeling of adequacy.

Parenting manuals authored by these experts originating from the USA, Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries can be positioned as the official expert narrative on child rearing and care in Croatia as well. This is the

[6] See **Figure 3** at https://istarski.hr/node/42249-trazila-muskarce-na-internetu-i-bila-nabijena-seksualnim-strastima (the headline is 'Tražila muškarce na internetu i bila nabijena seksualnim strastima' ['She was looking for men online and was longing for sexual activity']) and **Figure 4** at https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/ne-pokazuje-zaljenje-zamjera-si-samo-jednu-stvar-je-li-sustav-zakazao-kod-najmlade-djevojcice-u-hrvatskoj-osumnjicenoj-za-tesko-ubojstvo/7197438/ (the headline, 'Ne pokazuje žaljenje, zamjera si samo jednu stvar' ['She's not showing any remorse, she resents only one thing'], is misleading, since it actually does not refer to C. P. R., but to her fourteen-year-old accomplice).

[7] See **Figure 5** at https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/danas-presuda-majci-koja-je-ugusila-dijete-1240211. The headline is 'C. P. nije pokazala nimalo emocija ni kajanja' ['C. P. hasn't shown any emotions or remorse'].

result of globalisation processes and the saturation of the media and public discourse in general by the ideas and values shared by the western cultural patterns, which are accepted largely uncritically and transposed onto Croatian society. Books by influential authors like Benjamin Spock (1946), T. Berry Brazelton (2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 1993), Penelope Leach (1994, 1978), and Williams Sears (2005, 2004, 2001, 1995, 1993) are translated into Croatian and available in bookstores and public libraries.[8] Magazines and websites catering to parents perpetuate dominant parenting ideologies. As authors like Judith Warner point put, the media play a huge role in 'prescribing and proscribing norms for maternal behaviour' (Warner, 2006: 4), by 'contrasting what they deem to be the socially acceptable "good" mother with what they believe to be the reprehensible "bad" mother' (ibid). Moreover, ideas about parenting in general and motherhood and mothering in particular are affirmed and perpetuated on specialised online discussion boards covering child rearing-related issues. In the Croatian online media, there are two major sites for digital discussion: on *roda.hr*, specialising in parenting issues, and the sub-topic 'Parents and Children' under the *forum.hr*, the largest Croatian discussion board covering a variety of general topics. It is important to point out that *roda.hr* is the official web page of the *Roda* organisation (standing for *Roditelji u akciji* – *Parents In Action*), an influential promoter of attachment-style parenting values. *Roda* participates in different types of actions and activities that aim to influence parenting in general, as well as its concrete aspects, from state provision, such as the legislation and practices in maternity hospitals (for example, the recent 'Prekinimo šutnju' – 'Break the Silence' campaign (*Prekinimo šutnju*, 2018)), to interventions in the private sphere of individual decisions and everyday practices, such as breastfeeding, baby hygiene, sleeping arrangements, and so on.

The role of these specialised discussion boards is two-fold. First, they play a supportive and advisory role that used to be reserved for family members, especially other, more experienced female members of the family, like grandmothers, aunts and older sisters who could provide new mothers with practical advice, as well as emotional support. The increased physical mobility of families connected with the modern lifestyle very often means that the extended family members are living far away from new mothers, who can then turn to a virtual community through discussion boards, with more experienced mothers giving advice to new mothers. Furthermore, discussion boards can also function as a supportive group of friends who share their experiences, show understanding for the various difficulties that motherhood entails and help each other to weather out the daily stress, fears and isolation characteristic of the initial period in the lives of new mothers.

Authors like Barbara Barnett attribute only positive aspects to motherhood blogs and discussion boards, claiming that they 'demonstrate an "ethic of care"' (Petersen, 2014: 289, quoted in Barnett, 2016: 256), as women are focused on social responsibility and positive ideas and ideals. However, it is questionable whether all the discourse that occurs on the discussion forums and blogs necessarily maintains this affirmative tone. As mentioned earlier, the virtual community is also the place where the dominant parenting/mothering ideology is affirmed and perpetuated. Shared personal practices and experiences can thus be judged by other discussion participants, depending on how much the individual mother adheres to / deviates from the dominant ideology. In this way, forum discussions cannot only be seen as the 'safe space' for mothers, but also as a supervising and correctional tool.

Since 'forum.hr is the leading Croatian forum portal with over 430,000 listed members (www.forum.hr; March 2016)' (Miljković Krečar and Kolega, 2017: 516), with 1594 topics currently listed in the sub-forum 'Parents and children' / 'Roditelji i djeca' (last access 10 July 2019), it was chosen as the analysis material. Close reading of the aforementioned sub-forum was conducted from April 2018 to November 2018. It included overview of all listed topics, after which particular threads of interest were chosen, based on their titles and potential connection with the issues of maternal ambivalence, clashes with the dominant motherhood ideology or other specific difficulties and challenges that mothers face in their everyday practices. Of the topics singled out in this way, four are included in this paper: 'Nemajke' / 'Non-Mothers' (first post 27 March 2010, last post 11 October 2017, total number of posts 6734, available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=536100, last accessed 6 July 2019), 'Jeste li ikada viknuli na svoje dijete?' / 'Have you ever yelled at your baby?' (first post 3 November 2011, last post 19 December 2011, total number of posts 64, available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=683337, last accessed 7 July 2019), 'Postporođajna depresija' / 'Postpartum Depression' (first post 22 January 2004, last post 17 June 2019, total number of posts 348, available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=311015, last accessed 7 July 2019), 'Želim da nikad nisam imala dijete, je li to normalno?' / 'I wish I'd never had a child, is that normal?' (first post 28 November 2015, last post 12 February 2016, total number of posts 220, available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=914086, last accessed 10 July 2019). The purpose of the close reading of the forum posts was to find and analyse potential clashes of individual maternal practices with the dominant motherhood ideology and the reactions of other discussion participants to these maternal transgressions.

[8] Some of the titles translated into Croatian have multiple editions. First editions in English are included in the reference list, followed by all the Croatian editions currently listed in the Croatian public library catalogues.

WHAT MAKES A 'NON-MOTHER'

One of the ways of dealing with feelings of inadequacy on these sites is through humour and strategies of what Marijana Hameršak identifies as 'affirmative parenting manuals' (Hameršak, 2009: 19), which includes the texts which are 'aimed at meeting, or failing to meet, expectations and requirements which are the result of putting the pieces of advice from the first category of manuals (the so-called prescriptive manuals) into practice', their focus being on 'survival strategies' (Hameršak, 2009: 19). Hameršak notes that the affirmative manuals do not present 'the needs of mothers, their retreats and frustrations' as pathological, and their tone is usually 'cordial, friendly (...) and often humorous' (Hameršak, 2009: 19). Hameršak includes different literary genres in this category, from more classic forms of parenting manuals, through memoires to even *chick-lit*.[9] With the advent of blogs and forums specialized for detailing the daily minutiae of maternal experiences, this type of affirmative manual narrative has also moved to the digital sphere, where (anonymous) mothers share and discuss their perceived 'failures' in the 'cordial, friendly (...) and often humorous' tone that Hameršak recognizes as the significant trait of this type of discourse.

The topic 'Nemajke' / 'Non-Mothers' on *forum.hr* (available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=536100) is an example of this type of humorous confessional narrative, in which posters list their imperfections and failures in a sort of tongue-in-cheek subversion of the ideology of intensive motherhood:

> I see that on this discussion board a lot of attention is being given to stating who is a better mother, whose child will be bigger, stronger, whose baby food will be healthier, whose house cleaner, whose clothes will be ironed better, etc. This is why I invite you to write why you belong in the infamous category of non-mothers (nemajke), that is, what are some things that you did that ideal mothers would never do (for whichever reason)? (Anonymous_1, 27 March 2010, post number 1)

The topic thread includes maternal 'failures' and 'transgressions' in various, generally heavily proscribed, areas of mothering, for example, preparing nutritious, healthy meals: 'My kid had chocolate and juice for breakfast this morning' (Anonymous_2, 22 May 2010, post number 992); participating in outdoor activities: 'I'm so glad it was raining today so we didn't have to go out for a walk. I really didn't feel like it.' (Anonymous_3, 1 October 2010, post number 2387); daily routine:

> I've taught them to make their own breakfast, to turn on the cartoons by themselves, to use everything with buttons, to brush their teeth, to clean their room... All that for purely selfish reasons, just so I can sleep a bit longer in the morning (especially if I'm working in the afternoon).
>
> And sometimes I make grilled sandwiches and pizza for lunch, sometimes just sunny-side-up eggs and I don't care ☺
>
> They also play Playstation and watch cartoons much more than they should.
>
> And I've even taught the older one how to find assigned reading essays online (I really love technology) ☺ (Anonymous_4, 28 March 2010, post number 17);

and strategies for finding some time for oneself:

> The other day I had to take my baby's poo sample to hospital for testing, and she stayed at home with my husband. On my way back, I bought Story [a popular Croatian women's celebrity and fashion magazine] and sat in the car in the parking lot and read it because I knew I wouldn't be able to do that at home.
>
> And my husband called me two times to see why it's taking so long, I didn't hear my mobile phone, and later I told him that there was a traffic jam.
>
> (Anonymous_5, 12 October 2012, post number 4790)

[9] The term was originally (and ironically) coined by Chris Mazza for the edited anthology *Chick Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (1995), but it evolved and „worked its way through academic and conservative criticism, and into popular culture"(Farkas, 2006: 902), with Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary (1997) being labelled as the prime example. *Chick lit* 'deals with the intimate experience of women negotiating identities and cultural expectations on the level of the everyday' (Farkas, 2006: 902) reflecting 'the anxieties of today's "transitional" women, who take certain rights for granted while still feeling much stress and ambivalence about identity, sexual agency, and the attractions or perils of work, marriage, and motherhood' (ibid., 903).

The experiences shared in the thread mainly concern benign everyday imperfections – giving children too much candy or letting them watch a couple of cartoons more than deemed appropriate. When these 'deviations' are mentioned, participants very often emphasise that this is not their usual norm – these are exceptions, small slippages that occur when they are experiencing an especially difficult day. However, even in this 'humorous' context, participants are informed that they are not conforming to the expected maternal behaviour that fits the requirements of the dominant ideology of motherhood. The idea of abstaining from judgement proves to be impossible, with various posters calling out the discussion participants on their perceived bad mothering practices, with maternal selfishness being pointed out as the main objection:

> some of you are truly horrible. but i think that probably the worst is the one who wrote: instead of a feeding chair for the baby i bought a pair of jeans for myself. I hate selfish parents. (Anonymous_6, 31 March 2010, post number 281)

> I've been reading this thread for the last couple of days and I'm at a loss for words, you really are non-mothers.... I don't see what's so funny about letting children cry while you put your mp3 headphones on so you can't hear their about their needs, they must be crying because they feel like it, right, and it hasn't crossed your minds that by crying they are letting you know about their needs.... (...)

> You add tons of fabric softener to the laundry that your children wear on their sensitive skin – read a bit about the fabric softener ingredients instead of bragging about the shameful things you do here.

> Breastfeeding+smoking+beer=horror

> I won't even comment on other things because the things you do are making me sick and you are bragging about it because it's supposed to be funny and cute. (Anonymous_7, 3 May 2010, post number 773)

> You console one another on this thread because you've realised that it's not easy to be a mum, that it's normal to be sleep deprived after you give birth, that your baby is the centre of your world and that EVERYTHING revolves around them not YOU (...)

> Yeah, it's not easy to be a mum but some of us are at least trying. (Anonymous_ 7, 3 May 2010, post number 813)

> You can say whatever you want but i really see no reasons why a 5-6-month-old child (and maybe even younger, i don't know when you began doing this) should be left to sleep somewhere else, even if it's at their grandparents'. A child that old needs their mom (and dad) the most. (Anonymous_ 8 December 2010, post number 2883)

The humorous tone can also function as mimicry for other, more sinister feelings which are still deemed unacceptable to express in the public sphere. Shari Thurer points out that 'maternal altruism is difficult to sustain' (Thurer, 1995: xvi):

> While our children fill us with cosmic joy (…) they also provoke in us at times such anger and frustration that we hardly recognize the fury as our own. If motherhood is the dreamy relationship it is often billed as, then those flashes of hostility must be unnatural, traitorous, destructive of all that is normal, good and decent. The resulting self-doubt is not much talked about. Mothers may joke about it, but they do not talk about it seriously. (ibid)

However, even in the 'serious' context of sharing experiences, in which participants express their need for advice and emotional support, the deeply embedded notions of good and bad mothering and mothers are reasserted. For example, when a participant notes that she sometimes yells at her children 'Jeste li ikada viknuli na svoje dijete?' / 'Have you ever yelled at your baby?', available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=683337) and that she feels guilty because of that ('I definitely feel like the worst mother in the world…' - Anonymous_9, 3 November 2011, post number 1), and the other one notes that this behaviour is normal and that it will leave no permanent negative consequences on the children, other commentators are quick to remind her of the accepted approaches to child development and psychology:

> You can't tell this for sure, and I sincerely doubt that this won't leave any consequences. It depends on what you mean by 'consequences'. When we yell at children, they are scared, they feel insecure and sad, and it can affect their self-confidence, their view of themselves and others, and, as far as I'm concerned,

> even if it only applies to that isolated act of yelling and the short period of time afterwards, it's not something that you should consider to be of no importance whatsoever. (Anonymous_10, 3 November 2011, post number 8)

Furthermore, even in the 'humorous' thread like the 'Non-Mothers', the initial purpose of which is subverting the norms of the dominant motherhood ideology, some of the participants self-diagnose their behaviour as pathological, even when concrete examples of 'non-mothering' practices are absent from their narrative, like in the case of the participant whose maternal failures stem from her perceived inability to comply with the ideal of perpetually happy, totally committed mother:

> Guys, I feel like a non-mother for days now. I take care of my little son all day long, the best way I know and can. I take care of him on my own, my husband works all day, nobody has changed his diaper since the day he was born but me. Sometimes I'm tired, sleepy and tense, maybe I don't play with him enough, sometimes I sing to him, but not always. I feel bad because I'm not a happy, smiling mother all the time, at least while he is still so little.
>
> At the end of the day when he falls asleep, like now, I watch the photos I took of him and I feel like crying... My little one, my little munchkin who depends only on me and I'm the most important thing to him, and I often surf the internet or watch TV while I'm breastfeeding him, I'm not focused completely on him.
>
> Does this make me a non-mother? (Anonymous_ 11 July 2010, post number 1208)

The idea of permanently happy and content mother is present even in the topic dealing with serious mental health conditions which can significantly affect individual maternal experiences. In the discussion string dealing with postpartum depression ('Postporođajna depresija' / 'Postpartum Depression', available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=311015), participants generally presented their attitudes as understanding and non-judgemental, emphasising how difficult the consequences of this condition can be if it remains untreated. However, some of the posts claimed that they 'did not have the time' to suffer from postpartum depression on account of the health problems they themselves or their babies experienced after birth. In this way, postpartum depression is minimalised and implied to be a personal 'failure':

> I didn't suffer from that. My baby had a bad case of neonatal jaundice and was kept in the hospital, I was too worried and obsessed with milk pumping to have the time for baby blues (Anonymous_12, 22 January, 2004, post number 4).
>
> I've heard that this [postpartum depression] exists, but I have never experienced it myself, well, since I literally fought for survival during my baby's childhood, so being depressed afterwards was the last thing on my mind, just joy and the wish to recover as soon as possible (Anonymous_13, 23 January, 2004, post number 9).
>
> I didn't feel depressed immediately after giving birth; I think I had less time in general so I just didn't have time to think about myself (Anonymous_14, 19 December, 2006, post number 167).

In the testimonies of mothers in infanticide cases that Barnett (2016) covers in her book, in many instances women saw themselves as failed mothers. This was usually combined with substance abuse and/or a long history of mental problems. Since the still prevailing ideology of our society claims that 'women have one pathway to fulfilment – child care' (Almond, 2010, quoted in Barnett, 2016: 17), good mothers seemingly are 'never aggressive or apathetic, and they certainly are never depressed' (ibid). The unattainable ideal of intensive motherhood stigmatises mental illness and can lead to devastating consequences if mothers are too ashamed or scared to ask for help, if even available. As Caplan points out,

> …when women believe they are bad mothers, their self-esteem plummets, their sense of isolation grows, and the likelihood they will abuse their children increases. (Caplan, 2010, quoted in Barnett, 2016: 59)

Ann Oakley points out that maternal depression can often be directly linked 'to the expectation that motherhood requires abnegation of the self' (quoted in Adams, 2014: 42). If a mother finds it difficult to comply with the requirement of total selflessness, this can be judged as a deep personal flaw or unwillingness to shake off the selfish and self-involved mindset of her pre-maternal state.

As the subjects of the interviews included in Hays's book unanimously point out, a bad mother is 'a mother who neglects her kids for selfish reasons, because she is more concerned with her personal fulfilment, her leisure

pursuits, her material possessions, and her status than she is with her children' (ibid), while 'the very definition of good mothering includes the willingness to give up things so that your children can have things' (ibid, 126). In the Croatian filicide cases, this moral failure of selfishness is seen as brought to its ultimate outcome: 'Women who kill their children are selfish if they cannot put their children's interests ahead of their own' (Barnett, 2016: 148). This selfishness is especially severely condemned if it is perceived as stemming from the mother's sexuality: the long association of motherhood with purity and asexuality makes the topic of mothers' sexuality distasteful *per se*; if it is viewed as a motivating factor for the abuse, neglect and filicide, it enters the field of unthinkable. In the media coverage:

> … the women's sexual history became a topic in news stories, and while promiscuity does not equal violence, it was included in news stories as evidence that [the mothers who committed filicide] were not only abusive; they were irresponsible and immoral. (Barnett, 2016: 135)

Brief historical overviews of the practice of filicide world-wide, by Hrdy (1999) and Barnett (2016), show that in certain cultures and/or periods in human history filicide was widespread for religious or social reasons, including a 'brutal act of mercy' (Barnett, 2016: 56). Mothers who commit filicide are prone to describing their acts as merciful and necessary, especially if the murder of the child is accompanied by the mother's suicide. For example Keira V. Williams (2018) presents two cases from the 19th century, those of Margaret Garner and Hester Vaughan, in which the mothers' decision to end their children's lives resulted from dire circumstances of slavery and poverty. In her Facebook post, similarly, I. F. wrote that she is taking her son with her because she wants to save him from a miserable childhood with his father (Trupeljak, 2015).

Filicide may be seen as the ultimate act of care and good mothering, the final ethical imperative (Adams, 2014). Guilt can also have a role in filicide, when failing to meet the unattainable standard of ideal motherhood:

> When mothers think they should be able to give to their children infinitely and are unable to do so (as no human could), they feel guilty, angry, worthless, ashamed, depressed, and fearful of judgment of others. These feelings paralyze mind and body, making it difficult to respond to one's child at all, let alone appropriately. (Adams, 2014: 92)

In the preface to *Bad Mothers*, Miller et al. lists types of bad mothering – abuse and neglect, abandonment of children, immoral conducts, emotional and psychological violence, and, 'in its most extreme form (…) infanticide' (Miller et al., 2017: 5). These types of failures are socially perceived 'to be in [bad mothers'] maternal actions (or inactions) and in their identities, for which they alone are responsible' (ibid), while attention is rarely paid 'to the context within which women mother or the structures that constrain their mothering choices' (Griffin, quoted in Miller et al., 2017: 5). In a heteronormative society it is noted that fathers rarely, if ever, face the same quality criteria for their parenting practices – the phenomenon of the 'invisible father' is present 'in intensive motherhood due to the perceived status of motherhood and the financial security provided by their partner in a heteronormative context' (Ames, 2017: 23),. Similarly, in filicide cases, which 'focuses on the mother and tends to neglect the dynamic between the couple' and 'the father appears to be an unimportant factor in understanding the mother's condition' (Wheelwright, 2002: 273). Maternal filicide can also be perceived as an act of revenge against the husband/father, but a subtler analysis of his role is usually missing from media representation of the act.

Just as motherhood, in Adrienne Rich's words, is earned through everyday nurturing practices of mothering which are never finalised (Rich, 1995), but continue to establish and re-establish the child-mother relationship on a daily basis, 'bad mothering' (sometimes simultaneously) undergoes the same process, used as a sign of warning, a constant reminder that the 'good mother' status is never permanent and always under close scrutiny, both internal and external, and how slipping into the dreaded category of an inadequate, harmful, monstrous mother is perhaps an easy fate. Since '[f]or mothers, perfection is the expectation, not the exception' (Barnett, 2016: 81), even the routine practices of feeding or cleaning the child can be scrutinised, and the

> …spectre of the bad mother who fails to contend with risk appropriately is a critical mode of social control, for she is an internalized figure that serves as a point of comparison for mothers to assess the quality of their own mothering. (Malacrida, 116, quoted in Campbell, 2017: 147-8)

Moreover, once gained, the bad mother status is not something that can be easily nullified, so the return to good mothering is a much more difficult task than the other way around. This does not come as a surprise since, in the expert discourse which functions as surveillance, the 'long-term effects of bad mothering are construed as having effects well into future generations' (Campbell, 2017: 136). The prescriptiveness of the official discourse of good motherhood leads to interventions in the individual mothers' lives, aimed at regulating the practices defined as deviant:

> The regulatory discourses of medical workers, family members, friends, and even strangers encourage continual self-appraisal and discipline not only because women internalize the narratives of good mothering but also because they want to elude being viewed as a reviled figure. (Campbell, 2017: 148)

The Perfect Mother myth and the ideal of intensive motherhood have proven to be so pervading and overpowering that they persist even in the contexts of the filicide cases. Barnett notes that

> .. in the analysis of the news stories (…), although she was never mentioned, the Perfect Mother was the standard by which all women were measured and by which women measured themselves (…) And while women who killed their children acknowledged they failed to properly care for their children, they also stated that perfection was what they strived for. (Barnett, 2016: 102)

The correlation between the symbolic ideal and filicide can be viewed as twofold. First, as Geraldine Holloway points out in her empirical study of maternal filicide, a number of authors consider 'the social construction of motherhood to be a significant aspect of filicide' (Holloway, 2016: 116), referring to the works of Morris and Wilczynski (1993), Alder and Baker (1997) and Alder and Polk (2001) who,

> …consider these idealised stereotypes of woman and mothers alongside an alternative construction which they term the 'dark side of motherhood' in which the burden of responsibility for child-rearing falls disproportionately upon mothers. (Holloway, 2016: 117)

The expectations laid by the perfect motherhood ideology may result in 'good mother stress' that Mugavin (2005, quoted in Holloway, 2017: 116)) positions as 'one of the triggers to maternal filicide' (ibid.), which is 'related to the pressure of trying to be a good mother, although lacking sufficient validation for the role' (ibid.) Furthermore, essentialist approaches to motherhood may lead to cognitive dissonance, in the questioning of their 'true femininity' (Oakley, 1981, quoted in Holloway, 2017: 116) in women who struggleto experience 'natural' maternal instincts and whose feelings toward their children and their maternal role are more complicated and/or ambivalent.

Secondly, the idea of 'altruistic filicide' (Resnick, 1969) can be perceived to be closely related to the intensive motherhood ideology which positions the mother as the primary caretaker and beneficiary for the well-being of her children. In her study, Holloway introduces a number of factors listed as the possible catalysts or triggers for filicide. Her study subjects express feelings of social isolation, suspiciousness aimed at social services and society in general and anxiety about the possibility of being separated from their children, as well as prominent suicidal thoughts. In this context, '[m]others are conceptualised as having killed their children either to save them from being motherless and/or to protect them from perceived harm' (Holloway, 2016: 127), with their decision being 'modulated by simultaneous beliefs about both Saving and Uniting with their child' (ibid.). In this light, filicide is viewed as what has controversially been described as a 'mercy killing'; it is stated as one of the five major motives in Resnick's review of psychiatric literature on this topic: 'a mother kills her child out of love' (Friedman and Resnick, 2007: 137) since 'she believes death to be in the child's best interest' (ibid.). As studies by Somander and Ramen and Friedman et al. show, the motive of filicide was 'usually considered to be "altruistic", in the sense that the well-being of the child was of primary concern' (quoted in Willemsen et al., 2007: 2016) and that 'the mothers were motivated by the desire to alleviate real or imagined suffering in their children' (ibid.). Since the main postulates of perfect mothering are maternal selflessness and acting in what is perceived to be the best interest of the child, the mother perceives her suicide as 'an unacceptable abandonment of the child' (Holloway, 2016: 127), while simultaneously 'the killing of the child is a way of ensuring that the child was safe from perceived harm' (ibid.). As I. F. expressed in her suicide note, 'My only happiness didn't deserve any of this, but he is still making this journey with me, but only to the point where our paths part... He will be much better off there!' (Direktno.hr, 2015). The final lines in her tragic letter paint the picture of her son as an angel playing and laughing from the clouds above. I. F. points out that she will not be joining him in his new home (their paths parting after their deaths), so the logical conclusion is that, if her son becomes an angel in heaven, she is doomed to spend the eternity in hell. This religious symbolism serves as further proof of her perceived selflessness – suffering torment for all eternity is the sacrifice she is willing to take on in order to prevent her son from facing 'an intolerable world' Friedman and Resnick, 2007: 137) or to save him 'from a fate worse than death' (ibid.).

CONCLUSION: MOTHERHOOD AND/AS AMBIVALENCE

Feminist approaches to understanding filicide have multiple approaches to deal with. It seems both logical and tempting to perceive the mothers who commit filicide as the victims of 'the invisible violence of the institution of motherhood, the guilt, the powerless responsibility for human lives, the judgments and condemnations, the fear

of her own power, the guilt, the guilt, the guilt' (Rich, 1995: 276), and to claim that 'every mother exists on the spectrum within danger of killing their children and that spectrum is created by the conditions of patriarchal motherhood' (Ames, 2017: 30). However, this approach risks falling 'into an essentialist trap (..), which frequently takes refuge in ideas of fixed female or maternal self' (Jeremiah, 2004: 60) by 'suggesting that mothering is actually and essentially loving' (ibid), thus simplifying the variety of emotions experienced in the mother-child relationship, and coming full circle to the western conventional position of the natural female's preconditioning towards nurturing and motherhood. Furthermore, it simplifies the positions of what are perceived as 'good' and 'bad' mothers, by claiming that:

> …women who actually act in accordance with the myth (of good motherhood) are privileged because of the ways this ideology sustains power structures, but (they) are also considered to be passive recipients of normative power. (Rozmarin, 2018: 352)

Since such women are thus 'victims of self-annihilating practices' (ibid), they are not perceived to be politically useful in the dismantling of the patriarchal institution of motherhood, unlike the 'bad mothers' who resist and undermine its containments.

In order to avoid a simplification of the 'good' and 'bad' mother dichotomy, it is necessary to try to accomplish the integration of the political and the ethical while rethinking motherhood as a possible resource for a new understanding of subjectivity. This implies understanding the ethics of care of others in a broader sense that encompasses both the political and moral aspects of different facets and choices of mothering, as well as applying moral imagination to care practices of mothering within the institution of motherhood through a specific kind of 'maternal thinking' (Ruddick, 1995). The final story in this paper can function as an example of how this dichotomy can be bridged, and how a more nuanced perception of the ethics of care can influence the way we approach motherhood and mothering.

In a post entitled 'Želim da nikad nisam imala dijete, je li to normalno?' / 'I wish I'd never had a child, is that normal?' (available at http://www.forum.hr/showthread.php?t=914086), a mother I will call Anonymous_15 writes that, even though she has a happy family, a loving husband and a son whom she loves more than anything in the world (and would, if necessary, sacrifice her life for without hesitation), she regrets becoming a mother, claiming that, if she could go back in time and do everything all over again, she would not give birth to him. Anonymous_15 finishes her story with a question/plea: "Is there anybody else who feels this way or am I truly a monster?" (Anonymous_15, 5 December, 2015, post number 43). A number of discussion participants expressed suspicion about the sincerity of the author's love for her child, as well as reservations about the quality of maternal care she is able to provide, deeming that the hate Anonymous_15 expresses towards her maternal role and mothering practices are incompatible with feelings of 'genuine' maternal love. Their conclusions chiefly concur with Anonymous_15's perceived selfishness, in accordance with dominant values which imply 'that our children are exquisitely delicate creatures, hugely vulnerable to our idiosyncrasies and deficits, who require relentless psychological attunement and approval' (Thurer, 1995: xiii):

> Children are happy only if they have happy parents. The poster's child is definitely not happy, we shouldn't fool ourselves. Children are not things. They have feelings (Anonymous_, 16, 7 December, 2015, post number 75).
>
> The child didn't ask to be born, didn't choose their mother or deserved to be unhappy... and the child is unhappy and you are going to maim their ability to build their future, establish relationships and become a parent.
>
> You thing you perform your role well? You think your child doesn't feel this and that this will never surface and leave deep scars on all three of you? (Anonymous_17, 7 December 2015, post number 79).
>
> And please don't tell me you really love that child so much. That's not true, you love yourself and you miss the life you had before the child (Anonymous_18, 11 December 2015, post number 110).
>
> It wasn't the right time for you to have a child and you viewed everything through your selfish interests to fulfil the society's expectations and you weren't ready to be a parent... Now suffer your punishment, you can blame only yourself not the child whose life you are ruining... (Anonymous_19, 17 December 2015, post number 140, available at)

The main point of conflict in Anonymous_15's case is thus the perceived incompatibility between the appropriate mothering and child-rearing (and, consequently, a well-socialized, psychologically healthy child) and the lack of enjoyment in the everyday practices of motherhood and the maternal role as such. This brings us back

to the idea of motherhood as fundamentally interwoven with the feelings of love, devotion and pleasure – the thought (and example) of a mother who experiences these two spheres as separate is perceived as disturbing and unnatural, the popular conclusion is that Anonymous_15 is a 'non-mother'. However, Adrienne Rich declares that 'motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage – pregnancy and childbirth – then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct' (Rich, 1995: 10), thus making motherhood a permanent process which needs to be updated, re-learnt and re-established on a daily basis. The connective tissue of this process consists of different types of care practices that the mother implements in her daily interactions with the child. As Rich states:

> We learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be 'innate' in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores of socializing a human being. (Rich, 1995: 31)

Becoming adequate in the mothering practices and in the socialization processes does not have to equal enjoyment in the process; even if/when a mother cares, she can also simultaneously mourn the loss of her past personhood and personal freedom; even when she sacrifices, it does not necessarily come without the feelings of grief, resentment or even remorse. As Sara Ahmed claims,

> [b]ecoming caring is not about becoming good or nice (...) To care is not about letting an object go but holding on to an object by letting oneself go, giving oneself over to something that is not one's own. (Ahmed, 2010: 186)

In addition,

> [c]aring is anxious – to be full of care, to be careful, is to take care of things by becoming anxious about their future, where the future is embodied in the fragility of an object whose persistence matters. (ibid)

In her posts Anonymous_15 expresses deep anxiety about the safety and health of her child, as well as personal resignation that there is a quick (or basically any) solution or an escape route to her ambivalence. 'From the way you make things sound, it seems that you will be unhappy for the rest of your life. And that's that. Right?', (Anonymous_20, 5 December 2015, post number 54) asks one of the commentators, and Anonymous_15's response is 'More or less, yes' (Anonymous_15, 6 December 2015, post number 55). Anonymous_15 is thus not looking for a solution on the discussion board, she is looking for psychological support and empathy, which is found to be lacking in general, since only two of the discussion contributors recognised the subject Anonymous_15 had raised as generally important for the perception/misconceptions that surround the institution of motherhood and its contemporary ideology.

It is impossible to determine the exact causes of maternal filicide – shame, mental illness, poverty, social stigma and isolation are just some of the factors that affect the state in which a mother tries to mother, and fails. The role of the mother figure in traditional ideology is one of the primary caretaker who loves unconditionally and is always prepared to sacrifice herself for her child(ren). Since motherhood is perceived as 'natural' for women, negative feelings of depression, discontent and anger are not deemed compatible with this perception – on the contrary, they are viewed as unnatural and deviant, even monstrous. For some authors, 'a mother does not need extraordinary circumstances to kill her children' (Ames, 2017: 6), since the impossible standards of the contemporary ideology of motherhood make even the 'ordinary experience of motherhood (…) extraordinary enough' (ibid). Challenging the concepts of maternal perfection and perfect mothering can be the first step in the right direction.

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The Role of Culture in Negotiating Reproductive Rights of Diaspora Heterosexual Nigerian Women

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how female identity is shaped by patriarchies and manifests differently according to cultural norms. In the United Kingdom (UK), maternal mortality of non-natives is considerably higher than natives. Nigeria has one of the worst maternal indices in the world, hence the imperative to explore the relationship between Nigerian cultural values and reproductive decision-making including uptake of birth control services. This research involves in-depth interviews with five heterosexual women of Nigerian heritage living in the north of England in Leeds, UK. The data collected is analysed using Critical Feminist Theory and manifests a number of nuanced, complex relationships centring on power, culture and gender which together serve to sustain and institutionalise certain cultural practices that impact negatively on the reproductive rights of Nigerian women. This research shows that Nigeria by contrast, has a dynamic web of cultural norms where men have the power to make these decisions which would normally predominantly reside with females in the UK. Thus, despite acculturation to a more liberal and equal society through migration, women of Nigerian origin who are permanent residents in the UK still have to negotiate traditional patriarchal expectations which continue to dominate decision-making processes from choosing a life partner to raising a family. Widespread cultural acceptance of male superiority; male child preference and the custom of paying bride price remain persistent practices which continue to create a strictly gendered hierarchical social order which diminishes the reproductive rights of Nigerian women in the UK.

Keywords: gender and reproductive rights, feminist theory, culture, Nigerian women, birth control

INTRODUCTION

Central to Cultural Studies is the focus on constructions and contestations of various categories of identity, including sexuality, abilities and race (King, 2016). The definition of the term 'culture' is however, heavily debated (Bodley, 2011). While Stein and Rowe (2006) define culture as a learned and systematic behaviour passed down from one generation to the next, Kagawa-Singer and Chung (1994: 198) see culture 'as a tool which defines reality for its members', arguing further that people's perception of reality emerges through the process of socialisation which shapes beliefs, practices, norms, behaviours and values in a given society. The exploration of cultural factors in this article draws from the Kagawa-Singer and Chung's (1994) conceptualisation of culture because it effectively captures the inclusiveness and complexity of culture as a tool that crafts practices and influences decision-making. Historically, culture has always served as a tool which influences how ideas and practices gain hegemony and ultimately become normative (King, 2016). The concept of *culture* plays a significant role in influencing reproductive rights of Nigerian women living in Nigeria and more precisely in the decision making around birth control, where the outcomes of pregnancy shapes a woman's life trajectory (Iyanda and Nwankwo, 2018; Atchison et al., 2019). Some cultural factors achieve this through silencing of female voices, subordination of the female bodies and subjectivities to male ones, and outright devaluation of femininity (King, 2016).

In this article, feminist poststructuralism as both an epistemological and theoretical approach informs the exploration of cultural factors that impact on the reproductive rights of women of Nigerian heritage living in the UK. According to Weedon (1987:40-41), feminist poststructuralism is 'a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change'. Feminist poststructuralism offers a dynamic and

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nuanced understanding of experiences whilst according attention to both meaning and subjectivities (Boonzaier, 2008).

Currently, Nigeria's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is approximately 5.5 children per woman (World Bank, 2017). This is presumed to be due to cultural beliefs by Nigerians that having many children is economically advantageous and that a woman's principal role in the family is that of a child-bearer (Sanni, 2016). This pro-natalist belief in Nigerian culture means that a decline in fertility will not solely depend on promotion of birth control measures; it will depend on adjusting relevant incentive structures to make smaller families advantageous (Ogunjuyigbe et al., 2010). In the UK, the combined factors of the high cost of child support, more female participation in the workforce and more recently child benefit capped to the first two children, all seem to work synergistically to shape the norm around the number of children in families to the UK average TFR being 1.8 (Bradshaw et al., 2006; Sefton, 2019). At the same time, Ogunjuyigbe et al. (2005) have argued that although Nigerian women appear not to be using contraceptives - which might suggest they want to have more children, the demand for abortions is rising, indicating an alternative unmet need for birth control. Spousal opposition is identified as a major barrier to the uptake of birth control practices by women in Nigeria (Babalola et al., 2012).

Although many feminist scholars have often questioned the permanence of normative roles reflected in only married, and heterosexual family structures, rather than more inclusive family structures (like same-sex couples) (Allen and Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015), such complex family structures is beyond the scope of this study. A majority of Nigerian women take no part in decisions regarding their fertility and reproductive health, leaving key decisions to their male partners (Okwor and Olaseha, 2010; Austin, 2015; Babalola et al., 2015). Hence, relational dynamics in families negate a woman's reproductive autonomy and this further reiterates that gender is a relational process that is both socially and culturally constructed (Wills and Risman, 2006). In addition, Akindele and Adebimpe (2016) state that this unequal power relationship is due to women being seen as morally and sexually weak; justifying the practice that their body and sexuality are subjected to the control of their husbands. A major consequence of this is that it leads to 'benevolent sexism' - a belief that women are weak and need to be helped, which is disempowering and problematic because women should have the right as citizens to take control of their own health (WHO, 1986; Cislaghi, 2018). In fact, Dewar (2006) is of the opinion that the radical ideas of sexual freedom, rights and women's empowerment associated with birth control movements of the 19th century was downplayed under colonialism to gain acceptance in conservative countries like Nigeria. In these countries, birth control was reframed as 'family planning', a term which promotes the social and health benefits of birth control such as the alleviation of poverty and reduction in maternal mortality without threatening male superiority and dominance (Gupta, 2000). Moreover, the implementation of a rights and sexual freedom framework of birth control in Nigeria is problematic because of disparities between global and local narratives concerning the female body (Izugbara and Undie, 2008; Tamale, 2008). For example, most parts of Nigeria give rights over a woman's body and sexuality to her husband through bride price payments and marriage (Ogunjuyigbe et al., 2005). Thus, globally sanctioned rights may have no bearing for these women.

Religion also plays a central role in influencing the cultural acceptability (or unacceptability) of the uptake of birth control or family planning services in Nigeria (Izugbara et al., 2010; Izugbara and Ezeh, 2010; Obasohan, 2015). In addition, religion shapes ideology and provides people with teachings that legitimise morality, social norms and cultural values (Pinter et al., 2016). Historically, first wave feminism strongly criticised institutionalised religion for promoting the submission of women both on symbolic and practical terms (Woodhead, 2001). Paradoxically, the movement for women's rights owes some of its origin to Christian denominations such as *Catholique société des féministes chrétiens* and the Protestant's *Mouvement jeunes femmes* (Forcades, 2015). Therefore, the relationship between women's reproductive rights, feminism and religion could be said to be complex and ambivalent (Giorgi, 2016). Furthermore, with the advent of the second wave of feminism, many left Christianity and joined other forms of religiosity which either subverted the hierarchy between genders or thrived on theories based on primal matriarchy (Woodhead, 2001). This led Giorgi (2016: 58) to assert that the relationship between religion and women's rights including reproductive rights is best understood as 'a historical contingency than an irreconcilable difference'.

However, according to Schenker (2000) and Bakibinga et al. (2016), monotheist religions like Roman Catholicism and conservative Protestantism prohibit all forms of modern means of contraception, citing procreation as the principal reason for marriage. Interestingly, both denominations support traditional means of birth regulation, for example the rhythm method and periodic abstinence within marriages (Orji and Onwudiegwu, 2002; Ujuju et al., 2011). Among other Protestants, birth control is seen as a means of exercising responsible parenthood; hence, all forms of birth control are allowed only within marriage (LoPresti, 2005). For Muslims, despite Poston (2005) maintaining that Islam abhors all forms of birth control on the basis that it violates God's law of procreation, a study by Audu et al. (2008) found that most Nigerian Muslim women were more accepting of their husbands using contraceptives than using them themselves. Arguably, some religious principles place

supremacy on males and reject that women own the right to their bodies and fertility (Iyer, 2002; Pinter et al., 2016).

Beyond religion, traditional beliefs that support lineage continuity place a high premium on fertility as most women are compelled to continue reproducing until a male child who, according to the patriarchal Nigerian system, is believed to exclusively ensure the continuity of a family's lineage (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014). A male child is described as the link that ensures the continuation of the family (Obiyo, 2016). Childlessness (whether voluntary or involuntary) thus becomes socially unacceptable and leads to women's deprivation, violence, isolation and abandonment (Waziri-Erameh and Omoti, 2006; Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014).

Additionally, postcolonial approaches argue that discourses used to rationalise and advocate birth control especially in African populations are shaped by racist philosophies, in addition to political and economic interests (Gupta, 2000). For instance, the Malthusian-inspired assumptions of population growth present a racialised discourse that constructs African women as hyper-fecund who lack the moral and financial progeny to raise children and are concomitantly to blame for their poverty and underdevelopment (Malthus, 1976). This assumption suggests birth control is a 'cure' for Africa's economic misery (Jones, 2013). For some, teachings on birth control targeting Africans and blacks generally are viewed as a form of Western colonisation and ethnocentrism – tendencies which see western ideals as the standard and the imperative to judge others by those standards (Ferguson and Brown, 1991). For others, it is considered an invasion of Africans' historical sensitivity to life and families (Ekeocha, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

In our project, we wanted to ask two primary questions:

1. Are there specific cultural norms, expectations, practices and beliefs that influence the reproductive rights of UK-based Nigerian women?
2. How does religion interact with culture to affect reproductive decision-making of Nigerian heritage women living in the UK?

The research employed a single phase, cross-sectional, qualitative study design using face-to-face semi-structured interviews of UK-based Nigerian women. The qualitative design allows exploration of people's emic perspectives which can accommodate diverse interpretations. The semi-structured interview approach offers a logical guide for in-depth discussions required to address research questions (Longhurst, 2003). The study population was defined as 18-35 years old women of Nigerian heritage who had lived in the UK for at least five years. The 18-35 age range depicts maturity and high fertility, potentially prompting women to consider marriage, motherhood and birth control services (Dunson et al., 2004). The length of time participants were resident in the UK was expected to be related to any influence a new socio-cultural context might have on their perceptions of reproductive rights and change in their behaviours such as with the uptake of contraceptives. Leeds was chosen for easy access to women of Nigerian heritage because the city has one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse populations in the UK (World Population Review, 2019). For sampling and recruitment, participants were selected from the Nigerian community in Leeds. The recruitment process adopted a snowball pattern (Browne, 2005) which was repeated by each interviewed person until five women were interviewed. All participants spoke in English.[1]

The women who volunteered to participate in this research were categorised as lower-middle and middle-middle class. Psuedonyms were used to show ethical compliance.

Ozioma is a 29 year old Engineer who has been living in Leeds, UK for six years. She has a Masters degree from the UK and works in an engineering firm at the city centre. At the time of this study, she had been married for five months and had no children.

Ola is a 33 year old married woman with a Criminology degree from a university in Leeds. She works as a lawyer and has two children.

Yinka aged 34, was a nurse in Nigeria before migrating to the UK twelve years ago. She presently holds a Masters degree from a UK university and works as a Nurse with the British National Health Service (NHS). She is married with two children.

Koko works as an interior decorator and holds a BSc degree in Environmental health. She is 28 years old and has been living in Leeds for seven years.

Adesuwa is 30 years old, married with a child and has been living in Leeds for eight years. She works as a pharmacist in Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

[1] This study received ethics approval from Leeds Beckett Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all potential study participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the research within the withdrawal window (from the beginning of the interview and elapses after data analysis). Confidentiality was enhanced by ascribing pseudonyms to participants to maintain their anonymity (Moore, 2012).

All participants were interviewed independently. We engaged them in an informal conversation which was aimed at building rapport (Morrow, 2005). This was to put them at ease and to build trust, which improves the credibility of the study's findings (ibid). Being an "insider", in that one of the researchers was born and raised in Nigeria and further as a woman, it was hoped that she was perceived as being more able to understand and empathise with experiences of Nigerian women in a socio-cultural setting that largely subjugates them. For the researcher, Anizoba, it was occasionally difficult to separate intellectual from emotional considerations, because of the effect of identification that occurred between researcher and participant.

In our critical framework, two methods of theoretical analyses were used: critical feminist approach as described by Dominelli (2002) and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These methods of analyses were also influenced by Smith's (1987) Feminist Standpoint Theory. Such perspectives offer an alternative way of viewing the world, away from the androcentric nature of research which distorts women's experiences to one which generates knowledge rooted in women's lived experiences (Punch, 2014). Horizonalising (locating significant statements) of data was done according to the three frameworks of Critical Feminism: binary thinking, unpacking universalist standards and gendered power relations (Dominelli, 2002). Critical feminism offers an analytical framework that aims to identify and challenge the pathologising discourses of women's oppression (Alcázar-Campos, 2013). These frameworks of critical feminism offer a lens for identifying the nature of the inequalities towards women and their impact on reproductive decision-making of the study's participants. The findings from this study are organised into four categories: (a) construction of voluntary childlessness as 'deviancy' (b) unpacking universalist standards: a case of religion (c) binary thinking (d) gendered power relations: an issue of women's rights, which we will now summarise.

CONSTRUCTION OF VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS AS 'DEVIANCY'

A commonly reported perspective among participants related to the normalcy in ascribing women the principal role of child-bearers. Participants' understanding of contraception and various means of contraception available to women did not recognise the desire of a woman to actively choose to be childless. Ola said:

> "Family planning is taking precautions when building a family and trying to space your babies. It is basically planning your family and how you want to raise your kids."

This reflects an understanding of contraception as providing an opportunity to control the number of births throughout a woman's reproductive life. Although Yinka had a more radical view of family planning as one of the ways women can take control of their lives and be more productive in the society, she conveyed similar sentiments of contraception being conceptualised along the lines of controlling childbirth. According to her:

> "…as far as I understand, it is spacing your children in such a way that you can afford to look after them and give them a good life. It also means that you will have a good life yourself and function better as a woman…"

From both perspectives, having children remains an important aspect of women's lives and adds to the multidimensional nature of women's status within households and their communities. For these women, marriage and procreation are inseparable and the idea of not having children at all was not countenanced. When probed further on the function of sexuality especially in marriage as primarily geared towards procreation and begetting a progeny, Ozioma said:

> "…I find it strange that a woman should not get married and have children of her own or at least aspire to have children. Having children is what makes me a real woman. That is how things should be. The number of children and spacing can be different for everybody but unless you are a nun, I see no reason why a woman should not have children."

UNPACKING UNIVERSALIST STANDARDS: A CASE OF RELIGION

Participants identified religion - especially Islam - as an ideological structure that espouses universalist standards or principles which function to constrain the reproductive rights of women of Nigerian heritage, and consequently undervalue their roles in society. Although the participants did not have any personal religious convictions, they commented on the experiences of other women. According to Yinka:

> "…I know of some Nigerian Muslim women in the UK who don't use any form of contraception because of their belief that it is God who gives children. They are being taught in their places of worship

> that they are beneath a man whose role is to direct and lead, while they follow. To them, taking up any form of contraception is akin to interfering with God's work and unfortunately, they bear the consequences of this type of teaching."

On the other hand, some participants believed that Nigerian women in the UK are not influenced by these laws as they would be in Nigeria because of a more liberal UK culture including women having access to contraceptives. They posit that the high cost of child maintenance in the UK and the expectation of female participation in the workforce discouraged having large numbers of children. For example, Adesuwa stated:

> "Some say that Islamic beliefs permit Nigerian women to have many children, but I think this is an archaic way of thinking because here (UK), women from Nigeria who are Muslims do not want to have many children because of the high cost of child care. Don't forget that these women work and have their careers ahead of them. Religion may have influenced their reproductive choices in Nigeria, but not here (UK)."

BINARY THINKING

Binary thinking views gender as opposites rather than as an identity which is fluid and can be understood as a continuum of behaviours and attitudes (Christensen and Wright, 2018). This study reveals the impact of binary thinking in participants' constructing socially and culturally acceptable roles for men and women, with such constructions influencing their reproductive choices. The perception of male children as culturally more preferred to females to ensure continuity of lineage is largely accepted. Their reluctance to see female children as people with the necessary will and attitude to carry on a family's name reveals binary thinking about what constitutes 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Ola explained:

> "Nigerians have a culture which places the responsibility on male children to ensure lineage continuity. Men retain their fathers' name and pass it onto their children. This is something a woman cannot do. So, for us, this is a culture that cannot die in Nigerian families living in both UK and Nigeria…there has to be a man in a family to make it a complete unit. That is what a typical African man wants. Women do not have much say on this."

Additionally, our findings show that relatives influence the reproductive choices that couples make. Relatives, especially mothers-in-law, can put pressure on their sons to have more male children. This can have a major implication on a woman's mental health, leading to psychological and psychosomatic effects including distress, anxiety and depression (Van Balen and Bos, 2009). Preference for male children is aggressive, in that most women are compelled to have more children than they initially planned to save their relationships: For instance, Yinka said:

> "…. we are not immune to interferences from our mothers-in-law here. Whenever they visit, they clearly prefer their male grandchildren and for those families with no male child, it is a nightmare for them. To be honest, if I did not already have a male child, I will try harder to have one at least. This does not imply that I dislike my female children, I just want to be happy and save my marriage from issues."

Some of the participants offered more nuanced or ambivalent views on male child preference. Although their thinking sometimes moved beyond binary opposites of gender, the strong preference for male children remained fundamental. Koko put it in this way:

> "…I could have many girls and there may be one with masculine traits. She is as good as having a male child. Girls are beginning to carry on the family name in some cases. But for a traditional Nigerian family, this is not welcome. Our culture is quite strong and the need to have a male child is something that may never go away."

GENDERED POWER RELATIONS: AN ISSUE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Our research highlights the gendered nature of social relations in decision-making regarding women's reproductive choices. Women of Nigerian heritage in the UK do not have full control over their bodies and come second place in issues concerning their fertility. Yinka elaborated:

> "…. I suppose wherever you are, men will always be men and they will control a lot of things. But I think what the UK involves is that you also have women who work and contribute to the family unlike back home where the man is mostly the sole breadwinner. Therefore, these men are not as powerful here as they would be in Nigeria. We do not make exclusive decisions on reproduction and family planning, but we have an opinion and contribute. A lot of men don't like that we even have a say."

In addition, some participants cited the bride price custom - a cultural requirement that gives a Nigerian man the exclusive rights over a woman's body, as one obstacle to achieving women's autonomy. Some participants alluded to the patriarchal overtones of bride price payment but see themselves helpless. Ozioma said:

> "…I share same views as people who say that a woman should be able to fully make decisions about her body but for us, our husbands own our bodies because he paid a bride price. It may seem patriarchal, but this is our culture. We are not like the white folks. It is our identity and way of life as a people. Wives are under husbands so they should respect and submit to them."

Here, bride price indicates that a woman is owned by a man, which reduces her only to household decision-making roles. The Nigerian custom of bride price tends to limit a woman's independence and perpetuates an unequal gender power relation, especially regarding reproductive health-seeking choices of women.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN NEGOTIATING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Within discourses of feminine identity and reproduction, the gendered expectations of women to bear children are pervasive (Makama, 2013). The perspectives of participants in this study further reinforce this. This finding is consistent with other studies amongst Nigerian women that report childlessness to be met with disapproval and incredulity (Olu, 1999; Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014). Meyers (2001) has noted that these perspectives negatively position both voluntary and involuntary childless women in the society. The desire of a woman to be childless is perceived as challenging the 'normal' trajectory where traditional visions of reproductive heterosexuality are normative steps in adult life (Elder, 2008; Giddens and Sutton, 2009).

Gillespie (2001) reported that white British women who are voluntarily childless are also considered selfish, unnatural, deviant, maladjusted and immature. However, Berrington (2017) observes that there are an increasing number of UK women who are making the choice to be childless, a trend which is very rare in Nigeria regardless of marital status. In a qualitative study with UK childless women, participants prioritised their careers over motherhood and deliberately remained childless (Hakim, 2000). Even so, it is projected that 22% of women in the UK who reach the age of 40 will be childless by 2020. By contrast, in Nigeria, high levels of resentment for childlessness and very low uptake of more permanent means of birth control linger (Abiodun et al., 2012).

In our study, participants still conformed to childbearing as an ultimate signifier of their feminine identity despite living in a more progressive, liberal and secular environment in the UK. Our research reveals the hegemonic gendered obligations to which only women are forced to conform. Such obligations label women who decide to be childless, or rather child-free as 'deviating from the norm', consequently marginalising them, making them prone to misogynistic expectations, stigma and social isolation (Mogobe, 2005; Hollos and Larsen, 2008; Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014). Social definitions of womanhood in relation to childbearing alienates those women who do not wish to associate their femininity with a desire to birth children.

For many Nigerian women, religion guides their way of life and serve as a means for meeting practical, psychological and spiritual needs (Para-Mallam, 2006). Many scholars have argued that religion, directly and indirectly, espouses a negative force for gender equality and serves to sustain female oppression (Rossano, 2008; Rwafa, 2016; Risman et al., 2018). Our research found that participants believe that Islamic laws do not promote equality among men and women and view any attempts to regulate reproduction as interfering with God's work. Similar negative influences of Islamic laws on reproductive rights of Nigerian women were reported in a study by Para-Mallam (2006), where participants contended that Islam gives husbands exclusive rights to determine family size. This consequently renders their wives' bodies as sites of male domination. In addition, Schmidt et al. (2012) found that religion opposed the uptake of modern family planning services among the black African Community in the UK. This group shares similar characteristics with this study's participants because they were all migrants who were born outside of the UK. However, a comparative study of British Muslim attitudes to contraceptives from women who were born here may disaggregate these assumptions as most British middle class Muslim women do practice restrictive birth control.

Bakibinga et al. (2016) have argued that religion has no impact on the reproductive rights of women. He argues that through the process of secularisation (Shiner, 1967), many communities have become integrated beyond religious boundaries which allow other socio-economic determinants besides religion to impede the uptake of birth control services. Secularisation in the West proposes that as a society advances in modernity and scientific

developments, spiritual ideas on which religion relies on for its legitimacy become undermined and in extreme cases are forced into obscurity (Shiner, 1967). This assertion is inconsistent with findings on migrant women, where religious beliefs continue to be strong (Munt, 2012). The effects of secularisation cannot be assumed to be the same across all demographics (Norris and Inglehart, 2011; Peri-Rotem, 2016). The impact of religion in shaping norms and values may be diminishing in some countries but is unchanged or even amplified in others (Greeley, 2017), especially in relation to the process of migration where religion provides a link to cultures of home and also a bridge or bond between women refugees and migrants (Munt, 2012).

Feminists have strongly objected to the use of religion as a tool to sustain the domination of males over women (Mojab, 2001). Forman-Rabinovici and Sommer (2018) state that one of the ways religion may reinforce gender inequality within the context of reproductive rights and as reported by participants in this study is through its laws, principles and customs. Since religion is often central to native Nigerian women's identity, they are profoundly affected by it (Ugwu and de Kok, 2015).

We have shown how the preference for a male child is culturally influenced and is born out of dualist/binary thinking (Dominelli, 2002). Fundamental to this type of thinking is that only one gender is privileged and required to carry out specific roles (Schiwy, 2007). Nigerian cultures frame male and female children as having different identities and capabilities, making male superiority over females clear to both boys and girls early on in life (Raji et al., 2016). Participants from this study, despite living in the UK, espoused a home culture that ascribes the role of lineage continuity to only males. This is similar with findings in a study by Igbolo and Ejue (2016) which reports that negative attitudes towards girls was influenced by desires for male children to continue lines of descent. This preference acts as a mechanism that sustains the patriarchal status quo within migrant communities (Izugbara, 2004).

Placing such a high premium upon sons reveals the hegemonic practice with which Nigerian women are forced to conform to, or are complicit in (Nnadi, 2013). Male children are perceived as symbols of strength and longevity as they grow to become 'men' (Nwokocha, 2007). This puts pressure on women to deliver sons which more generally has implications for female reproductive rights and maternal health and forcefully positions women where they perpetuate the lower status of girls (Raji et al., 2016). As Dustin (2016) argues, such productions of dominant masculinity need to problematised which should allow for accountability and contestation. Culture plays a huge role in shaping health decision-making and behaviour (Warwick-Booth et al., 2012), and in the case of migration, there are significant factors why 'home' culture, or cultural practices from the country of origin, become held onto even when arguably they are detrimental to the woman's current experience.

According to Mosha and Kakoko (2013), until gender roles that shape spousal communication and reproductive decision making are changed, full reproductive rights for Nigerian women will not be achieved. The decision-making process about the uptake of birth control services among participants remained heavily influenced by Nigeria's patriarchal system. This system privileges the male voice, considering men alone to be the Head of the Household, as well as owners of women's bodies due to the bride price system (Makama, 2013). However, many authors have shown the bride price payment in a different light. They argue that the payment does not necessarily imply the loss of a woman's autonomy, rather it authenticates marriages and symbolises the beginning of a new relationship between both families (Asen, 2017; Princewill et al., 2018). In the south-eastern part of Nigeria, bride price is heavily commercialised and any man marrying from this region is seen as a real man -because the high bride price would have substantially depleted his financial resources (Adefi, 2009). To reciprocate, the woman is obligated to bear as many children as possible and refusal can end the marriage (Oluwakemi, 2017). This limited control by women over their fertility means that despite the global second-wave feminist movement that heralded birth control as a woman's human right - and which significantly altered women's sexuality - Nigerian women remain largely defined within the confines of a religious and patriarchal culture which mandates submission to men. The western liberal, secular rights of women may not have very significant bearing for native-born Nigerian women despite living in more progressive countries like the UK, and this is despite a growth of feminism and feminist scholarship which comes out of Nigerian experience.[2]

Many African women living outside their place of nativity are more inclined to protect their cultural practices even if these are sexist and oppressive to them (Mansbridge and Tate, 1992). For example, a study by Femi-Ajao (2016) revealed that women of Nigerian heritage living in the UK barely disclose intimate partner violence to authorities because they hold onto the Nigerian cultural norm which encourages women to endure abuse from their husbands as reporting such incidents is perceived as an act of disloyalty. The women in our study are not oblivious to the marginalisation of women within marriage but seem to have accepted such. Smith's (1987) idea of

[2] See for example Simidele Dosekun's forthcoming *Fashioning Postfeminism: Spectacular Femininity and Transnational Culture in Nigeria* Also available as a PhD thesis at: https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.680161; Jacob Crystal's *Supernatural Bodies: The intersection of Nigerian Feminism and Body Autonomy* Available as a Masters thesis at: https://search.proquest.com/openview/814dd142892d7fb2f7e59c54b710ebd9/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y and Adebukunola Babalola's Overlooking Misogyny: A Critical Examination of Fela Anikulapokuti's Music, Lifestyle and Legacy Available at: https://tamucc-ir.tdl.org/handle/1969.6/31358

bifurcation of consciousness offers a useful lens to view how subjugation and a dominant consciousness are fostered, nurtured and ultimately inhabited by these participants. Bifurcation of consciousness starts from the premise that two modes of consciousness exist within a woman: the world as she would want to experience it and the reality she must adapt to (Harding, 2004). The adapted consciousness conditions women to construct their realities from the perspective of a dominant and 'powerful' group (men) and this perspective is deeply ingrained and practised in most institutions of the world including families and marriages (Phillips, 2014). Thus, the routine and taken-for-granted everyday situations in which women experience themselves include reproductive health decision making which becomes deeply embedded in issues of dominance, power and subjugation from dominant masculinity (Uddin, 2014).

This has significant implications vis-à-vis this ethnic group because health promotion is committed to fighting social injustice and addressing structural inequalities that hinder people from attaining their full possible health (Naidoo and Wills, 2016). Health promotion has the potential to address the existential concerns that negatively shape the lives of Nigerian women because at its core it operates from the belief that all humans have the capacity and agency to acquire really useful knowledge and act on it. Health promotion emphasises the need for empowerment education, a type of learning that fosters critical consciousness (*conscientization*) (Friere, 1972) which will hopefully lead to a better understanding and challenge to the oppressive practices that impact negatively on women's health. Empowerment here is used in the context of community/group empowerment, rather than individual empowerment because from a feminist perspective; there is a sense of belonging to a group that arises from women's everyday experiences with gender oppression (Simien, 2004), and also because migrant women do usually make strong connections to the local ethnic communities of which they are part. Moreover, it is the shared experiences with systems of domination and structures of oppression that drive groups and supporters into political activism to bring about radical social changes (Wilcox, 1990). Through consciousness-raising, women can begin to deconstruct dominant ideologies of gender superiority and find the collective action as a necessary form of resistance (Simien, 2004; Cannon, 2016). Although this study only involves a very small sample, its findings do suggest that much work is still to be done in empowering middle class, heterosexual Nigerian-born mothers living in the UK. More research on how these women can and do resist patriarchal expectations would constitute the next step in this project.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the interplay of various social, religious and cultural factors such as gender obligations, marriage, dowry payment, lineage continuity and the social standing of women (childless or not) that constrain the reproductive rights of women of Nigerian heritage living in the UK. Collins and Bilge (2016) note the ways in which these factors interact intersectionally - and posit that they must be dealt with together as they interrelate to reveal multiple layers of subjugation for such women. Activists and health promoters who champion the cause of birth control need to take better account of the specific cultural discourses of migrant women, taking into account variations in regional and national identity. It is incumbent on health educators to reach out to such communities and develop careful dialogue with them, especially around axes of cultural difference.

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Book Review

Modern Motherhood and Women's Dual Identities: Rewriting the Sexual Contract

Mariana Thomas [1]*

Published: September 10, 2019

Book's Author: Petra Bueskens

Publication Date: 2018

Publisher: Oxon & New York: Routledge

Price: £105 hardcover

Number of Pages: 334 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-138-67742-5

Modern Motherhood and Women's Dual Identities: Rewriting the Sexual Contract presents an innovative and necessary intervention into a central dilemma in late modernity: the contradiction between western women's maternal and individualised selves. By identifying and examining the origins of the sexual contract, Petra Bueskens effectively demonstrates that its structural legacy acts to simultaneously constrain and liberate women.

The principal insight of the book lies in the author's contention that women's freedom in the contemporary West is implicated in their continued subjugation as mothers under the 'new sexual contract'. This marks a theoretical evolution beyond existing feminist research which has established the existence of the polarity between maternal and autonomous selves as well as the perpetuation of gendered private and public spheres. Through an astute interpretation of sociological history and by conducting interviews with a group of 'revolving mothers', Bueskens is able to put forth a proposal for 'revolutionary change in the social order' (p. 304).

The book can be organised into two complimentary approaches: firstly, an historical, theoretical and philosophical investigation and, secondly, a thematic case study of ten working mothers. Bueskens presents a detailed analysis of the birth of the modern social contract and the 'individual': an historical point from which, the author contends, Western society still draws its basic structure. Developed by the classical Western philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries, the foundational principles of social contract theory or classical liberalism dictated that all men are born free; that they are free and equal to each other; and any government should be determined by democratic consent and the rule of law. The establishment of sovereignty for each man marked a departure from traditional, feudal society in which the rule of the father was hierarchically implemented by the domains of the church, state and family. In classical liberalism, the rule of the father was intended to be passed down to the rule of the son, and, thus, the social contract was born. Bueskens builds her theoretical position largely on Carole Pateman's assertion that the social contract from its inception relied upon the existence of the sexual contract and, therefore, the subjection of women as wives and mothers. Although the social contract granted a natural right to egalitarianism for both sexes, it was based on what Pateman terms 'fraternal patriarchy' which continued to perceive the patriarchal family and women's subjection to male rule as the 'natural' order of civilised society. This asymmetry was fixed not just by 'natural laws' but by institutionalised legality as women's subjugation to men was written into property rights and the prohibition of full citizenship, including suffrage. In Bueskens' phrasing:

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> …it was never a matter of mere exclusion that guaranteed women's specifically modern subjection; rather, it was the way women were included [as wives and mothers] that constituted the central obstacle for participation in society (p. 81).

According to Bueskens, the groundwork of contractual theory and the introduction of the 'individual' eventually allows women to demand the equal rights which lay at the heart of classical liberalism. Whereas Pateman states that the social and sexual contracts, by definition, exclude women and preclude female individualisation, Bueskens theorises that over time women have appropriated the category of the 'individual' in order to gain entry and participation in the patriarchal public sphere and labour market. Yet, the public sphere may only exist alongside its counterpart - the private-domestic sphere - which continues to be a female gendered space. The 'individual' is only free to leave the home on the caveat that somebody remains to perform domestic and care work. For Bueskens, herein lies the root of the contradiction in contemporary women's lives.

The book embarks upon a 'sociological history' of over 300 years of western women's duality, transitioning from its birth in the proto-industrialisation era to its contemporary transmutation. Bueskens draws a vital connection between the gendered spheres which persist today and the separation of the household/family from the economy which took place during the industrial revolution. Although many women did begin to enter the waged workforce, which developed outside the home during the move to industrialisation, all women continued to be excluded from full citizenship and the vast majority did not earn a sufficient wage to ensure economic independence as single women. As production began to leave the home in the 18th century, childcare and domestic work became the solitary pursuit of the stay-at-home mother. This is the point at which we see the creation of the early nuclear family and the gendered division of labour. Alongside the privatisation of motherhood, there was an increase in 'Woman rights' and a prominent rise in the educated, middle-class 'new woman'. Her 'nemesis', the archetypal 'moral mother' grew out of a wider 'surge of sentiment' caused by an increase in space and resources which allowed for further familial privacy and intimacy, an economic growth which saw an increase in single-earner households, and a cultural shift towards marriage on the basis of romantic love.

The ideological movement towards the 'cult of motherhood' developed from the Rousseauist view that the infant required love and nurturance given by the mother alone in the private setting of the home. This quickly became an influential ideology in the culture of the 19th century, and one that was used as reasoning behind the separation of women from the 'outside world' of production. Bueskens demonstrates that by the fin de siècle the 'new woman' or the 'woman who leaves' had entered mainstream cultural dialogue and were deemed to represent a serious threat to the existing order, despite their relatively small numbers. These women wanted love, freedom, education and liberation from economic dependence; this marked a change in attitude which manifested in declining birth rates during the decades before and after the fin de siècle - a 'silent strike' against the conditions of marriage and motherhood. At this point in the analysis, the author takes a substantial chronological leap from the fin de siècle to late modernity as she begins to offer her observations of contemporary society. For the sake of thorough analysis, it would have been useful for Bueskens to present her critical insight into the changes that took place during the mid-twentieth century, to elucidate the effects of the first and second world wars as well as the struggles and gains of the feminist movement during this time.

In the following section, the author surveys a wide range of sociological literature in order to produce a varied account of the modern Western woman in terms of her education, employment and position within the domestic/familial realm. All of this is framed within recent sociological debates regarding the decline of the traditional concept of society, defined by 'hard' structures such as the state, the economy and the family, which has been replaced with the fluid networks of globalisation and late-stage capitalism, and a dissolution of the institutional sovereignty associated with the old social contract. Running in parallel to this is the narrative of individual choice and responsibility; the advancement of individual mobility and freedom in neoliberal society has allowed both men and women to practise 'self-making', continually electing who they are and how they will live. Within this landscape, there have been radical gains towards women's equality; to a certain extent, women have been released from the patriarchal order which confined previous generations and can now pursue love and work under the same (or similar) conditions as their male counterparts. Bueskens agrees that women are now free to act as individuals in ways that were not possible within the old social contract, but argues that these free choices, such as, to delay marriage and motherhood, gain an education or develop a career, are being performed alongside a host of responsibilities that remain or increasingly fall upon women.

Despite unprecedented movement out of the home and into the workforce by women, the vast majority of women still choose to become mothers and, additionally, to undertake the majority of the parenting and domestic duties while their husbands or partners return to work. The 'new scenario' produces a complex discord between the woman who is free as an individual and constrained as a mother. In this scenario, a manipulation of the narrative of individual 'free choice' has created a culture in which the social contract has transformed into the individual contract. Bueskens argues that as society has become more fluid and less structured, patriarchy too has become deinstitutionalised and 'deregulated'. While women may no longer be legally subordinated, there is a

societal subjection in the form of 'individual' female problems, motherhood being one of them; the diminishment of welfare support and neo-liberalism's contempt for dependency compounds an individualisation of care. The sexual contract, which relied upon women's domestic labour, not only persists but, in fact, flourishes in an unregulated form and so the 'deregulation of social structure and increasing individualisation reveals the sexual contract more clearly than before' (p. 168). Women may now successfully enter the workforce as de facto men – or, in social contract vernacular, as 'individuals' – but not as women, and certainly not as mothers.

In the West, this is evidenced by the sharp decline in women's economic and career success after they become mothers – the author shows that women who have a financial 'breadwinner' when they become mothers suffer the least economic penalties, while single mothers are among those who suffer the worst. Bueskens points to a worldwide 'fertility strike' which sees women either delaying motherhood or opting out entirely in order to avoid an economic and career drop-off post-childbirth. The increased gender equality and opportunity open to individuals who are willing to operate as ideal neo-liberal subjects closes when these individuals become mothers and cease to fulfil models of self-sufficiency, flexibility and independence. On becoming mothers, women experience a 'traditionalisation process' which sees a sharp increase in a gendered division of labour within the family, with women undertaking a larger share of the care and domestic workload even when their husbands or partners participate more actively in the household than the average (between 80-95 per cent of couples have a highly unequal division of labour). A complicating factor is that most women want to stay at home during their child's early years, even in the rare circumstances in which they would have adequate support to return to work. Mothers mainly attempt to manage the contradictions between their family work and paid work, their 'maternal self' and their 'individualised self' respectively, by undertaking a 'second shift', more accurately described as multi-tasking, during which time they undertake paid work as well as the majority of childcare and domestic work. The conflicting dual identities inherent within the figure of the contemporary woman as well as the burden of exhaustion and stress placed on mothers is deemed to be the inevitable price of 'wanting it all'; it is what Bueskens identifies as the 'current struggle' of feminism - the final site of emancipation.

Through her case study of ten mothers, Bueskens develops practical solutions to the problems presented by the 'new sexual contract'. The research focuses on 'revolving mothers', defined by Bueskens as women who have chosen careers or creative pursuits that take them away from the home for periods of time that exceed the standard working day – from several nights to months at a time. These women fit into the category of 'outsider', they are social innovators, and can therefore potentially teach us new ways of undertaking motherhood which challenge the conventions of the 'new sexual contract'. Without exception, the women practise 'strategic maternal absence' which provides them with practical and psychological relief from their domestic work and child-care, and which serves the radical purpose of restructuring gender relations in the home (p. 48). Bueskens has intentionally chosen women for her sociological case study who fit into the ideal 'individual' role – well-educated, professional, ambitious, middle-class - prior to becoming mothers or in tandem with motherhood and, therefore, are more likely to have experienced an exaggerated 'traditionalisation' of gender roles with their partners.

Bueskens recognises the privilege of her participants and concedes that the case study is not applicable to the experience of the majority of women. Although the empirical research does present valuable insight, at times it feels out of step with the author's claim to variegation and inclusivity in the rest of the book. As a result of this, the empirical research remains rather limited in scope in comparison to the critical reach of the rest of the text. On the other hand, the author's case study has the consequence of highlighting that it is currently only women in a significantly privileged position who are able to choose shared, flexible parenting through extended maternal absence. As Bueskens acknowledges, most of the participants work in a freelance capacity, an option which is not generally available to women who are not as well-educated or socioeconomically secure. Through demonstrating that this parenting practice is not available to most women, Bueskens highlights the need for greater structural support in order to free mothers from the 'default position' within families. The book concludes with a rallying call for a massive restructuring of our existing models of work and welfare regimes, although, rather disappointingly, this point is not significantly elucidated. Bueskens has written passionately elsewhere on the subject of the reformation of state welfare for mothers and specifically on the potential advantages of a universal basic income, so the reader may have benefitted from the author's further valuable insight on this topic.

Overall, this study marks an exciting development in motherhood studies, as well as in the fields of gender studies and social and political theory. Perhaps its most impressive contribution to the field of motherhood studies lies in its willingness to effectively return to past social and feminist theory that may have been disregarded in order to present new understandings of the contemporary female dilemma. Arguably this is a brave and worthwhile decision by Bueskens, as it allows her to implement innovative analysis of the modern 'sexual contract' and to consider strategies that can disrupt it. The book will appeal to a wide range of readers who are interested in or familiar with the experience of the contemporary woman and mother. Undoubtedly, it will become a significant theoretical addition to the feminist debates and existing research on modern motherhood and women's dual identities.

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Book Review

My Butch Career: A Memoir

Sarah Chinn [1]*

Published: September 10, 2019

Book's Author: Esther Newton

Publication Date: 2018

Publisher: Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Price: $29.95

Number of Pages: 274pp.

ISBN: 1478001291 (Paperback)

By the time Esther Newton was ten years old she had worked out who she was: "an anti-girl, a girl refusenik, caught between genders" (60). Growing up in a family both incapable of expressing emotion and suffused with rage and combativeness, the young Esther realised that she had another kind of identity, separate from that of her parents, although deeply informed by who they were. While her mother's family was populated by "unconventional women, strong enough to follow their hearts and desires," there was minimal room for Newton's form of unconventionality, which combined a rejection of femininity and a full-hearted embrace of masculinity.

Many of the best moments in *My Butch Career* trace the prehistory of, ambivalence towards, and eventual embrace of her masculinity. But the book is more than a memoir. It works through a variety of other issues, including the structures of binarised gender itself, the misogyny that Newton faced in her academic career, and the meshes of gender and class politics in which she found herself caught for much of her life. The title itself speaks to these multiple trajectories. The word "career" can mean simply the professional path of a life from training to mastery. At the same time, as Newton points out, the idea of a career is inextricable from the professional classes, "bound up in class in gender" (2). Career means "education and training in business, politics, armed forces, law, or academia and like professions," more than just a job but an identity that has long been the bailiwick of men of the owning classes.

But "career" can also be a verb, "to move swiftly and in an uncontrolled way in a specified direction." Unlike the clearly-defined path of the professional career, this kind of career is unpredictable. It has sudden turns and stops, without a predefined destination. And Newton's butch career followed both these paths simultaneously: on the one hand the procession from college to graduate school to entry-level academic job and on the other a stop-and-start journey towards her own definition of butchness and an untroubled embrace of her love of women. In addition, each of these meanings also informed and intruded upon each other. Newton's sense of herself as having "a double gender consciousness," shared with " drag queens and with transgender people who choose to end the discrepancy between the bodies' sex and the gender they deem themselves to be," leads her to write her dissertation on the drag culture of Chicago, which eventually became the classic work of queer ethnography *Mother Camp* (8). It also led to her being denied tenure and promotion, in large part because both her work and her embodiment were not deemed appropriate for the academic world.

Added to all of this is her sense of not measuring up to butch stereotypes, which are also grounded in class dynamics. Unlike the working-class bar dykes who shared her gender insubordination, Newton wasn't tough: "Their rugged masculinity and tough talk made me seem wimpish. I couldn't fight with my fists, a knife or even

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insults" (91). Whereas a cisgendered man could find a place for himself as a nonviolent academic, a masculine woman had a much tougher time of it in the 1960s and 1970s. Newton hardly came from a wealthy family, but she identifies with the professional classes and imagines herself ending up in a classroom, not a bar fight (in *Zami*, Audre Lorde talks about a similar tension, feeling that she has to construct firm lines between her lesbian, black, and academic lives).

At the same time, bar dykes taught her how to follow a different kind of career – the career lesbian. They were, she says, "the first to show me how to be butch, which means they showed me how to have a style" (92). But it was "exhausting" for Newton in her early twenties to keep up the double existence of butch dyke on the one hand and professional woman on the other, exhausting to maintain "the work of monitoring and camouflaging this other self – don't hold your cigarette between your thumb and index finger, that's too masculine" – and too working-class (98). Ultimately, Newton sees herself as faced with a choice and "I had already chosen higher education over the strongest passion in my life, my love for women, because the two seemed incompatible" (106).

Ironically, in a different era – perhaps the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or in our current moment – those two desires would have been able to coexist more comfortably. Newton's spiritual foremothers, such as M. Carey Thomas, the longtime president of Bryn Mawr College, or Ruth Benedict, were able to combine their love for women with their academic pursuits. But in the hyper-heteronormative years of the Cold War, Newton faced steep barriers to living openly as a queer academic.

As for so many women of her generation, Newton's life was turned around and upside down by the excitement and ferment of the feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While she had previously understood the reasons for her discomfort in the world as being caused by her queerness and resistance to femininity, feminism gave her a new vocabulary. Like many female academics of the post-war period, Newton was encouraged to see herself as an exception, unlike "regular" women in her desire to pursue an academic career and rejection of marriage and resignation to life in the suburbs. But feminism provided her with a notion of connection to other women: "My exceptionalism, I saw, was situated within the same gender matrix that constrained all other women" (13). The challenge, then, was to maintain her hard-won butchness while recognising and acting upon her connection to women quite unlike her.

While Newton gives the reader a detailed discussion of her formative years and her early battles with academic institutions, she rushes through more recent times. There's a brief discussion of the founding of what was then the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (now CLAGS: The Center for LGBT Studies) and the struggles to find it a home. But I would have liked to have known in more detail how Newton dealt with her recognition by younger queer scholars as a pioneer in the field. In sharp contrast to the risks she ran early on in her career, Newton is now seen as a giant in the field of queer studies, from *Mother Camp* to her early work on "mannish lesbians," for her involvement in the furore of the sex wars (chronicled in more detail by her sister-in-arms and former lover Amber Hollibaugh in her memoir *My Dangerous Desires*, a fascinating counterpoint to Newton's book) to her now decades-long professional and personal partnership with performance artist Holly Hughes. Ironically for such a ground-breaking scholar, Newton doesn't see herself as a revolutionary (although I'd surely argue that she is): "Revolutionary ideas do not sit easy on me, even though I am an outsider to the bottom of my angry gay heart" (157). I wonder if this sense of *outsidership* and ambivalence doesn't adequately equip her to consider her own stature as a foremother (or perhaps fore-lesbian-aunt) to today's queer and trans scholars, who stand on her shoulders.

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Book Review

Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan

Jenny Lin [1]*

Published: September 10, 2019

Edited By: Maud Lavin, Ling Yang, and Jing Jamie Zhao

Publication Date: 2017

Publisher: Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, Queer Asia Series

Price: HK $495 (Hong Kong, Macau, Mainland China, and Taiwan) US $60 (Other countries)

Number of Pages: 292 pp. hardback.

ISBN: 978-988-8390-9

If, like me, you were born before 1990 and are not immersed in online fan cultures, you may never have heard of the acronyms BL and GL that comprise the primary thrust of *Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan* (hereafter *Queer Fan Cultures*). Fortunately, this captivating anthology's editors Maud Lavin, Ling Yang, and Jing Jamie Zhao define 'BL (Boys' Love, a fan subculture narrating male homoeroticism)' and 'GL (Girls' Love, a fan subculture narrating female homoeroticism)' (p. xi) at the outset in the Introduction. Lavin, Yang, and Zhao expertly unpack and contextualise these and other terms that may be new to the less enlightened reader – 'ACG (anime, comics, and games)' (p. xii); 'slash/femslash (fan writing practices that explore male/female homoerotic romances)' (p. xiv); and Chinese slang '*tongzhi* (gay), *guaitai* (weirdo), *ku'er* (cool youth)' (p. xix) – which reappear in fruitful discussions in the following chapters. I recently assigned *Queer Fan Cultures* in a seminar, and my millennial students, who enthusiastically devoured the book, already knew all about BL, GL, and ACG, as well as related concepts like "cosplay" (costume play, as when people dress like manga and anime characters) and "shipping," which denotes when fans couple two seemingly heterosexual characters in a same-sex relationship. No matter their extant knowledge of BL, undergraduate and graduate students and seasoned academics all stand to gain a tremendous deal from this anthology, which probes the theoretical dimensions of BL, GL, cosplay, and androgynous idols while expertly weaving in enlightening and nuanced socio-political observations on the complex cross-cultural relations between mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Truly interdisciplinary, the anthology deftly integrates various subcultures and platforms (e.g. celebrity fan groups, pop music, online forums) and methodological approaches (e.g. Internet ethnography, interviews, postmodern analyses) in a rhizomatic compilation akin to the online fan cultures and queer theoretical terrains the book illuminates. Furthermore, the editors successfully employ a transcultural framework by presenting case studies from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, contributing to Sinophone studies, a burgeoning field pioneered by scholars such as Shu-mei Shih (p. xix) that seeks to examine cultural connections across and between vast and disparate Chinese-speaking populations. Often occupying feminist positions, Sinophone studies practitioners are well poised to radically transform traditional humanistic disciplines long dominated by Western content, and built on Orientalist notions of Western academic superiority and attempts at categorising/containing non-Western subjects. *Queer Fan Cultures* aligns Sinophone studies with queer theory and fan/reception studies,

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and in so doing, poses a triply effective method for decolonising academic disciplines by challenging Western hegemonies, heteronormativity, and top-down power structures of knowledge construction. In the editors' own words, they share with queer Asian studies, queer China studies, and queer Sinophone studies

> a common focus on non-normative genders, sexualities, and desires; a complex understanding of the hybrid and heterogeneous nature of Chinese-speaking sociocultural practices and experiences; and a strong commitment to decenter Western gender and sexuality knowledge and theories (p. xiii).

Section 1. Mainland China occupies over half of the book and includes six chapters, whereas Section 2. Hong Kong and Section 3. Taiwan contain two chapters each. This distribution of content makes sense given the territories' respective sizes, populations, and global political clout. While practical, this tripart spatial division does not offer a particularly exciting path through the anthology. In line with the book's daring content, the editors might have more boldly and creatively arranged essays theoretically and/or thematically (e.g. by grouping chapters about BL generally and chapters focusing on fans of individual celebrities). The main connective threads, as the book's title reveals, are: boys' love, cosplay, and androgynous idols. Subthemes include contemporary theories of media, performativity, and parody/the carnivalesque; current and historically informed political and personal relations, especially between mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but also between China, Japan, Korea, and Western nations; and varied perspectives on and legal statuses of LGBTQ communities in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The anthology's contributors keenly consider queer fan cultures as both being influenced by and influencing various political realities facing LGBTQ communities: in mainland China, where homosexuality was decriminalised in 1997 and removed from the official list of mental disorders in 2001, the government maintains a 'no encouraging, no discouraging, and no promoting attitude' (p. xvi). In Hong Kong, 'since the decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1991, the local *tongzhi* [gay] movement has always preferred normalisation over confrontation' (p. 132); furthermore, 'Taiwan has often been assumed to be a liberal and democratic state in terms of gender and sexual equality…Yet it has also been found that the sex-negative traditions and other conservative and political forces in Taiwan have been persistent in…negating homosexuality' (p. xx).

Allow me to hover over Chapter 1, 'Chinese *Danmei* Fandom and Cultural Globalisation from Below' by Ling Yang and Yanrui Xu, which offers the most comprehensive exploration of BL (*Danmei* in Chinese), as a

> model of grassroots globalisation that subverts heterosexual normativity, fosters alternative social and economic networks, and generates a convergence of cultural and media flows from both the East and the West (p. 3).

The chapter provides a highly informative overview of multiple BL platforms in mainland China, such as print magazines, commercial websites, and non-profit blogs, and examines how these platforms have developed from the early 1990s (when BL was first introduced to China via pirated Japanese manga) to the present. The authors show how fans evade mainland China's strict censorship laws by, for instance, utilising fake or borrowed permits to publish print magazines and employing coded language in online venues. The chapter's data is culled from online ethnography of BL websites, field research into BL distribution networks, interviews with BL fans, including publishers, creators and readers, and years of the authors' own BL fan experiences. This extensive data is analysed in relation to theories of 'low-end globalisation' (p. 7) and colonial histories, political and economic competition, and social interactions within East Asia. The authors positively assess BL fan cultures, with their 'nomadic' 'cross-fertilisation' across diverse formats and genres, as constituting a 'vibrant global cultural commons' (p. 8). However, Yang and Xu also intimate that liberation from/subversion of gender and sexuality norms does not necessarily extend to the political sphere. The final part of this chapter discusses how BL platforms can stoke nationalist sentiments, showing how mainland Chinese BL fans tend to disparage pro-democracy activism (e.g. Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement), concluding that 'pop cosmopolitanism' and nationalism can actually go hand in hand' (p. 14). Chapter 1 raises a myriad of important points about the socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions of queer fan cultures that link to subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 3, 'The World of Grand Union': Engendering Trans/nationalism via Boys' Love in Chinese Online *Hetalia* Fandom', Yang further highlights diverse perspectives on geopolitics through an analysis of *Hetalia: Axis Powers* (2006-), a Japanese manga and anime series featuring characters representing nations, and the series' reinterpretation by mainland Chinese fans into various BL stories and spin-offs. Yang examines how fans have 'shipped' *Hetalia* characters, such as Ivan Braginski (Russia) and Yao (China), and how these pairings register particular political relations and historical circumstances (e.g. China's 1950s regard of the Soviet Union as 'big brother' to emulate) (p. 55). This chapter also discusses conflicting ideas on how BL fans feel China should be represented in relation to other nations, as either a '*seme* (*gong* 攻 in Chinese, literally, the attacker, similar to the *top* in self-defined gay relationships with labeled positions)' or '*uke* (*shou*, 受, literally, the receiver/bottom)' (9). In *seme*

vs. *uke* discussions and elsewhere in the book, as in Egret Lulu Zhou's Chapter 6, 'Dongfang Bubai, 東方不敗; Online Fandom, and the Gender Politics of a Legendary Queer Icon in Post-Mao China', which notes the backlash against feminism in post-Mao China vis-à-vis the re-gendering of the classic martial arts character Dongfang Bubai (originally a man who castrated himself and fell in love with another man) - readers sense that BL fans occupy subversive terrains that are always at risk of conforming to heteronormative standards through the assignation of binary gendered positions that adhere to patriarchal order, even within same-sex couplings. Yet the queer, non-normative space carved out by these fans ultimately remains intact through the vast number of participants and their thousands of diverging fantasies and opinions, all articulable through the Internet and the relative anonymity it affords.

Multiple chapters highlight the transgressive potentials of transnational, and especially pan-Asian dynamics within queer fan cultures. In Chapter 9, 'Exploring the Significance of 'Japaneseness': A Case Study of *Fujoshi*'s BL Fantasies in Taiwan', Weijung Chang considers the defining role Japanophilia (common in Taiwan, with its complicated colonialist past) plays in the island's culture of *fujoshi* (girls who read male homoerotic texts). Chapter 2, 'Cosplay, Cuteness, and *Weiniang*: The Queered *Ke'ai* of Male Cosplayers as 'Fake Girls', by Shih-chen Chao provides an in-depth cultural contextualisation of the 'cute' (*kawaii* in Japanese, *aegyo* in Korean, *ke'ai* in Chinese) performative strategies of AC Alice Fake Girl Group, an all-male group known for cosplaying female Japanese anime and manga characters and Korean pop singers. Chao convincingly concludes that the group's hyper cute performances (which adapt mainstream conventions of female gender performativity and online selfie culture) pose 'deviant challenges to real-world heteronormative discourse in today's China' (p. 39). This chapter engages most directly with images through Chao's close readings of the cosplayers' postures and facial expressions. As an art historian, I desired more imagery analysis of this kind elsewhere in the book. I would also love to see coloured screen shots punctuating the texts and enhancing the Internet-like space *Queer Fan Cultures* occupies.

Many contributors focus on fans' multifarious discussions of androgynous idols and what these discussions reveal about cross-cultural relations and personal perspectives on queer topics. Jing Jamie Zhao's Chapter 4, 'Queering the Post-*L Word* Shane in the 'Garden of Eden': Chinese Fans' Gossip about Katherine Moennig', provides ample insight into lesbian identities in mainland China and is packed with rich theoretical examinations of 'Occidentalist homoeroticisation' and 'queer hybridity' as embodied in mainland Chinese fans' projections about Moennig, an actress who plays 'a handsome lesbian womanizer' (65) on the popular American television show, *The L-Word*. Eva Cheuk Yin Li's Chapter 7, 'Desiring Queer, Negotiating Normal: Denise Ho (HOCC 何韻詩) Fandom before and after the Coming-Out', offers a captivating discussion of HOCC, one of the only Hong Kong celebrities to publicly come out as lesbian, informed by fans' related comments. Li argues that fans' responses to HOCC – which vary greatly from supportive to non-supportive to prescribing what kind of lesbian she should be (e.g. B or TB/tomboy, approximating but not entirely reducible to 'butch lesbian' vs. G or TBG/tomboy's girl, approximating 'femme lesbian') (p. 142) – are embedded in the *tongzhi* (gay) movement in Hong Kong and the normative backlash that constantly threatens the movement. In Chapter 8, 'Hong Kong-Based Fans of Mainland Idol Li Yuchun (李宇春): Elective Belonging, Gender Ambiguity, and Rooted Cosmopolitanism', Maud Lavin reveals how fans and followers of mainland Chinese pop singer Li Yuchun, known for her *zhongxing* (中性) gender neutral style and sexual ambiguity, negotiate bigotry towards Mainlanders in Hong Kong and generate a sense of elective cosmopolitan belonging. In a positive and productive manner, Lavin describes Li's public persona as 'queer light' (p. 162) (which, in her reading, is actually not light at all), considering, with welcome sincerity, the potential of 'tomboy' styles to foster greater acceptance of fluid gender, sexuality, and place-based identities as well as more generous cross-cultural communications.

In the penultimate footnote of Chapter 5, 'From Online BL Fandom to the CCTV *Spring Festival Gala*: The Transforming Power of Online Carnival', a fascinating study of how the 'shipping' of pop singer Wang Leehom and pianist Li Yundi played out in online BL platforms and mainstream Chinese television, Shuyan Zhou observes that

> there are some gay netizens who express a very unpleasant and negative attitude to some BL fans; they usually believe the consumption of male homosexuality by those BL fans distorts gay men's representation to the public and creates a misperception that a male homosexual must be beautiful, aesthetic, and even unreal (p. 110).

I would have liked to hear more dissenting opinions of this kind, to add to the already multitudinous array of voices and perspectives presented.

Overall, *Queer Fan Cultures* constructs a dialogical terrain in which conflicting opinions are presented evenly and without bias. The critical power of this dialogical terrain is highlighted in the anthology's culminating Chapter 10, 'Girls Who Love Boys' Love: BL as Goods to Think with in Taiwan', wherein Fran Martin astutely states:

> I want to argue for the important social function of the BL scene itself as an arena – 'a discursive battlefield,' in Akiko Mizoguchi's inspired phrase – where complex debates about gender and sexuality can be played out, in all their internal contradiction, through the construction and trading of the fans' own reflexive theorisations (p. 195).

In this sense, the anthology functions like the BL scene, erecting a 'discursive battlefield' that promises to spawn further examinations of the political, social, and cultural stakes of BL, GL, ACG, cosplay, and androgynous idols. To be sure, this book illuminates the online lives, desires, fantasies, and realities of BL and other queer fans, especially the examined genres' primary consumers and creators – young Chinese women. I did find myself wishing for a more thorough and sustained recognition of other kinds of queer fans (e.g. gay men, transgender people) and genres specifically geared toward them; this is an area the editors themselves marked for future research (p. xxvi), and I realise such studies might necessitate an entire second or even third volume. In the year following *Queer Fan Cultures*' publication, to the shock and horror of many (especially young) people, voters in a 2018 Taiwan referendum overwhelmingly rejected the previous year's Constitutional Court ruling that could have made Taiwan the first place in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage. The referendum results, along with increasing global threats to LGBTQ rights (including in the United States from where I write), remind us of the urgent need to seriously consider *tongzhi* (gay), *guaitai* (weirdo), and *ku'er* (cool youth) fantasies as real alternative futures.

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Book Review

A Queer Way Out: The Politics of Queer Emigration from Israel

Sabiha Allouche [1]*

Published: September 10, 2019

Book's Author: Hila Amit

Publication Date: 2018

Publisher: USA: SUNY Press

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Number of Pages: 252 pp. paperback

ISBN: 978-1-4384-7010-8

† The book has been awarded *The 2019 Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS) Book Award*

Despite its title, *A Queer Emigration Out: The Politics of Queer Emigration from Israel*, freelance researcher and fiction author Hila Amit's latest work has less to do with emigration as a process than with the affective dimension of relocating. Amit explores what she terms 'queer migration' out of Israel; that is, the relocation of self-identified queer Israelis who choose to leave the Israeli Zionist project behind. Following Amit, their relocation allows them to 'create a sense of self, belonging, and citizenship amid the exigencies of migration in the face of the ongoing violent conflict in their homeland' (p. xx). It would be wrong, though, to assume that Amit's interlocutors are driven by nihilistic aspirations or are politically passive. On the contrary, by opting out of the Israeli state's chrono and homo- normative schedules, they exhume a particular agency – understood by Amit as an 'unheroic resistance' that undermines the Zionist project.

In Chapter 1, Amit introduces the reader to what she terms 'emigration anxiety' and the paradox it poses to the Israeli state. On the one hand, the Israeli state cannot prevent *yerida*, or outbound migration *from* Israel at the risk of betraying its democratic appeal. Instead, we learn from Amit that the Israeli state counters such anxieties by exaggerating the virtues of *aliyah*, or inbound migration *to* Israel and by putting a 'positive gloss' on emigration through 'new uses for the diaspora' (p. 34). Amit relies on a myriad of registers in order to show the continuities between scholarly works, popular media, and the Israeli state's discourse on emigration. Contrary to classic migration studies where economic motivations for migrating are distinguished from political ones, Amit, whilst basing her analysis on her interlocutors' narratives, urges us to collapse the two. In her words:

> By promoting a discourse that frames emigration as an economic question, other political issues (and most visibly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the security consequences of it), are deemed irrelevant to the decision to leave. (p. 24)

Amit's aim is to relate the 'standard' emigration story where academic, political and popular texts converge in upholding the narrative of 'emigration anxiety' and to show the Zionist biases of academics themselves, whose approach readily undermines the violence(s) permeated by the Israeli state against some of its populations and the Palestinians.

Chapter 2 constitutes, in many ways, the anti-thesis of the 'standard' emigration story. In order to bypass Israeli conventional attitudes towards emigration, Amit privileges her interlocutors' personal accounts alongside an array

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of popular culture texts. In doing so, she shows how a 'queer approach to emigration [destabilises] collective conceptions regarding motivations for departure' (p. 38).

Chapters 3 and 5 successfully capture the argumentative potential of queer temporality analysis since it is capable of containing those energies and affects that are inherent to nation-building and yet largely absent from classic nationalism studies. This is not to say that Amit's interlocutors are forging a new nation-space for themselves. On the contrary, it is precisely their affect of 'unbelonging', as Amit points out, and their constant bid to locate a home somewhere, elsewhere, which binds them. Home, however, is best understood along the lines of departure, not arrival. As Amit point out, 'the subversive significance of departure is that it symbolises a refusal to answer Zionism in the currency of heroism and active resistance' (p. xv). *Unbelonging* is also propagated by Amit's interlocutors' disillusionment with the chrono-normative, hyper -militarised and -masculinist logics of the Israeli state; that is, the Israeli state's attitudes towards the Palestinian population, opposition to serving in the Israeli army, and the exclusionary (notably classist and Zionistic) dynamics of Tel Aviv's LGBT population are some of the themes that inform Amit's queer emigration. Amit detects similar arguments and tensions in her short, though important examination of the queer migratory cyberspace in Chapter 4.

The last two chapters, 6 and 7, constitute the crux of Amit's argument. She clearly conceptualises her interlocutors' politics of avoidance as 'unheroic political activism' (p. 149), the opposite of the hyper-militarised Israeli everyday. All along, Amit distinguishes between pre- and post- Israeli state Zionist writing, and thus matches her interlocutors' aspirations with the first. As Amit argues:

> Israel … is the failure of Zionism. Not only does the state of Israel not function as 'an outpost of civilization against barbarism' … reality might suggest exactly the opposite (p. 192).

Amit's interlocutors embody the Israeli state's conceptualisation of the failed subject. At the same time, they appropriate failure and redeploy it as 'radical potential' and 'unique alternative' (p. 165), in line with their understandings of the unsustainability and grievance-inducing consequences of the Zionist project.

All in all, Amit opens up a space to conceive a human agency that is ambivalent and adaptive. Her overall queer approach to space and time, neither of which emerge as tangible per se – the very result of her interlocutors' lived reality – allows her to navigate the messiness of contemporary global politics, largely dominated by a liberalist/nationalist binary. At the same time, it is important to not fall into the trap of romanticising resistance, something that Amit does, especially when we contrast her interlocutors' day-to-day living in Berlin, London or New York with the discriminatory and debilitating mechanisms that the Palestinian population residing in Israel is permanently subjected to.

As was the case with Jasbir Puar's 2018's work *The Right to Maim*, which sat uneasily with the Zionist lobby in the US, it is likely that Amit's work will fall flat with those 'normal homosexuals' (see Weber 2016) who sustain and uphold the Israeli state's settler colonial project.

For the cynical reader, the absence of a direct engagement with self-identified queer Palestinians could be wrongly interpreted as an analytical hole in the author's argument. Conversely, Amit is clear on her positionality, which could explain her unwillingness to speak on behalf of the Palestinian experience, and rightly so. Indeed, she informs her readers early on about her Iranian and Syrian roots. She also carefully unpacks some of the differences that shape each of the *Ashkenazi* and the *Mizrahi* populations' relationships to the Israeli state. Amit is undoubtedly aware of the partiality of knowledge (see Harding 2004), as feminist theorists often remind us, and of her privileged position as a researcher.

A Queer Way Out is more than an ethnographic examination of a small yet significant migratory context, not in quantitative terms but in qualitative ones. The book is written in an accessible language and is thus likely to resonate with a wide audience, including novice readers. It is a highly inter-disciplinary work that cleverly alternates between theoretical writing and empirical examples and whose methodology aptly contains the very existential rhetoric it grapples with. By working her thesis through a queer temporality and affective framework, Amit readily challenges classic approaches to the study of the nation by providing an anthropological account instead. By stretching the scope of queerness beyond sexuality paradigms, her work offers an innovative queer analysis at each of the micro, meso, and macro levels.

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Book Review

The Cosmopolitan Dream: Transnational Chinese Masculinities in a Global Age

Ting-Fai Yu [1]*

Published: September 10, 2019

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Setting out to explore Chinese masculinities as cosmopolitan configurations, Derek Hird and Geng Song's edited volume *The Cosmopolitan Dream* is a timely contribution to both the scholarly understanding of China's growing presence on the global stage and the transnational turn in men's and masculinity studies.

In demonstrating 'how Confucian masculinities and elite practices, reworked and hybridized, echo across the discourses and everyday lives of contemporary Chinese men and masculinities' (p. 1), this edited volume's chief objective is two-fold. On the one hand, by drawing on and expanding the scholarship on Chinese masculinities, the volume as a whole spotlights the continuity and transformation of the historical male gendered expressions of *wen* 文 (literary) and *wu* 武 (martial) (Louie 2002, 2015) 'in China's post-socialist era with transnational dimensions' (p. 1). On the other, the diverse but theoretically intermingled case studies presented in many of the chapters decenter and, in turn, provincialise the model of 'transnational business masculinities' (Connell and Wood 2005) that has (previously) defined what we (used to) conceive as the hegemonic ideal in global gender hierarchies. As a result, the volume not only exemplifies a 'localising' intervention to the development of men's and masculinity studies but also sheds important light on how male privilege is produced vis-à-vis other social relations such as class, ethnicity and parenthood both within and extended beyond China.

Varied in their disciplinary approaches (e.g. media studies, anthropology, history) and methodological strategies (e.g. textual analysis, ethnography, oral interviewing), the chapters altogether paint a broad picture of contemporary Chinese masculinities under China's transforming political economy. Starting off the discussion by defining the very subject of inquiry, Geng Song's chapter 'Cosmopolitanism with Chinese Characteristics' deploys a number of Chinese TV dramas to demonstrate how the kind of cosmopolitanism relevant to contemporary China is rooted in and constructed through post-socialist consumer culture. Distinguished from Haiyan Lee's (2015) definition of the cosmopolitan subject as one that 'honors the humanity of the stranger' (p. 243), Song points out that in 'the construction of idealized masculinity, cosmopolitanism as a desirable quality is always coupled with a distinctive class background and hierarchy' (p. 35). Echoing Song's observation of Chinese cosmopolitanism as classed configurations, Hongwei Bao's chapter also highlights the class connotations – both contemporary and traditional, at times converged – that are manifested in male same-sex intimacies through an intertextual analysis of the online novel *Beijing Story* (1996) and Stanley Kwan's film adaptation *Lan Yu* (2001). For example, Bao argues that while the protagonist Handong, a successful businessman who made his wealth through international trade, engages in

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gay sex as a means to demonstrate his "new rich" class distinction' (p. 83) in his public life, he alternatively utilises the cultural reference of *nanfeng* 南風 ('southern/male style') – meaning male homoeroticism understood as 'simply a hobby […] among the socially privileged' (p. 82) – to maintain his respectability when seeking family's tolerance.

One of the other remarkable strengths of this volume are the critical efforts made to trace the transformation of Chinese masculinities across time and space. By analysing the representation of mainland Chinese men in transnational spaces, Shelden Lu's chapter chronicles the formation of Chinese male subjects in relation to the world impacts of three historical events: namely, the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in 1997, and China's ascendancy to an economic superpower in the 2010s. In examining the films of Hong Kong directors Clara Law (*Farewell China*, 1990) and Peter Chan (*Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, 1996; *American Dreams in China*, 2013), what Lu offers is an empirically substantive and critically engaged delineation of "a trajectory from an incapacitated, suffering male figure, to a questing, inquisitive male around 1997, and finally to a figure of empowered confident male in the twenty first century (p. 60).

Departing from much of the existing scholarship on men's migration and the transnational construction of Chinese masculinities that is based on the experiences in Western societies, James Coates examines how Chinese masculinities are negotiated in Japan through the life trajectory of the labourer-turned-celebrity-turned-politician Li Xiaomu. The chapter highlights the entrepreneurial pliability of Li's masculine performances – from an underworld figure to a 'consumerist cosmopolitan' (Song and Lee, 2010) – that is instrumental in appealing to Japanese and Chinese audiences at different stages of his career.

Aside from the abovementioned chapters' multidisciplinary approaches to theorising cosmopolitan Chinese masculinities, other chapters exhibit a number of detailed case studies that underscore the diverse trajectories of global gendered formations vis-à-vis transforming social relations both within and extended beyond China. Based on field research of birth tourism in 'maternity B&Bs' in Los Angeles, Tingyu Kang's chapter engages in dialogue with the concept of 'flexible citizenship' (Ong 1999) and in doing so, articulates new configurations of Chinese masculinities as emerged through a new gendered division of labour spanning across the Pacific. Kang wrote:

> "The formation of migrant elite masculinities in flexible citizenship is not isolated but, rather, constituted in relational interactions among actors with diverse class, gender, and ethnic identities (p. 205).

As male helpers are required to perform masculinised care labour for the pregnant women such as driving and moving help, Kang observes that this outsourcing of 'husbandhood' has generated anxieties for the China-based husbands who 'express a persistent need to reassert their dominant position over their wives and the male helpers' (p. 201). Because, Kang argues, 'the spatial distance between the husbands and their families de-stabilises their sense of masculinity with regard to their wives' spatial mobility, infidelity, and power over household decision-making' (p. 205). Exploring the timely topic of contemporary parenting practices, Miriam Driessen's study investigates how Chinese men working in Africa negotiate their fatherhood away from home. Living in a time when '[e]arning respectability as a blue-collar worker has become harder in present-day Chinese society' (p. 184), her chapter incisively scrutinises the tensions arising from the ways in which the research subjects are caught between the social expectations of fathers as both financial providers and caregivers.

This volume as a whole constitutes an important contribution for understanding the transformation of Chinese masculinities in transnational contexts and toward consolidating such global gendered formations as a field of inquiry. However, some of the chapters epitomise a lack of integration between their descriptive and analytic accounts. For example, while Feng's chapter provides a specified overview of the historical construction of culinary masculinities in China and a detailed biography of Cai Lan, the subject matter of transnational Chinese masculinities as related to the broader theme of the volume is only discussed briefly at the end in its conclusion section. As a result, readers who expect to learn about cosmopolitan 'Chineseness' or the changing configurations of global masculinities, rather than the life and career of Cai Lan, might feel somewhat disconcerted. Despite some of these minor shortcomings, this book is certainly a timely intervention to the study of Chinese masculinities as well as an approachable text for students, scholars and a general readership interested in gender studies and contemporary China.

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