

Sending Love The Making Of Transnational

CHARMAINE CRAWFORD

Utilisant un cadre théorique féministe trans national, l'auteure aborde la problématique de la relation entre la

the periphery to the core, in search of better economic opportunities, the composition and duration pattern of

lead migrants, a racial and sexual division of labour continues to operate within exploitative capitalist processes defining the type of labour migrant women of colour are best suited for. "Migrant women [of colour] are usually concentrated in the service sector, manufacturing industry, sex industry and domestic service" (Ada Cheng 47).

In this paper, I employ a transnational anti-racist feminist¹ theoretical framework to problematize the relationship between macro economic processes (such as globalization) and racialization of female labour migration in order to examine how African Caribbean women negotiate and re-configure their roles as workers and mothers across borders. I will show how under restrictive immigration policies the federal government facilitated the importation of Caribbean domestics into Canada in order to serve its economic and nationalist interests from the 1970s to mid-1980s. This evidently contributed to the devaluation of Caribbean women's paid reproductive work and citizenship status. I will further discuss how Caribbean women (those with and without residency status) kept their households afloat amidst economic and socio-political uncertainty. The heightened visibility of transnational Caribbean families can be seen as both a by-product of globalization as well as a response to it.

Managing Caribbean Domestics in Canada

By 1967, under a universal points system, the Canadian federal government opened its doors to immigrants

For female migrants the lure of working abroad is necessitated by the opportunity to send remittances (which could be in the form of foreign currency, goods, and services) home to support their families.

mondialisation et la racialisation des femmes au travail. Elle donne l'exemple des femmes des Caraïbes qui ont dû négocier et reconfigurer leurs rôles de mères et travailleuses en dehors de leurs frontières. Elle démontre comment les politiques restrictives de l'immigration fédérale ont facilité l'importation de ces femmes au Canada afin de servir ses intérêts économiques entre 1970 et le milieu des années '80.

Globalization has not only marked the continuous and interwoven flow of capital, commodities, and information on a macro level, but has also affected how labour moves across borders. Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Stilller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc state that "transnational migration is inextricably linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism and must be analyzed within the context of global relations between capital and labour" (22). Indubitably, the flow of capital, commodities, and labour between post-industrialized and "third world" nations are far from being equally distributed and shared because of the economic preponderance of western nations within the capitalist world system. While the bulk of migrants still move from

migration has been affected by globalization. More so than ever before women tend to predominate as lead migrants, contributing to what is called the "feminization of labour migration" (Ada Cheng). The heightened economic instability in the "third world" caused by indebtedness and structural adjustment policies has precipitated the increase of female economic activity abroad not only to offset unemployment, poverty, and male economic marginality but in order to suit the development plans of some "third world" nations. The Philippine government readily exports Filipina labour to Canada, Saudi Arabia, and the United States as a part of its debt-servicing strategy (Parrenas). For female migrants the lure of working abroad is necessitated by opportunity to send remittances (which could be in the form of foreign currency, goods, and services) back home to support their families. Prior to the 1960s in the Caribbean, men led migration outflows to the United States, the U.K. and other Caribbean islands but this trend was reversed in the 1970s and 1980s with a significant female migrant outflow (Beneria and Feldman). While there is the increased visibility of women as

In A Barrel

Caribbean Families In Canada

of colour who had been previously rejected as racially undesirable entrants. This was not a benevolent gesture on the part of the federal government but instead was necessitated by the needs of the political economy. Canada's economy was burgeoning, like other industrialized economies at this time, with workers advancing to better paid occupations so there was the need to fill labour shortages in low and semi-skilled occupations (Simmons). "Cheap" labour was sought from newly decolonized nations of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean to work in sectors that the average white citizen avoided. The federal government was ultimately continuing its asymmetrical neo-colonial relationship with "third world" countries through the importation and commodification of non-white labour to benefit its economic needs (Arat-Koc 1999).

By 1970, the federal government was desperate to fill the shortage in domestic services for white middle-class families because more women were working outside of the home. In fact, by the 1980s the number of families that comprised the "breadwinner/housewife category was less than 16 per cent from around 65 per cent in 1961" (Arat-Koc 1990: 82). Although white middle-class women were increasingly engaged in paid work, the sexual division of labour in relation to the social reproduction of labour remained in tact. With limited help from their male partners and no socialized childcare, women remained primarily responsible for childcare and household duties. This contributed to a double day for many working mothers who had to juggle both paid and unpaid work. Arat-

Koc points out that the demand for live-in domestics came from dual-career couples with small children who did not qualify for childcare subsidies. "For parents with two or more pre-school children, employment of a live-in nanny would cost significantly less than sending children to daycare centre or hiring live-out help" (1990: 83).

The policy changes that came about for foreign domestics in 1973 reflected the federal government's need to ensure a constant supply of domestic workers within the parameters of its economic and nationalist interests. Foreign domestics, unlike their predecessors, were no longer granted immigrant or "landed" status but entered the country on work permits or employment visas. To avoid deportation, foreign domestics were required to stay with the same

domestics formal rights as workers and citizens.

From July 1975 to June 1976 "44.8 per cent of all entrants to Canada's foreign domestic program were from the Caribbean, and only 0.3 per cent were from all countries in Asia" (Bakan and Stasiulis 1994: 316). There were definitive push and pull factors that mediated the movement of working-class African Caribbean women during this time. Although the federal government was not able to secure Caribbean women as a captive labour force in domestic services under the 1955 Domestic Work Scheme (Calliste), government officials once again utilized their diplomatic ties with English-speaking Caribbean nations (particularly Jamaica) in the 1970s to facilitate the import of Caribbean domestics to help remedy its domestic work prob-

By 1970, the federal government was desperate to fill the shortage in domestic services for white middle-class families because more women were working outside of the home.

employer for two years until their contracts expired, upon which they had to return home (Silvera). Domestics had to have a grade eight education and they still had to be "single and without dependents." Foreign domestics were bound to precarious labour contracts like indentured servants. The new ambiguous status granted to domestics allowed the government to effectively deal with the high turnover in domestic services without having to give

lem. Pervasive racist-sexist stereotypes prevailed, deeming Caribbean women good "Island" or "West Indian" girls best suited for domestic work despite the fact that many of them had skills and qualifications in other areas. Glenn argues that the racialization of paid reproductive labour since colonialism has trapped black women and women of colour into doing the "dirty" work as domestics and nannies in white middle-class households or as cooks,

cleaners, health-care aides and nurses in public institutions. Caribbean nations also benefited from this export of female labour "through market affiliation with Canada and from remittances sent home by domestic workers" (Daenzer 85).

African Caribbean women were not passive victims in this interaction. Many were household heads wanting to migrate in order to escape poverty, unemployment, and limited opportunities in their countries. They saw migration as a temporary strategy to support their families and households. While domestics were required to be without dependents in order to qualify to work in Canada, out of desperation, some African Caribbean women concealed their motherhood status in order to do so. This circumvention of this immigration stipulation was apparently overlooked by some Canadian officials and private employment agencies that sought to fill the domestic worker demand in Canada (Daenzer).

Discriminatory Racist/Sexist Effects

There is a definitive relationship between the heightened invisibility and devaluation of paid domestic work and the increased importation of Caribbean women and other domestics of colour (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997). By the federal government keeping the points assigned to occupational demand for domestic work relatively low, Caribbean women are unable to acquire the points needed for permanent residency unlike their European counterparts who are ranked higher as nannies and nursemaids (Arat-Koc 1999). Racial sexism informed the decreased citizenship rights assigned to African Caribbean domestics and other domestics of colour, making them "good enough to work but not good enough to stay" in the country. Moreover, the government of the day reduced its expenditure costs on social reproduction by importing racially "cheap" domestic help instead

of providing affordable public childcare facilities to families (Arat-Koc 1990).

The intersectionality of race, gender, class, and migrancy status positioned Caribbean domestics, and other domestics of colour (notably Filipina domestics) on a whole, as a super-exploitable labour force. Arat-Koc states that:

while domestic labour under capitalism assumes several universal characteristics such as invisibility, isolation and low status, the way these are experienced by individuals performing such labour may vary significantly by class, race and citizenship. (1990: 86)

As overworked and underpaid live-in domestic help, Caribbean women were isolated and exposed to employer abuse (Silvera). Lacking citizenship rights and labour protection they were less likely to leave this sector ensuring the employers and the state a docile labour force.

By only targeting single females without dependents, the government sought to by-pass additional costs in maintaining dependents. The normative social category of single women without dependents also promoted a Eurocentric middle-class heterosexual stance on sexuality and family by limiting women's mobility based on their maternal status compared to men. Caribbean male migrant workers to Canada have never been discriminated against based on their paternal status.² Ultimately, this discriminatory motherhood category did not take into consideration the demographic cultural composition of working-class Caribbean households, where female-household heads predominate, forcing Caribbean women to choose between their role as workers or mothers. Working-class African Caribbean women's experiences with motherhood have always incorporated a multiplicity of productive and reproductive activities with or without male partners that

cannot be reduced to rigid distinctions between the private and public. Glenn argues that the "two fundamental elements in the construction of racial-ethnic womanhood were the notion of inherent traits that suited the women for service and the denial of women's identities as wives and mothers in their own right" (32). This meant African Caribbean women continued to be defined first, and foremost, as workers and secondary as mothers. Reminiscent from slavery's past, Caribbean domestics were re-producing white households at the expense of their own. Caribbean women and their children had to live through years of separation from another one other, sometimes spanning more than five years, as a result of discriminatory foreign domestic work policies (Silvera; Henry).

Closed Door Policy: Caribbean Immigrants Beware !

By the end of the 1970s, due to the world recession and Canada's vulnerable economy, immigration policy requirements tightened. Under the points system, education and occupational training for potential immigrants were high priority. More immigrants were targeted from the independent and refugee immigrant class and less from the family class (Anderson; Simmons). Family reunification was jeopardized because Caribbean immigrants had difficulty sponsoring immediate family members for one reason or another. This was particularly a problem for unmarried Caribbean women who wanted to sponsor their children (Henry). Since some immigration officials complied with a Eurocentric middle-class nuclear family norm some Caribbean women felt compelled to participate in marriages of convenience to speed up the sponsorship process (Foster). Simply put, wifehood legitimized motherhood and secured sponsorship of dependents.

Less Caribbean and African immigrants were able to enter Canada as

independents while more entrepreneurial class immigrants from Asia gained entry. Despite the implementation of the universal points system in 1967, racism camouflaged in class privilege persisted and controlled the inflow of immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa. In 1984, immigrants from the Caribbean made up 6.4 per cent (5,630) of landed entrants, Africa 4.0 per cent (3,552) and Asia 47.5 per cent (41,920).³ There was also a shift from the admittance of Caribbean foreign domestics to importing Filipino domestics, who were perceived as being less troublesome (Jakubowski). By the mid-1990s, with the implementation of the sponsorship bond and the landing fee, Caribbean entrants could not readily buy their way into Canada making their chances of migrating even more difficult.

The mid-1980s brought about two major trends. First, as mentioned before, the federal government tightened its immigration policies in areas of residency and sponsorship; and the second, was economic crisis in the Caribbean region. Caribbean economies were ravished by indebtedness and social conditions had deteriorated due to International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank structural adjustment policies. Indebtedness, currency devaluations, millions spent in food import and cuts to health, education and social welfare had taken its toll on Caribbean populations (Thomas). In order to escape these dire local conditions, Caribbean men and women found ways to enter and stay in Canada. Some people came as visitors and then remained in the country undocumented (Henry). Caribbean domestics who were not sponsored by their employers or who were not able to get their contracts renewed went underground doing other work in factories and the service industry in order to make ends meet.⁴ Some women had not earned enough to return home while others could not afford to stop sending money to their households as little as it seemed. In

response to these illegal inflows from the Caribbean and elsewhere, the federal government imposed visa requirements for visitors from designated countries (Anderson). Up until the present time, visitors from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Guyana require visas to enter Canada. The choices made by Caribbean migrants and visitors to circumvent immigration policies not only had legal ramifications but emotional ones related to fears of deportation and prolonged separation from children and family members.

Transnational Caribbean Families

Globalization has contributed to heightened female migration impacting on gender roles and relations and family formations across borders. The rupture in family cohesiveness has been exacerbated by restrictive immigration policies. Claudette Crawford-Brown discusses this in her study on the effects of migration on Caribbean families in New York. She states that:

Parents have to deal with immigration laws that don't allow their children to rejoin them in

ers a like. Scholars are seeking to address the gap in this research area.

So how did Caribbean women manage to take care of their families from abroad regardless of their residency status? Transnational families refers to:

The dispersal of members of kin groups across national boundaries (often oceans and continents), along with the active and continuous maintenance of these kin ties by means of constant communication and travel and the exchange of goods, services and personnel. (Ho 34)

African Caribbean women utilized their extended family networks to maintain their families from abroad. Older Caribbean women, usually grandmothers and aunts, nurture and care for displaced children, becoming carriers of culture as other-mothers or fosters mothers, while their female relatives or friends work abroad in order to send money and goods to their households back home. Communal mothering and household activities are crucial to the survival of kin members. My paternal grandmother helped raise my two cousins

Racial sexism informed the decreased citizenship rights assigned to African Caribbean domestics, making them "good enough to work but not good enough to stay" in the country.

a timely manner. The time between is too long sometimes up to ten years. Some of these mothers are illegal so it takes time to get legalized as a resident. There is tremendous guilt and absolute agony that many mothers go through. (11)

The catch-22 scenario of Caribbean women leaving behind their children to work abroad has had long-lasting effects on children⁵ and moth-

during the ten-year absence of their mother who had migrated to the United States to work. While this shows the resiliency on the part of Caribbean womenfolk, we should not overlook the additional responsibility and stress placed on older women for inter-generational childrearing.

The activities in transnational Caribbean families are not simply a consequence of globalization but a continuation of African Caribbean family interactions but across seemingly

distant borders. Throughout time on both a regional and international level Caribbean women have utilized their extended family and kinship networks, incorporating child-minding and child-shifting arrangements, to buffer the effects of unemployment, poverty, racial oppression and domestic disruption (Senior; Aymer; Chamberlain). Accordingly, Caribbean women, like other women in the African diaspora, view motherhood and mothering as a collective rather than a solitary or private act (Hill-Collins).

The Caribbean corridor in Toronto is Eglinton Ave. West, which houses the memories and realities of "home" for Caribbean immigrants. The restaurants, barbershops, and groceries stocked with popular Caribbean provisions line this location, mimicking a Caribbean flare within a conservative Canadian milieu. But this location is especially important for its transnational social and economic markers. The common sight of barrels in front of the stores and remittance services (Western Union in particular) are reflective of the ruptures and continuities of migration. The barrel is symbolic for Caribbean people in showing how families, mothers in particular, support their children and households in the Caribbean through the remitting of money, consumer goods, and provisions. Monetary remittances are a major source of foreign currency for Caribbean countries. Remittances are not only important in financing imports and used for debt servicing, on a local level they provide for the financing of food, shelter, medical care, and education for Caribbean people. They are also kept as savings for returnees (Itzigsohn). Exported labour and the remittances show how "third world" nations manage their debt-ridden economies under a structural adjustment framework. Caribbean women may also send items in bulk to their households for resale in the informal market. This is a common practice in Jamaica where the role of higglers within the domestic

economy is prominent (Crawford-Brown). On a transcultural level, the barrel disseminates North American culture styles and values through consumer goods and luxuries items. Caribbean mothers without status may try to compensate for their long absence by sending their children expensive consumer items like brand-name sneakers. This is somewhat of a promissory note of a better life to come someday, in "foreign" (abroad). Moreover, remittances link Caribbean households with the main breadwinner on a transnational level.

Caribbean women and their families have found innovative ways to buffer the effects of social and economic instability in their home countries in the last three decades. Their migratory movements and transnational connections made between home and abroad are indicative of how they have responded to the socio-economic pressures caused by globalization and immigration restrictions imposed by receiving countries such as Canada. Caribbean women have found themselves among the traffic of globalized identities, sometimes legitimately and sometimes not, contributing to the transnationality of economics, culture, and family.

Charmaine Crawford is a Ph.D. candidate in Women's Studies at York University. Her dissertation topic is "The Impact of Transnational Migration on Caribbean Women and Their Families."

¹Transnational feminist project seeks to "articulate the relationship of gender and scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridical oppression on multiple levels" (Grewal and Kaplan 17).

²In 1977, seven Jamaican women faced deportation on fraud charges because they falsified their maternal status in order to qualify as foreign domestics. They claimed to not have

dependents when they actually did. Defying the notion of passive apolitical domestics, Caribbean women stood up for their rights and challenged the status-quo, by filing a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission on the grounds that women with children should not be discriminated against. "They won their case on the ruling that no married man had ever been deported for failing to list his children" (Arat-Koc 1990: 102). This was a tumultuous victory for Caribbean women and for domestics overall because they no longer had to abdicate their status as mothers to be migrant workers.

³Employment and Immigration Canada Statistics, 1985.

⁴Based on the advocacy of International Coalition to End Domestic Exploitation (INTERCEDE), in 1981, the federal government revised foreign domestic policy. Foreign domestics could now apply for landed status after a two-year live-in service with a designated employer. Although domestics had an opportunity to acquire their landed status after their contracts had expired, they had a high price to pay for it. Foreign domestics' reliance on employers for sponsorship in lieu of possible landed status heightened their vulnerability as workers.

⁵Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese's study on Caribbean teenagers who migrated after their mothers found that teenagers experienced a sense of loss, depression, feelings of abandonment, rejection and displacement as a result of being left behind. Some had difficulty adapting to their new environment and family setting while others exhibited signs of self abuse and suicide. The longer the period of separation from the child, the more difficult to establish bonds and trust upon reunification. Factors such as whether or not children were left in a secure loving environment and whether mothers kept in touch with their children, not by just sending provisions and money, but through letters and telephone calls, influence how

children respond to their mothers upon reunification.

References

- Ada Cheng, Shu-Ju. "Labour Migration and International Sexual Division of Labour: A Feminist Perspective." *Gender and Immigration*. Eds. Gregory Kelson and Debra DeLact. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 38-58.
- Anderson, Wolseley W. *Caribbean Immigrants: A Socio-Demographic Profile*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 1993.
- Arat-Koc, Sedef. "Gender and Race in 'Non-discriminatory' Immigration Policies in Canada, 1960s to Present." *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought*. Eds. Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson. Toronto: Women's Press, 1999. 207-233.
- Arat-Koc, Sedef. "From Mothers of the Nation to Migrant Workers." *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*. Eds. Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. 53-79.
- Arat-Koc, Sedef. "Importing Housewives: Non-Citizen Domestic Workers and the Crisis of The Domestic Sphere in Canada." Eds. Meg Luxton, Harriet Rosenberg, Sedef Arat-Koc. *Through The Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990. 81-103.
- Aymer, Paula L. *Uprooted Women: Migrant Domestic Workers in the Caribbean*. Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997.
- Bakan, Abigail and Davia Stasiulis. "Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada." *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*. Eds. Abigail Bakan and Davia Stasiulis. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Bakan, Abigail B. and Stasiulis, Davia. "Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship." *Science and Society* 58 (1) (1994): 7-33.
- Basch, Linda G., Nina Glick-Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Post-Colonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994.
- Beneria, Lourdes and Feldman, Shelly. *Unequal Burden: Economic Crises, Persistent Poverty and Women's Work*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992.
- Boyce-Davies, Carole. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Camberlain, Mary. "The Family as Model and Metaphor in Caribbean Migration to Britain." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25 (2) (1999): 251-266
- Calliste, Agnes. "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestic Workers from the Caribbean." *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers*. Eds. Jesse Vorst et al. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1991. 136-168.
- Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3) (1994): 302-338.
- Crawford-Brown, Claudette P. J. "Separation and Reunification: The Effects of Migration on Children." *Kinesis* (Feb. 2000): 10-11.
- Daenzer, Patricia. "An Affair Between Nations: International Relations and the Movement of Household Service Workers." *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*. Eds. Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. 81-118.
- Foster, Cecil. *Sleep On, Beloved*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 1995.
- Glasgow, Godfrey F. and Gouse-Sheese, Janice. "Themes of Rejection and Abandonment in Group Work with Caribbean Adolescents." *Social Work with Groups* 1(4) (1995) 3-27.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labour." *Signs* 18, (1)(1992): 1-42.
- Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. Eds. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Henry, Frances. *The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto: Learning to Live with Racism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.
- Hill-Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd Edition). New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Ho, Christine. "The Internationalization of Kinship and the Feminization of Caribbean Migration: The Case of Afro-Trinidadian Immigrants in Los Angeles." *Human Organization, Journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology* 52 (1) (1993): 32-40.
- Itzigsohn, Jose. "Migrant Remittance, Labour Markets, and Household Strategies: A Comparative Analysis of Low-Income Household Strategies in the Caribbean." *Social Forces* 74 (2) (1995): 633-655.
- Jakubowski, Lisa Marie. *Immigration and the Legalization of Racism*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997.
- Parrenas, Rhacel Salazar. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. California: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Senior, Olive. *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey Ltd., 1991.
- Silvera, Makeda. *Silenced*. Toronto: Black Women and Women of Colour Press, 1983.
- Simmons, Alan B. "'New Wave' Immigrants: Origins and Characteristics." *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant Racial and Cultural Variations*. Eds. Shiva S. Halli, Frank Trovato and Leo Driedger. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990. 129-140.
- Thomas, Clive. *The Poor and the Powerless: Economic Policy and Change in the Caribbean*. London: Latin American Bureau, 1988.