EMPOWERED MOTHERING & EMPLOYMENT: A STUDY OF EMPLOYED MYANMAR DIASPORIC MOTHERS IN GREATER TORONTO AREA

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ABSTRACT

My research study focuses on “empowered mothering and employment” in relation to first-generation migrant women from Myanmar (Burma) who have relocated to Canada. Specifically, I investigate how employed Myanmar diasporic mothers construct their own accounts of “good mothering” via the perspectives of empowerment and resistance in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country through the lenses of two feminist theories: motherhood theory and feminist mothering theory. My investigation is based on a review of relevant works of maternal theorists and feminist migration scholars who explore the lived complexities of migrant mothers within the context of South East Asian migration to Western countries, as well as conducting a qualitative survey interview with eight employed Myanmar Diasporic mothers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). My study has two main objectives: Firstly, it examines the experiences of employed mothers from Myanmar in the GTA who seek to challenge normative motherhood and the patriarchal culture of the sending country via an engagement with empowered mothering. Secondly, my findings will contribute to existing literature on motherhood studies by providing an overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the minority of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers who have been under-researched with regard to their perceptions of “successful motherhood.” To this end, I argue that the sociocultural constructions of motherhood that are embedded in patriarchal society do not preclude attempts of migrant mothers to actualize power/agency via creative mothering ideologies and practices despite the crossing of borders and continents.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Research Context

Beginning in the 1980s, scholars (Houston, et al; Simon and Brettel; Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte; Boyd; Morokvasic; Sassen-Koob; Safa; Simon and De-Ley; Pedraza; Gabbachia; Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Pessar) began to highlight the active role of women in the migration process (qtd. in Rodriguez 207). Similarly, other scholars (Rodriguez; Glenn, Chang and Forcey; Maddali; McKinnon; Seu; Bouris et., al; and Valenzuela) have explored migration in the context of women's roles as mothers, noting that the migration experiences of such women – regardless of their status as immigrants or refugees – affects their identities as mothers as well as their very processes of mothering (Rodriguez 207).

Hochschild notes that most migrant women are young adults, with their average age being 29 years and with most coming from countries where motherhood is a central identity for women (qtd. in Schultes and Vallianatos 3). Some of these migrant women leave their young children to be cared for by their extended families in the sending countries or take them with them to the host country (Schultes and Vallianatos 3). Conversely, some of these women will face a first-time mothering (becoming a mother for the first time) experience during their settlement process in a host country. Overall, migrant women face a host of challenges in settling in a new land. Not only are gender roles often less traditional in the new country, but most women face precarious employment and downward class mobility, which entails the necessity of acquiring two incomes, thereby leading to a renegotiation of household labor and childcare (Maitra 155; Olsen 1; Limpangog 199).

Based on research into a broad range of empirical studies and personal experiences in diverse historical and sociocultural contexts, motherhood scholars have defined the meaning of “motherhood” by providing a key distinction between motherhood and mothering. For instance, Rich provides two meanings of “motherhood”: the first one is *the potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children; the second one is the *institution* of mothering, which is a keystone of the most diverse social and political systems that aim at ensuring that all women will remain subject to male control (7). As for O’Reilly, she defines “motherhood” as being a male defined term, which is controlled by patriarchal institutions and is deeply oppressive to women. In contrast, the term “mothering” is female-defined, female-centered, and potentially empowering to women (“Feminist mothering” 185).

Additionally, as Ruddick argues, maternal practice is characterized by three demands that apply to mothers: (i) *to protect and to preserve their children*; (ii) *to nurture their children’s emotional and intellectual growth*; and (iii) *to provide training to their children and ensure their social acceptability*. This third demand is not required by children’s needs, but rather by the needs of society given its assumption that mothers shape the growth of their children in “acceptable” ways (O’Reilly, “Matricentric Feminism” 29), which further complicates the women’s experiences of mothering when mothers reframe their own accounts of good mothering in the context of women’s migration and work.

Bearing this in mind, how do migrant mothers adapt to these gender role changes in relation to both ideology and practice when they are required to participate in the workforce? How do women seek to challenge normative conceptions of motherhood and the ensuing stereotypical expectations that are constructed via patriarchal notions? How do migrant mothers juggle their responsibilities when combining mothering and employment in the context of care-sharing and family renegotiation? My research centres on these issues, which are underdiscussed and undertheorized in mainstream motherhood studies in relation to migrant women's identities not only as mothers, but also as employees whose experiences of mothering challenge the sending country's motherhood norms and traditional gender roles.

Rationale

In the Canadian context, many studies have discussed narratives of employed mothers from the following perspectives: changes in patterns of combining employment and domestic responsibilities; problems and delights experienced in relation to juggling workloads; similarities in paid work experiences and household strategies of employed women despite their diverse backgrounds; and the reproduction of gender differences and divisions in relation to heterosexual couples (Duffy; Mandell; Pupo; Fox). With regard to diasporic employed mothers in Western countries, some scholars explore the diversity of viewpoints of variously employed mothers in relation to mothering and labor market participation (e.g., full-time, part-time, work-at-home), in addition to outlining how these mothers attempt to find power within marginalized positions by reshaping, reclaiming, and resisting cultural expectations that are placed upon them as they reconstruct their own accounts of "good mothering" (Guerrina; Maitra; Limpangog).

However, little research has been done to identify how the cultural values, the family relations, and the varied concepts of gender equality in the sending countries affect the maternal ideologies of female migrants in relation to their children when it comes to reconstructing new accounts of "good mothering" in the host country. In particular, motherhood scholars have not yet adequately discussed the narratives of employed diasporic mothers who have migrated from a patriarchal-centered society. Additionally, even the term "feminism" remains a problematic or fear-inducing term in the political and sociocultural context of the sending country when it comes to the issue of women raising children in the receiving country.

As Black scholars Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks have argued, the term "feminism" is understood to be a "white" term for many Black women (qtd. in O'Reilly, "*Matricentric Feminism"* 193). Notably, this also extends to women in contemporary Myanmar, in which both "feminism" and "feminists" are regarded with particular fear by many Myanmar women when it comes to political, cultural, and religious contexts, though younger people are expressing a growing interest in feminism due to social media (Than, Tharaphi, et al. 2-12). In this regard, as O'Reilly details, developing a specific study of feminist mothering that does not exclude diverse women (e.g., women of color and women from developing countries) who eschew or disavow the term "feminism" is an ongoing project when it comes to migrant women's identities as mothers.

There has been some migration scholarship that explores the lived experiences and survival coping mechanisms of male and female migrants from Myanmar who were dislocated in Western countries (Marchbank, Jennifer, et al.; Gilhooly and Allen Lynn; MacLaren, Duncan, et al.). Notably, there have been other studies that discuss how women's lives change in various sociocultural contexts, while also exploring how gender ideologies vary across multiple sites of displacement (Mantei; Smith). However, these studies focus on ethnic (Karen) refugees from Myanmar and do not significantly discuss women who identify as mothers and possess experiences of mothering in host communities.

In the context of South East Asian women's migration to Canada, some motherhood scholars have explored women's experiences of first-time mothering in new land in relation to the following issues: embracing life-altering experiences of pregnancy and childbirth during resettlement and integration process in a new country (Meiyappan and Lohfeld); women’s interpretations of motherhood via engagement with the labor market and the challenging of traditional gender responsibilities and career reconstitution dilemmas (Limpangog); and women’s redefining of their roles as working mothers in new communities with regard to conflicting economic forces and life trajectories (Maitra). However, while the in-depth interviews in these studies cover migrant women from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, they do not include women from Myanmar.

On the other hand, other scholars (e.g., Duncan and Wong; Tiu Wu; Hsiao) provide important aspects of migrant mothering practices within an overarching set of stereotypes and controlling images such as the authoritarian approach, the Western approach (i.e., facilitating the child’s interest), and the tradeoff approach (i.e., a balance between authoritarian and Western concepts) in the context of South East Asian communities in Western countries. These motherhood scholars acknowledge and highlight the ongoing needs of empirical studies and personal experiences of motherhood-mothering in diverse historical and sociocultural contexts, as well with respect to concerns about the inclusiveness of minority and invisible groups. By contrast, the politics of terminology in researching and presentation seem problematic, especially as they relate to the emergence of stereotypes and controlled images of South East Asian communities in Western countries. For instance, “East Asian” is sometimes assumed to refer only to those of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean backgrounds; South East Asian refers to Asian Americans and Asian Canadians; and Asian North American is frequently used to denote communities of Asian descent in both the U.S and Canada (Duncan and Wong 162).

These flaws in the literature position diasporic Myanmar employed mothers as essentially being invisible. They underline the knowledge gap about some under-researched minorities like the Myanmar (who are also part of the South East Asian migrant community), while also undermining women's narrativizations of their identities as employed mothers and their experiences of mothering (i.e., raising their children) in the given host country. My study addresses this previously under-researched area by looking at the lived experiences of Myanmar diasporic employed mothers who have migrated to Canada, while also examining the impact of migration on their mothering ideologies and practices in their new homeland.

Primary Research Questions

This study investigates the following questions with specific relation to first-generation migrant women from Myanmar (Burma) who have relocated to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA): (i) How do employed Myanmar diasporic mothers construct their own accounts of "good mothering" via the perspectives of empowerment and resistance in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country? (ii) To what extent do their mothering practices resist definitions of normative motherhood for their own well-being and that of their children via an engaged feminist perspective that is primarily concerned with *empowered mothering?*

Objectives

My study has two main objectives: Firstly, it examines the experiences of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers in the GTA who seek to challenge normative motherhood and the patriarchal culture of the sending country via the perspectives of empowerment and resistance in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country. Secondly, my findings will contribute to existing literature on motherhood studies by providing an overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the minority of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers who have been under-researched with regard to their perceptions of "successful motherhood."

In this paper, I argue that the sociocultural constructions of motherhood that are embedded in patriarchal society do not preclude attempts of migrant mothers to actualize power/agency via creative mothering ideologies and practices despite the crossing of borders and continents. The following sections outline the background of Myanmar women within the context of gender roles and perceptions of feminism, as well as with respect to a theoretical framework, methodology, scope, and delimitation of research.

Women of Myanmar: Gender Roles & Women's Movement

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is located between the world's most populous countries (China and India) and is the least developed country in South-East Asia. The 2014 Census has reported that there are 51.5 million people who live in Myanmar, which is 51.8% female and 48.2% male (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. viii). The Myanmar government identifies eight major national ethnic races (Bamar, Chin, Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Mon, Kayah and Kachin) which encompass a total of 135 individual ethnic groups. Roughly 68% of the country's population belongs to the majority Bamar ethnic group ("*Burmese (Myanmar) People*").

According to the 2017 Human Development Index, Myanmar ranks 148 out of 189 countries, with its Gender Inequality Index ranking 106 of 160 countries. Moreover, the 2017 UNDP report notes that the female labor force accounts for 51.3% of the female population, while the male labor force accounts for 79.9% of the male population. Despite the fact that the country showed slightly improved progress in the Human Development Index value between 1990 and 2017, rising from 0.358 to 0.578, traditional stereotypes and myths are deeply rooted in the society (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. viii).

Historically speaking, especially during the days of the Burmese kings, the women of Myanmar seem to have been recognized for their legal and economic rights despite recent history has done little to diminish these ancient rights (Daw Mya Sein 1-2). For example, while many Asian women are fighting for equality with men in relation to marriage, divorce, and inheritance, Burmese women have been singularly fortunate in having this equality. To this day, married women are not required to maintain their family name or they keep their own name after marriage (Daw Mya Sein 1; Jeffrey Hays 1). Under Burmese law, it is both possible and acceptable for either partner of a marriage to terminate their contract with divorce. A woman may divorce her husband for cruelty, serious misconduct, or desertion, regardless of whether or not he consents. A husband and wife are the joint owners of all property acquired during their marriage, and their children have the rights to share and inherit equally, irrespective of sex (Daw Mya Sein 1-3; Jeffrey Hays 1).

Some researchers have discussed how family is very important in Myanmar, noting that its very concept contributes to women's considerable authority in the home. Jeffrey Hays describes how the nuclear family is the primary domestic unit that may also include extended family members, such as unmarried siblings, widowed parents, or more distant unmarried or widowed relatives. It is common for a newly married couple in Myanmar to live with the parents of one partner, though they will generally soon establish their own household (1). Similarly, Daw Mya Sein notes that cousins or aunts or other relatives will live in the household and take care of the children and mother, thereby allowing mothers to have a job or profession outside of the home. While Myanmar women are responsible for most domestic chores, they have considerable authority in the home when it comes to managing cash flow and family finances (Jeffrey Hays 1; Daw Mya Sein 4).

In their essay "The Status of Myanmar Women in Myanmar History and Culture" (2018), Jotikadhaja and Khin Maung Nyunt write,

> *"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". The old saying is unquestionably true. It is more so in Myanmar Society. In Myanmar family, mother is the Queen whereas through father is the supporter of the family and mainly responsible, it is the mother who is the power behind. She runs the whole family from kitchen to budget covering the whole range of daily life of the family. Father's income is given over to Mother who can make her own budget in a very pragmatic way for food, clothing, shelter, health and education of the family. Both father and mother are happy, neither feels superior or inferior to each other and children love both equally. In culture and religion, mother enjoys place of precedence over Father. Because mother keeps children in her womb and gives birth to them, we all genders owe much to our mothers. So we always give priority to mother. Pay respects to mother first and to father next"* (1)

Such writing underlines how Myanmar women usually maintain traditional cultural practices and manage domestic issues in the household with a certain power related to their given gender roles. As Rich has discussed, it is a Burmese woman's emphasis "on reproduction and [the] potential relationship to her children" (Rich 7) that renders her the queen of the family. At the same time, this emphasis entails that women expect their husbands to provide them with financial support and a stable relationship.

Family cohesion is reflected not only in shared cooking and eating during festivals, but also in regular evening meals with the family around the table. Noticeably, the first choice morsel goes to the husband and father of the children. Although in the Burmese language the father of a family is termed "Ein Oo Nat" (Lord of the forefront of the house), this term also implies that the mother rules the rest of the household as a queen. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women are discouraged from participating in the paid workforce. Some women exercise the choice to both work and raise their children so long as they still feel secure in their family relationships.. (Jeffrey Hays 2-3).

In social life as well as in public life, Burmese women occupy privileged and independent positions that are not limited by either marriage or motherhood (Daw Mya Sein 5). Serving and caring for parents is regarded as good practice and is believed to entail individual good merit from a spiritual perspective. Traditionally, relations between parents and children are exceptionally strong in both good and bad times, however, the relationship between mothers and daughters remains the strongest bond throughout life (Jeffrey Hays 1). With respect to gender equality, the ways in which Burmese women view themselves and the ways in which they are viewed by Burmese men has had an enormous influence on various aspects of social, cultural, religious (i.e., Buddhist), and political life. Jotikadhaja and Khin Maung Nyunt continue,

> *"[……] there has been no hard and fast rule of gender discrimination in Myanmar anthropologically, culturally and religiously. All Myanmar ethnic nationalities give equal status and treatment to men and women. Women are treated as weaker sex but only as fairer gender. Fairer gender by own virtues has feminine modesty and feminine privilege to be respected and protected by men. Therefore certain jobs, works and places are regarded as not suitable for fairer gender. So these are marked only for men not because of discrimination but out of rasped and regard for fairer gender"* (1).

In this regard, it appears that firm gender divisions between men and women are not perceived as discriminatory, but rather as upholding feminine privilege that is oriented towards fairer gender concepts. By contrast, work and livelihood opportunities for men and women are strongly linked to gender norms: hard work vs. light work; outside work vs. inside work; and productive work vs. reproductive work. These gender stereotypes uphold and perpetuate a patriarchal society. For example, a man views strength, bravery, and tenacity as his ideal gender qualities and believes that women lack these qualities. Consequently, the idea that women should focus on reproductive work is largely taken for granted, and women are expected to engage in both housekeeping and the caretaking of family members, which are viewed as essential duties for women even when they are actively employed and contributing to income earning (Tun Thein 5-7).

Gender relations are structured not only via sociocultural norms, but also via religious concepts. Nearly 88 percent of the Myanmar population is Buddhist and believes in the Buddhist concept of the male power known as *"hpon*." Granted to men at birth, this power positions man on a higher spiritual level than women and establishes them as the "natural" head of the family and household. Moreover, the concept of "*hpon*" entails that women are inherently inferior to men in religious status, thereby ensuring that patriarchal power is reinforced and reflected in society and its cultural practices (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. viii; Tun Thein 3-6; Harriden 26).

In essence, historical accounts highlight how womanhood and motherhood have occupied a unique conjoined status in Myanmar that has ensured that women there have traditionally had more freedoms than other women in Southeast Asia. Since the issue of equal rights between men and women has not historically been a key issue in Burma, a feminist movement did not exist in the local and political contexts of the country until Burma was conquered and transformed into a British colony. British rule of Burma lasted from 1824 to 1948, under which Burma was considered part of India and was governed according to the same constitution. As the documents of British colonial officials and newspapers indicate, the women of Burma were unlike women in India or the West given that they enjoyed equal rights with men. This was especially apparent when it came to the division of marriage property and inheritances. Notably, British colonials constructed a "civilization agenda" that devalued the role of women, thereby ensuring that their devaluation registered as an important factor in the achievement and maintenance of imperialism throughout the colonial era (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 1).

For example, Kumar notes that women’s contributions to family income ensured that they were recognized and documented as “producers” in the Burmese censuses of 1872 and 1881. This would change under British rule (from 1901 onwards), as the British censuses defined women as “unproductive dependents,” thereby ignoring their labor contributions to Burmese society (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 1). Unfortunately, such a practice further reinforces the unequal valuing of men’s and women’s work, thereby effectively ensuring that women endure a “double burden” of domestic and outside work. On the other hand, the British administration provided the growing number of educated women with opportunities in legal, medical, educational, and media professions via the advanced education system. Tun, Aye Lei, et al. argue that the British administration used the increased number of graduated women in order to import elite-oriented feminism favourable to Western ideology. Nevertheless, the resulting improvement of women’s literacy rates and knowledge with respect to international affairs resulted in women’s contributions to nationalism and the struggle for independence from the British (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 1).

In spite of assorted historical challenges and limitations, various women’s movements have given rise to female voices in differing ways from the colonial era to the post-colonial era and from military time to contemporary time (i.e., the transition to democratization). Notably, women’s movements and the birth of feminism came about during the colonial period (1824-1948). Interestingly, these movements were mainly led by male nationalist leaders and Buddhist monks. The intensity of these movements grew with the rise of nationalist schools that had emerged to boycott British missionary education (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 1-2).

Under the period of colonial rule, the women of Myanmar joined together in positioning feminism towards anti-colonialism. During the early years of the post-independence period

(1948-1961), the common theme of the overarching women’s movement was that femininity reinforced nationalism. However, under the rule of the military-backed Burma Socialist Programme Party (1962-1988), political repression, economic hardship, social control, and increased state-sponsored violence against minority ethnic women produced not only enhanced nationalism/ethno-nationalism, but also the very factors that compelled women to participate in mass political action in a way that they had never done before (Harriden, 189-190). On the other hand, gender equality has been viewed as a marginal area in the ongoing democratization process. The internalization of patriarchal culture throughout generations has made it not only hard to grapple with gender inequality, but also to question it (Tun, Aye Lei, et al.; Tun Thein; Harriden 26).

Fear of Feminism

Sadly, in our contemporary era (1990 to present), feminism has a negative connotation amongst many men and women alike in Myanmar. In essence, both "feminism" and "feminist" are sensitive and often scary terms for the people of Myanmar. Indeed, the terms are even problematic for the female politicians that came to power in the wake of the military coup that occurred over five decades ago, during which women’s political activism entailed that women endure great personal sacrifices such as long periods of imprisonment and separation from their families and children (Than, Tharaphi, et al.; Tun, Aye Lei, et al.; Harriden).

Tellingly, there have been no gender and feminist studies programs at colleges and universities in Myanmar until recently. As for female women’s rights activists, they have often refused to explicitly identify themselves as feminists and have instead concentrated on working towards relative gender equality by focusing on women’s issues rather than on gender rights. Other gender related issues such as LGBT rights are rarely discussed in mainstream activists as of now. With regard to civil society and its public authorities, there has been a general reluctance to discuss feminism in relation to an overall gender and development approach (Maber; Pistor; Than, Tharaphi, et al.; Tun, Aye Lei, et al.).

In her article "What 'feminism' means in Myanmar", Nora Pistor – a *freelance consultant on gender and women's rights currently working in Myanmar – discusses the contemporary debate about what feminism means to the people of Myanmar. Specifically, she focuses on two groups. The first group is largely composed of older conservative members who express an attachment to pre-colonial times and view established gender relations as being fine, whereas the second group is composed of younger progressive members who work in newly established networks* (e.g., NGOs and community-based organizations) and believe that such established gender roles are discriminatory, repressive, and in need of systemic change (2).

It has been noted that there are some Myanmar women – Anna May Say Pa (one of the founders of the Myanmar Institute for Theology), May May Pyone (founder of the NGO Gender Group), and Pyo Let Han, Shunn Le Swe Yee, Zin Mar Aung, and Khin Myo Kyi (founders of the only feminist organization in Myanmar) – who declared themselves to be feminists in the early 1990s. These women have been branded as "extreme" and as "man haters." Some exiled women's organizations – Women's League of Burma (WLB), Shan Women's Action Network SWAN, and Burmese Women's Union (BWU) – did not identify themselves as feminist organizations despite championing women issues (Than, Tharaphi, et al.1-2). Why is feminism a fear-inducing word, and what factors have resulted in the silencing of various women and feminists in Myanmar? Based on a review of the literature of various researchers and scholars, the social rejection of feminism in Myanmar and the attendant reluctance to self-identify as a feminist is primarily based on five interrelated factors.

Firstly, there has been no actual Burmese translation of "feminism," which is mostly referred to as "ei-hti-ya-wada" (female ideology), which means something that focuses only on women's issues. In this regard, most Burmese people perceive feminism as being biased in favor of women or as being an ideology that promotes female dominance and misandry. Such a misperception has cultivated divergence and competition between men and women rather than social cohesion and gender complementarity. As a result, many men tend to perceive feminists as misandrists. Additionally, the Burmese method of translation and negative labeling has turned many people away from feminist causes (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 15; Than, Tharaphi, et al.1-2). As Maber has discussed, the very term "feminism" has been viewed as problematic within various contexts of Myanmar society, where English language terms are employed for a variety of strategic reasons that include both emphasis and obfuscation (423).

Secondly, traditional groups and state-sponsored women's groups in Myanmar (e.g., the Maternal and Child Welfare Association [est. 1991]; the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs [est. 1996]; and the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation [est. 2003], which was formed by the military government and led by the wives of generals and other authorities regard feminism as a tool of Western neo-imperialism that allows the West to exert control over developing countries. These traditional groups believe that feminism demands radical imposed change while ignoring the values of local people. Moreover, these state-sponsored women's organizations only served to strengthen traditional and patriarchal notions of femininity, thereby beginning a rivalry of ideology between the traditional femininity that existed inside the country and the progressive feminism that existed outside the country (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 10, 15).

Thirdly, the power of patriarchal (Buddhist) religious institutions exerts influence over communities not only from religious perspectives, but also from political perspectives. Overall, extreme Buddhist nationalist groups, patriarchal religious institutions, concepts of national unity based on non-secular ideology, participation of Buddhist monks in independence struggles under the British rule and the junta, and the interdependence between State and religious power (i.e., Buddhism) have distorted the rise of feminist ideology (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 15-16).

Fourthly, an examination of Burmese Buddhist literature and beliefs reveals contrasting images of women. The practice of Myanmar Buddhists is typically characterized as favoring patriarchal values in spite of a non-discriminatory clause between men and women in Buddhist literature, which has influenced the development of gender roles and stereotypes (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 15; Harriden 23). For example, in Buddhist literature, women’s maternal roles and nurturing qualities are praised, though a binary has often been upheld, which depicts “bad women” as greedy and undisciplined temptresses who stand in opposition to “good women,” who show devotedness and subservience to their husbands (Harriden 25).

Fifthly, the issue of male-dominated decision-making and power in politics, rooted in the growth of military power (1962- present), has been a major challenge to improving women’s rights in political, economic, and social circumstances. Under military rule, economic and educational policies have been informed by a conservative, patriarchal, and chauvinistic ideology that has reinforced cultural norms that have historically restricted women’s socioeconomic progress. This acknowledged, while ethnic (minority) women are often regarded as victims of State-sponsored (i.e., the dominant Burmese state army) violence that has been orchestrated to enforce masculine power, some women have become more politically active as a result of their experiences. This is especially true in regard to women's participation in the 1988 uprising (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 16; Harriden 188-204). However, women's political activism has involved great personal sacrifices that have entailed that women risk facing long periods of imprisonment and separation from their families and children (Harriden 230).

Orchestrated by the military regime, the 2008 constitution allows the military to appoint 25% of parliamentary seats, with the qualification criteria for president requiring someone well acquainted with the affairs of the country and knowledgeable of the military supported male-dominated leadership, which limits the number of female representatives in parliament and deters a woman from running for the presidency (Pistor 3; Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 13). In this regard, feminism is still perceived as a radical perspective and many women's rights activists are even reluctant to accept feminism.

Theoretical Framework

I frame my research through theories pertaining to *motherhood* and *feminist mothering*. I explore mothering-motherhood as it is examined in contemporary maternal theory, and I discuss ongoing debates about "empowered mothering and labor market participation" with respect to migrant mothers who are juggling both mothering duties and employment commitments in Western countries. In particular, this study examines how contemporary motherhood theory and feminist mothering theory contribute to understanding the complexities of mothering and motherhood, especially when it comes to migrant mothers whose entry into the workforce has challenged gendered stereotypes that are embedded in the cultural norms and related social practices of the sending country.

Based on research into a broad range of empirical studies and personal experiences in diverse historical and sociocultural contexts, motherhood scholars have defined the meaning of "motherhood" by providing a key distinction between motherhood and mothering. For instance, Rich provides two meanings of "motherhood": the first one is *the potential relationship* of any women to her powers of reproduction and to her children; the second one is the *institution* of mothering, which is a keystone of the most diverse social and political systems that aim at ensuring that all women will remain subject to male control (7). Similarly, O'Reilly theorizes that the term "motherhood" refers to the patriarchal institutions of motherhood, which is male defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, whereas the word "mothering" refers to women's experiences of mothering and is female defined and centred and potentially empowering to women ("Matricentric Feminism 15). On the other hand, hooks calls for revolutionary parenting that emphasizes collective parenting (i.e., males and females will accept equal responsibility in childrearing), rather than romanticizing motherhood as women's truest vocation (147-155).

Nevertheless, the key theme of contemporary "motherhood" theory relates to how taking the ultimate caring responsibility for children transforms womanhood into motherhood, thereby rending it subject to control via patriarchy (Doucet; O'Reilly). In fact, the ongoing argument by researchers over the past thirty years is that domestic responsibility remains chronically gendered and female-centric even when mothers participate in the workforce and financially contribute to the family. To this end, I draw on valuable theoretical resources from motherhood scholars in order to discuss how migrant women's essential motherhood ideology lies at the intersection of gender, family, social class, and culture.

As Schultes and Vallianatos have suggested, the act of mothering in contemporary society extends across borders in both physical and ideological ways (3). Migrant mothers may perform motherhood in differing ways that pertain to the following two factors: i) How they were raised in the sending countries or inculcated the Western ideal of intensive mothering, which Vandenbeld Giles discusses in relation to children as social capital who can be "invested in" (qtd. in Schultes and Vallianatos 3); ii) How their families were reproduced in the host country, as noted by migration theorist Irene Gedalof, via the adaptation of familiar mothering practices from the sending country to new cultural and physical contexts (qtd. in Kackute 61)

The emergence of motherhood studies within the larger disciplines of feminist scholarship and women's studies, dated from the publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976) onwards, tends to fill the scholarship gap on the subject of "feminist mothering" as a diverse practice. As O'Reilly explains, feminist mothering is constructed as a negation of patriarchal motherhood and functions as a counter-narrative to motherhood when it comes to imagining and implementing a view of mothering that is *empowering* to women. As opposed to other feminist theories, the key difference in theorizing feminist mothering is that it is determined more by what it is not in patriarchal motherhood that causes mothering to be limiting or oppressive to women (O'Reilly "*Matricentric Feminism"135*-137). Feminist mothering attempts to balance the needs of women in managing multiple identities (e.g., mother, wife, caregiver, and student/employee) via a primary focus on empowered mothering.

Notably, O'Reilly's theorization of "feminist mothering" has particular relevance to my research to use as a theoretical framework because it is defined by what it is not in patriarchal motherhood. I want to find out how the employed mothers of the Myanmar diaspora resist patriarchal motherhood ideologies in the Canadian host country in spite of neither self-identifying as feminists nor having any real conception of feminist mothering. Ultimately, I intend to highlight how the mothering experience can be envisioned as a position of empowerment and agency for migrant women in the host country via the challenging of gender stereotypes that are embedded in the cultural norms and related social practices of the sending country.

Methodology

My analysis employs both primary and secondary data. With regard to the secondary data, I engage with the relevant works of maternal theorists such as Adrienne Rich, Andrea O'Reilly, bell hooks, and others who explore mothering and motherhood in relation to experience, identity, institutions, ideology, and empowerment. To achieve my research objectives, I also analyze the work of a variety of feminist scholars (Aimee Tiu Wu, Cirila P Limpangog, Karen Christopher, Srabani Maitra, and Yu-Ling Hsiao) who discuss and theorize the lived complexities of working-class and employed migrant mothers within the context of South East Asian migration to Western countries.

Regarding my primary data collection, my thesis employs an interpretive methodology via a qualitative research survey method. This is administered through a set of questionnaires, which are essentially structured and standardized in accordance with fifty questions that are inclusive of some open queries (these are provided at the end of my thesis under the "Appendix" section). Eight GTA mothers were recruited from amongst employed heterosexual couples in the Myanmar diaspora. There is no adequate database of the Myanmar diaspora in the GTA from which to select respondents. In this regard, a sampling of research subjects was achieved via a combination of convenience and snowball techniques (Bryman and Bell 245). I first approached some women from the Myanmar community to recruit the right participants (i.e., mothers) who meet four specific requirements as follows: (i) they must be older than twenty, and they must be first-generation migrant women from Myanmar; (ii) their husband must be of any ethnic origin of Myanmar; (iii) they must have at least one child ranging in age from infancy to thirteen years, and they must be living with said child; (iv) they must be employed (e.g., part-time, full-time, self-employed, working-from-home) and financially contributing to the household income. Moreover, I requested that some of my initial participants refer me to other relevant participants.

The analysis of my interview questionnaire follows a process of compiling, reviewing, cataloging, and analyzing the answers by relating them to the issues raised in the literature review via the two feminist theories of *motherhood* and *feminist mothering*. I also examine the various life narratives of the respondents in relation to the themes and issues that motherhood scholars have explored in relation to migrant women and work. The names of the participants are presented in my findings and my discussion section via pseudonyms.

Scope and Delimitation

This research examines the experiences of employed migrant mothers from Myanmar in the GTA who seek to challenge normative motherhood and the patriarchal culture of the sending country via an engagement with empowered mothering. My qualitative survey interview also reveals how employed Myanmar diasporic mothers construct their own accounts of “good mothering” via the perspectives of empowerment and resistance in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country. In order to attain complete and accurate information and achieve the objectives of my research, the study is limited to recruiting interview participants who meet the following criteria: they must be first-generation migrant women of Myanmar who are currently working and have at least one child ranging in age from infancy to 13 years of age; their husbands must be of Myanmar ethnic origin.

Migrant women face a host of challenges pertaining to traditional gender roles, employment trajectories, and downward class mobility that result from settling in a new land. The main focus of this research is a renegotiation of household labour and childcare with respect to migrant mothers who participate in the labour workforce in the host country. Specifically, I emphasize the renegotiation of gender roles between the participants and their spouses with regard to domestic power relations that arise as they share in parenting responsibilities. The discussions in this research are based on the findings of a survey questionnaire with eight working mothers in the GTA. Consequently, these women cannot be representative of the experiences of all migrant Myanmar women residing in Canada.

However, my research reveals how cultural and traditional beliefs travels via mothering practices, from the Global South to the Global North, and contribute to existing literature on motherhood studies by providing an overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the minority of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers who have been under-researched in mothering and migration scholarship. Moreover, the findings from my work outline how the culture and values of the sending country play an overall determinant role in shaping the "sense of self" processed by various migrant mothers when it comes to their relationships with their spouses and families.

Structure of Thesis

My thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter One (Introduction) provides the overall background of my thesis and addresses following six subtitles: Research Context; Rationale of Investigation; Primary Research Questions; Objectives; Women of Myanmar in the Context of Gender Roles & Women's Movements; Perceptions of Feminism in Myanmar; Theoretical Approach; Methodology; and Scope and Delimitation. Chapter Two (Literature Review) examines the patriarchal institution of motherhood as well as women's experiences of mothering, particularly in relation to normative discourses of good mothering in relation to women's labour market participation. I look specifically at migrant women who have journeyed from the Global South to the Global North. To this end, I draw on valuable literature resources and empirical evidence from maternal theorists such as Adrienne Rich, Andrea O’Reilly, and others who explore mothering and motherhood in relation to experience, identity, institutions, ideology, and empowerment. Moreover, I also analyze the work of a variety of feminist scholars (Aimee Tiu Wu, Cirila P Limpangog, Karen Christopher, Srabani Maitra, and Yu-Ling Hsiao) who discuss and theorize the lived complexities of working-class and employed migrant mothers within the context of South East Asian migration to Western countries. My literature review therefore provides a foundation for identifying the problems and gaps that need to be addressed by building on the work of established motherhood scholars.

In Chapter Three (Feminist Theoretical Perspectives), I discuss mothering and employment in the 21st century through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: *motherhood* and *feminist mothering*. I examine how they contribute to an understanding of the ongoing debates in “empowered mothering and labour market participation” in the context of women’s migration. Additionally, I also specifically explore mothering-motherhood as it is examined in contemporary maternal theory. T*his chapter suggests that* empowered mothering is a subject of feminist mothering and that its diverse practices constitute the culmination of mothers’ efforts to contest sociocultural myths relating to the right to work, the proliferation of anti-sexist sentiments about child-rearing, and the actualization of equitable parenting practices amongst spouses.

Chapter Four (Findings and Discussion) is composed of two sections. In the first section, I outline the research methodology, the structure of my questionnaire, and some of the challenges encountered in the interview process. Secondly, I provide information on my qualitative survey questionnaire that focuses on eight employed mothers from the Myanmar diaspora in the GTA region, and I analyze and discuss the findings through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks:

motherhood and *feminist mothering.* This second section explores nine themes that have emerged from my data in order to address my research questions and contribute to the overall conclusions made in my ensuing final chapter. These themes are as follows: (i) constructing a good mother profile in a new land; (ii) mothering ideologies and approaches; (iii) delegating mothering duties when working; (iv) empowered mothering in the context of Myanmar diasporic mothers; (iv) gender roles and concepts of gender equality; (v) co-mothering between two parents; (vi) the challenges mothers face in raising children in a new land; (viii) perceptions of being successful mothers; and (ix) feminist mothering as it relates to employed Myanmar diasporic mothers.

In Chapter Five (concluding chapter), I evaluate the findings from my interviews in light of the literature review in my second chapter while also giving particular consideration to the primary research questions and objectives detailed in my first chapter. Based on these findings, this chapter goes on to make two primary arguments. First, I argue that the sociocultural constructions of motherhood that are embedded in patriarchal society do not preclude attempts of migrant mothers to actualize power/agency via creative mothering ideologies and practices despite the crossing of borders and continents. Second, rather than consistently framing feminist mothers as absolute non-patriarchal mothers, I argue that feminist mothering should be discussed as a combination of both structural conditions (e.g., cultural beliefs, and material and economic demands) and subjective feelings about paid and unpaid work (e.g., domestic and child responsibilities).

Moreover, my conclusion highlights the limitations and implications of motherhood theories and feminist mothering, as these limitations and implications are associated with the ongoing redefinition of what constitutes good mothering from the perspectives of those mothers who are managing their families via both income contribution and maternal strategies. Finally, I provide suggestions for further feminist inquiry in relation to mothering, migration, and women's studies.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Overview

This literature review examines the patriarchal institution of motherhood as well as women's experiences of mothering, particularly in relation to normative discourses of good mothering and women's labour market participation. I will look specifically at migrant women who have journeyed from the Global South to the Global North. To this end, I draw on valuable literature resources and empirical evidence from maternal theorists such as Adrienne Rich, Andrea O'Reilly, and others who explore mothering and motherhood in relation to experience, identity, institutions, ideology, and empowerment.

To achieve my research objectives, I will also analyze the work of a variety of feminist scholars (Aimee Tiu Wu, Cirila P Limpangog, Karen Christopher, Srabani Maitra, and Yu-Ling Hsiao) who discuss and theorize the lived complexities of working-class and employed migrant mothers within the context of South East Asian migration to Western countries. My literature review therefore provides a foundation for identifying the problems and gaps that need to be addressed by building on the work of established motherhood scholars. It is composed of four sections.

The first section discusses the key distinction between mothering and motherhood provided by two maternal theorists: Adrienne Rich and Andrea O'Reilly. I will explore how their respective theorizations have validated patriarchal motherhood as the official meaning of motherhood and patriarchal institution of motherhood as a normative discourse. Additionally, I will discuss the differences between Rich and O'Reilly with regard to their discussions about women's relationship to power in normative motherhood discourse.

In the second section, I address the controversy over good mothering in the context of normative motherhood experiences by drawing on the literature of the following motherhood scholars: Sharon Hays, Susan Douglas, Meredith Michaels, Andrea O'Reilly, and other feminist scholars who have identified intensive mothering as the ascendant ideology in North America. Based on their findings, I will highlight their primary arguments and related limitations at the end of the section, while also exploring how their findings relate to my research.

In the third section, I examine women's migration and mothering with respect to stereotypes and controlling images that have appeared within South East Asian Diasporas, while also exploring how such existing assumptions have contradicted the findings of some empirical studies. Finally, the fourth section examines how migrant mothers from South East Asia negotiate their mothering, labour market participation, and family relations while situated at the intersection of gender and culture in the host country context.

Patriarchal Motherhood vs. Mothering

Motherhood is often understood strictly in relation to the state of being a mother, which is a woman who cares for and nurtures her children with the deepest love. This process sees a woman's function in accordance with her innate biological role with regard to a given society's assumptions of what motherhood is supposed to be. For example, some motherhood scholars (e.g., Sharon Hays, Martha McMahon, Ann Phoenix, and Anne Woollett) highlight how in most cultures mothers are held accountable for the care and emotional development of their children. They also note how these mothers are held responsible for the way that their children turn out, though fathers do increasingly shoulder responsibility for some household labour (qtd. in Collett 328).

Based on research into a broad range of empirical studies and personal experiences in diverse historical and sociocultural contexts, motherhood scholars have defined the meaning of "motherhood" by providing a key distinction between motherhood and mothering. For instance, Rich provides two meanings of "motherhood": the first one is *the potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children; the second one is the *institution* of mothering, which is a keystone of the most diverse social and political systems that aim at ensuring that all women will remain subject to male control (7). Rich argues that the meaning of "motherhood" is neither natural nor inevitable and that just as rape, prostitution, and slavery are not innate conditions, motherhood is not an innate condition either. Moreover, Rich's "*Of Woman Born*" underlines the following two features of modern patriarchal motherhood that are particularly harmful to mothers: (i) mothering that assumes motherhood to be natural to women and childrearing to be the sole responsibility of biological mothers; (ii) mothering that affords mothers no power to determine the conditions under which they mother despite the fact that they are assigned sole responsibility for their motherwork (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 16-17).

Another maternal theorist who has also distinguished the meaning of motherhood from mothering is Andrea O'Reilly. Her approach defines "motherhood" as being male defined and "mothering" as being female defined, thereby shedding light on two contradictory processes that women experience. As O'Reilly notes,

> The term "motherhood" refers to the patriarchal institutions of motherhood, which is male defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, whereas the word "mothering" refers to women's experiences of mothering and is female defined and centred and potentially empowering to women ("Matricentric Feminism 15).

Citing Rich (*In Of Women Born*), who notes that “to destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood,” O’Reilly asserts that “*the reality of patriarchal motherhood, thus must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of empowered mothering*” (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 16). In other words, the reality of motherhood is that it operates as a patriarchal institution to constrain, regulate, and dominate women and their mothering. To this end, it must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of empowered mothering, which can allow for a mother’s collective personal experiences of mothering to function as a site of empowerment. Moreover, O’Reilly argues that motherhood is primarily not a natural or a biological function, but rather a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing socioeconomic factors. She explicitly states that motherhood is a cultural construction and that its meaning varies with time and place. Thus, there is no essential or universal experience of motherhood. By contrast, the patriarchal institution that is socially constructed can be challenged and changed (“Matricentric Feminism” 16).

O’Reilly’s conceptualization of motherhood reflects the findings of some contemporary feminist scholars who have explored how migrant mothers reinterpret and redesign the meaning of motherhood in the new land via engagement with the labour market and paid work (Limpangog; Maitra). However, such findings reveal that participants’ re-designation of motherhood remains fixed on delegating care duties to mothers and/or a female kin member rather than on challenging traditional patriarchal assumptions about gendered responsibilities. For example, all the participants of Limpangog’s work (i.e., Filipina mothers in Australia) lived with nuclear families or transnational (female) kin and none of them challenged their spouses’ attitudes towards childrearing, which essentially saw them become involved in childcare responsibilities only when pressed to do so. Some spouses never offered to do it (200-202). Consequently, this normalizes women's roles as principal care providers.

Similarly, Maitra's study of South Asian migrant women in Toronto suggests that these mothers did not have jobs suitable to their qualifications due to one of the following two reasons, which relate to patriarchal values that bind them to family responsibilities and motherhood: (i) their husbands do not allow them to work due to the misimpression that women of colour are unable to look for jobs in the mainstream labour market; (ii) they devoted more time for family and children, and they regarded this as being one of the most important elements of their mothering work (155-157)

These findings highlight that the key theme of contemporary "motherhood" theory relates to how taking the ultimate caring responsibility for children transforms womanhood into motherhood, thereby rendering it subject to control via patriarchy (Doucet; O'Reilly). Additionally, domestic responsibility remains chronically gendered and female-centric even when mothers participate in the workforce and financially contribute to the family. It is important to note that, as discussed in this section, "motherhood" is gendered, as is the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction, to her children, and to the overall institution of motherhood (Rich). In essence, Rich and O'Reilly have validated patriarchal motherhood as the official meaning of motherhood, while also validating the patriarchal institution of motherhood as a normative discourse. Both of them explicitly state that the reality of patriarchal motherhood, which is particularly harmful to mothers and restrains women's power, should be challenged in order to distinguish it from the possibility of empowered mothering.

However, there is a difference between Rich and O’Reilly with regard to their discussions about women’s attainment of power in normative motherhood discourses. Rich’s discussion emphasizes women’s power in relation to reproduction and their potential relationship to their children (Rich 7), whereas O’Reilly emphasizes women’s lived experiences of mothering, noting that they can conform to and/or resist the patriarchal institution of motherhood as a process of gaining power or as a site of empowerment (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 15, 19). This is a significant contribution to understanding mothering as not merely a process of caring that is performed by mothers for their children, but also as a site of empowerment that is interconnected with various motherhood ideologies.

It is important to note that, as discussed above, there is a clear distinction between the two processes and practices (i.e., motherhood and mothering) depending on the reality of patriarchal motherhood given its existence not just across cultural differences, but also via migration experiences (i.e., its meaning varies with time and place). Moreover, ideas about motherhood and mothering do not exist in a vacuum. How mothers idealize their mothering practice is influenced by how they conceptualize attitudes and expectations about their children, their own mothers, and themselves. Additionally, as Ruddick argues, maternal practice is characterized by three demands that apply to mothers: (i) *to protect and to preserve their children*; (ii) *to nurture their children’s emotional and intellectual growth*; and (iii) *to provide training to their children and ensure their social acceptability*. This third demand is not required by children’s needs, but rather by the needs of society given its assumption that mothers shape the growth of their children in “acceptable” ways (O’Reilly, “Matricentric Feminism” 29), which complicates the women’s experiences of mothering in the context of migration.

How do women seek to challenge normative conceptions of motherhood and the ensuing stereotypical expectations that are constructed via patriarchal notions? How do they manage their merging of womanhood with motherhood when it comes to labour market participation and career development? How do immigrant mothers juggle their responsibilities when combining mothering and employment in the context of care-sharing and family renegotiation? My research will centre on these issues, which are underdiscussed and undertheorized in mainstream motherhood studies in relation to migrant women's identities not only as mothers, but also as employees whose experiences of mothering challenge the sending country's motherhood norms and traditional gender roles.

Good Mothering: Intensive to the "New Momism"

Andrea O'Reilly describes "sacrificial motherhood," which emerged as the dominant view of good mothering in the postwar period or approximately seventy years ago, with respect to the following three central themes: (i) mothering is natural to women and essential to their being as conveyed via Pamela Courtenay Hall's belief that women are born with a built-in set of capacities, dispositions, and desires to nurture children (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 45); (ii) the mother is to be the central caregiver of her biological children; and (iii) children require full-time mothering, but if the mother must work outside the home, then the children must always come before the job. In other words, concepts of normative motherhood define good mothering as full-time mothering and emphasize the physical proximity of mother and child, thereby emphasizing the importance of mothers being home with their children ("Matricentric Feminism" 45-47).

Similar to the themes of sacrificial motherhood, "intensive mothering" ideology was identified by Sharon Hays (1996) via textual analyses of child-rearing manuals and in-depth interviews with 38 mothers of preschoolers. In this ideology, mothers are expected to be the central caregivers of children. This ideal of child rearing is time-intensive, guided by experts, and emotionally engrossing. In this sense, Hays argues that good mothering requires the day-to-day labour of nurturing the child, listening to the child, attempting to decipher the child's needs and desires, struggling to meet the child's wishes, and placing the child's well-being ahead of their mother's own convenience. Hays also observed that intensive mothering left the employed mothers – whom she interviewed – feeling pressed for time, a little guilty, a bit inadequate, and somewhat ambivalent about their positions. Notably, according to Hays, employed mothers justified their paid work by emphasizing its benefits for their children rather than for themselves (qtd. in Christopher 75). Intensive mothering demands that mothers continually put the needs of their children above their own.

Building on the concept of intensive mothering ideology, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) coined the concept of "the new momism," which describes on a set of ideals, norms, and practices associated with being even a remotely decent mother. Specifically, a woman is expected to devote her entire physical, emotional, and intellectual being 24/7 to her children and to enjoy every minute of it. Also, Douglas and Meredith argue that such a myth is perpetuated by parenting books, magazines, value-based marketing, and the media coverage of celebrity mothers, thereby creating an equal opportunity oppressor that affects both stay-at-home and working mothers (qtd. in Collett 329). In other words, the new momism is a romanticization of motherhood, which involves impossible standards of women's childrearing and – most importantly – redefines all women through their relationship to their children.

Also, many scholars (Terry Arendell; Orit Avishai; Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels; Anita Garey; Angela Hattery; Cameron L. Macdonald) have identified intensive mothering as the ascendant ideology in North America (qtd. in Christopher 75). Notably, an intensive model of mothering, which is framed under standardized requirements, seems to have set an impossible standard of self-sacrifice given its requirement that a woman possess the ability to selflessly love her children at all times. In this regard, O'Reilly contends that the discourses of intensive mothering and new momism are oppressive to women not because of children's needs, but rather because they mandate that only the biological mother is capable of fulfilling the children's needs. These discourses specify that such needs must always come before those of the mothers and must be constantly responded to around the clock with extensive time, money and energy ("Matricentric Feminism 61).

Nevertheless, the concepts of intensive mothering and new momism ignore woman's well-being, while also failing to consider the fact that the roles and experiences of motherhood-mothering can change and be changed by mothers in relation to various other factors (e.g., needs of society, economic demand, changes in the labour market, migration patterns, available resources, justification/family negotiation ideologies, availability of more labour-saving devices and facilities, etc.). For example, some scholars (Joan Williams, Gretchen Webber, and Christine Williams) address how motherhood intersects with employment in women's lives when employers require mothers to be ideal workers, while also emphasizing how mothers appreciate the opportunity to work rather than challenging the ideal worker norm (qtd. in Christopher 75-76).

Intensive mothering is a child-centred model; however, there is evidence that some working mothers reframe their mothering strategies without rejecting the intensive mothering framework. Instead, they justify their paid employment by concentrating on fulfilling their children's needs as well as their own well-being. For instance, Karen Christopher's in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of 40 employed mothers in 2012 revealed that employed mothers reframed good mothering as being “in charge” of and ultimately being responsible for their children’s well-being. Mothers in this sample also justified employment in novel ways. Specifically, they emphasized the benefits of employment not only for their children, but also for themselves. They also rejected the long work hours imposed by an ideal worker model (Christopher 73).

Notably, the emergence of intensive mothering that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising children parallels the increase in mothers’ paid labour force participation. Additionally, the following factors make intensive mothering possible for employed mothers: the availability of more labour-saving devices (from microwaves to takeout food) for household help; mothers choosing to have fewer children; and the emergence of children’s enrichment support facilities (e.g., toys, books, games, camps, holidays, theatre, etc.) (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 52-53).

Johnston and Swanson suggest that employed mothers engaged in “cognitive acrobatics” to justify their employment given the ubiquity of the intensive mothering ideology. For example, Johnston and Swanson’s 2007 in-depth interviews with 98 married mothers with young children found that most full-time mothers were ultimately unable to reconcile the tension between their identities as mothers and workers. However, a minority of full-time mothers, as well as many of the part-time mothers, used reframing to integrate their worker identities and mothering in such a way that the contradiction no longer existed due to their shared belief that employment made them better mothers (qtd in Christopher 77).

These findings highlight the following two important points: (i) the strategy of employed mothers’ reframing for good mothering is still consistent with intensive mothering, with the children remaining the justification for their mother's employment; (ii) mothers reframe not only motherhood, but also employment in novel ways. That said, however, these findings do not cover the employed mothers' narratives in the context of migration. How do migrant mothers understand their caregiving and employment decisions, and how do they make sense of these decisions because of what they think they should be doing? How do employed mothers construct their own scripts of good mothering and to what extent does their reframing of good mothering strategy contribute to the intensive mothering model? My study will address this gap by looking at the lived experiences of Myanmar diasporic employed mothers who have migrated to Canada from a patriarchal-centered society, while also examining the impact of migration on their mothering ideologies and practices in their new homeland.

South East Asian Migrant Mothers: Stereotypes and Controlling Images

Many scholars (Rodriguez; Glenn, Chang and Forcey; Maddali; McKinnon; Seu; Bouris et., al; and Valenzuela) have explored migration in the context of women's roles as mothers, noting that the migration experiences of such women – regardless of their status as immigrants or refugees – affects their identities as mothers as well as their very processes of mothering (Rodriguez 207). Notably, as Schultes and Vallianatos have suggested, the act of mothering in contemporary society extends across borders in both physical and ideological ways (3). Migrant mothers may perform motherhood in differing ways that pertain to the following two factors: i) How they were raised in the sending countries or inculcated in the Western ideal of intensive mothering, which Vandenbeld Giles discusses in relation to children as social capital who can be "invested in" (qtd. in Schultes and Vallianatos 3); ii) How their families were reproduced in the host country via the adaptation of familiar mothering practices in relation to new cultural and physical contexts (Kackute).

Notably, mothering practices among Asian migrant women in North America are also constrained by an overarching set of stereotypes and controlling images that have positive and negative aspects. For example, as a result of the myth of the “model minority,” there is an assumption that Asians as a group are middle or upper-class, highly educated, successful in math and science, and extremely competitive (Ducan and Wong 169). By contrast, Yu-Ling Hsiao’s case study of Chinese working-class immigrants in one small city in the United States has revealed how the daily lives of Chinese immigrant mothers stand in opposition to an overarching set of stereotypes. Hsiao’s work highlights how working-class immigrant mothers experience parental difficulties when dealing with the task of educating children in unfamiliar social contexts due to their limited education and understanding of the new cultures’ norms and practices, in addition to their personal feelings of powerlessness and isolation (Hsiao 159 -160)

However, Hsiao’s study also reveals that working mothers do not stop developing active strategies and ideologies to protect their children and to advance their academic success in mainstream society. Hsiao observed the active strategy of two Chinese mothers who worked as waitresses at a Chinese restaurant and spoke a little conversational English. When these two mothers were advised in parent-teacher meetings to help their elementary school-aged children whose overall English was slow in progress, they interpreted the school message through their understanding of educational norms and practices via their shared Chinese cultural background. These mothers believed that elementary school in the United States did not provide the type of student homework that compelled their children to practice sufficient handwriting and spelling at home. They also felt that such schooling did not help to reduce their children’s TV time. In particular, one non-Christian mother asked her daughter to copy the Bible given her belief that it is a good text that could assist not only in improving her daughter's literacy, but also her ability to morally and academically engage with the acculturation process. (Hsiano 167, 170).

According to Duncan and Wong, another issue is that East Asian mothers are often degraded rather than recognized as multidimensional subjects via research that places a direct focus on the lived experiences of one particular immigrant or group from a feminist perspective (174). For instance, one qualitative study (Chang and Greenberger in 2012) suggests that Chinese American mothers felt more parent satisfaction when their children were getting good grades as compared to European American mothers, which thus tends to create another controlling image of East Asian mothers that depicts "Asian mothering" as "Tiger Mothering" (qtd. in Duncan and Wong 174). This recent controlling image has been based on Amy Chua's (Chinese) mothering ideology, which revolves around how she raised her two daughters in an extremely strict, middle-class environment via an authoritarian parenting approach that required her daughters to earn all A-grades in academics, play piano and violin via hours of focus each day, thereby denying them non-productive playtime with other kids (qtd. in Ducan and Wong 170; Tiu Wu 110).

Despite Chua's essentialist argument (i.e., Chinese parenting is superior to lackadaisical and overly accommodating "Western parenting") having been criticized by many readers, the overwhelming success of her book indicates the power and allure of the stereotype of Chinese mothering (Ducan and Wong 170). On the other hand, it has been noted that the concept of being a "tiger mother," a cultural reference coined by Chua in 2011, has divided readers into two groups: those who were infuriated by such an excessively controlling parenting style, and those who were in awe of such a refreshingly authentic disciplinary approach (Tiu Wu 110-111). Interestingly, based on the debates surrounding the Tiger mothering concept, the Asian American

Journal of Psychology published a special issue in 2013, which used empirical studies that employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in relation to South East Asian immigrant families (of China, Korea, Hmong, Mainland China) in the United States. The findings of these various studies are as follows: Su Yeong Kim et al.'s study showed that only 20 percent of parents were classified as Tiger parents; two studies (Susie D. Lamborn et al.; Niobe Way et al.) suggested that most Asian-heritage parents are warm, supportive, and loving toward their children; Charissa Cheah et al.'s study on Chinese immigrant mothers' perceptions of the contrasts between typical Chinese and U.S parenting showed that mothers learned to acculturate and become flexible in their parenting beliefs and practices in order to promote their children's holistic development in the U.S (qtd. in Tiu Wu 111).

The above findings discussed in Aimee Tiu Wu's chapter offered a stark contrast to the stereotype that South East Asian migrant mothers constitute a "Tiger Mother" group. Also, the author and educator Tiu Wu, an immigrant mother who was raised in a traditional Chinese multigenerational household and immigrated to Vancouver with her parents as a teenager, suggests Western academia has advocated thinking outside of the normative path of a culturally biased mindset by calling for the reexamination of the cultural expectations and evolving perspectives on family and parenting in the West. In her chapter "Tigerish Mom in the Dragon's Den," Tiu Wu states,

> *My mom was a classic Tiger mom who did not simply give orders without getting involved. She was in the trenches with me and quizzed me until the wee hours of the morning or shuttled me to and from choir rehearsals. As a parent and educator, I am keenly aware of this difference now and try to balance between being demanding and responsive toward my children's individual needs and interests. For example, my child who is in kindergarten recently asked for skating lessons, and although I would rather she learn math instead, I listened and registered her for a few skating lessons, which turned out to be something she really enjoyed. As a tradeoff, she had to practice math and reading every night with me* (Tiu Wu 121)

Tiu Wu does not reject the “tiger mother” concept that her mother used when raising her, though she does acknowledge the intersections of her home culture (East) and adopted culture (West), both of which have contributed significantly to her growth, thinking, and life trajectory. Consequently, Tiu Wu’s mothering approach is a “tradeoff” (a modification of the tiger mother concept), which revolves around listening to and facilitating the child’s interest (Western mothering) and then doing what the mother expects the child to do (a Chinese way of authoritarian mothering) at a different time. It should also be noted that there is a different articulation between the two authors (mothers) with regard to expectations about their children. Amy Chua drives her children to high levels of pressure to achieve all A-grades in academics. However, for Tiu Wu, she believes in “light-house parenting,” which is a term coined by Kenneth Ginsburg and Ilana Ginsburg (qtd. in Tiu Wu 123) to reference a healthy amount of support and challenge for children when it comes to helping them independently learn stress management so that they can become the best versions of themselves.

Despite there being similarities in the mothering issues experienced during post-migration, the examination of migrant motherhood identities necessitates an understanding of the role of motherhood in the construction of identities amongst female migrants. Additionally, these understandings allow for nuances to emerge, as one considers how social class, gender normative roles, responsibilities, ethnic-racial identities, and other cultural factors affect mothering experiences (Vallianatos and Kuroczycka-Schultes 263). In summary, this section provides three important aspects of existing literature that have explored migrant mothering practices with respect to existing stereotypes and controlled images within the context of South East Asian migrant mothers in Western countries.

Firstly, the controlling images and stereotypes discussed in this section contribute to the invisibility of the needs and experiences of working-class, employed immigrants, and poor East Asians. The challenges that mothers face in raising children may reflect the values and beliefs of their origin countries and cultures, while also fitting into host country normative cultures. Nevertheless, it is important to note that mothering approaches that stress authoritarianism (tiger mother concept), Western approaches (facilitating the child's interest), and tradeoffs (between authoritarian and Western concepts) can differ from individual to individual. In other words, it would be a fallacy if one made an assumption based on the lived experiences of one particular immigrant or group via a feminist perspective.

Secondly, childrearing can be challenging, regardless of whether one is a migrant or not, but migrant mothering involves situations that make women's experiences particularly more demanding (e.g., learning English, participating in school cultures, assisting their children in a new society, coping with financial stressors, and balancing employment with family commitments). However, these challenges do not stop the attempts of migrant mothers to actualize creative mothering ideologies via the reconfiguration of their familiar mothering practices in relation to new cultural and physical contexts.

Thirdly, it is inarguable that migrant mothering ideologies have been influenced by the cultural aspects and beliefs of the sending countries. By contrast, the intersections of home culture (East) and mainstream culture (West) may contribute significantly when mothers reconstruct their own accounts of good mothering in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in the host country. Overall, motherhood scholars acknowledge and highlight the ongoing needs of empirical studies and personal experiences of motherhood-mothering in diverse historical and sociocultural contexts, as well with respect to concerns about the inclusiveness of minority and invisible groups. However, the politics of terminology in researching and presentation seem problematic, especially as they relate to the emergence of stereotypes and controlled images of South East Asian communities in Western countries. For instance, “East Asian” is sometimes assumed to refer only to those of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean backgrounds; South East Asian refers to Asian Americans and Asian Canadians; and Asian North American is frequently used to denote communities of Asian descent in both the U.S and Canada (Duncan and Wong 162).

Furthermore, in the context of the South East Asian female community in Canada, some motherhood scholars have explored women’s mothering experiences in the new land (Limpangog; Meiyappan and Lohfeld; Maitra). However, while the in-depth interviews in these studies cover migrant women from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka Tamils, they do not include women from Myanmar. This gap in the literature positions some minority South East Asian groups like diasporic Myanmar mothers as essentially being invisible, and it tends to undermine Myanmar women’s narratives of their experiences of mothering (i.e., raising their children) in the given host country. In fact, in the cultural context, parenting in Myanmar appears as a strict disciplinary approach that contradicts Western ways of parenting. For example, relations between parents and children are exceptionally strong in both good and bad times, and the relationship between mothers and daughters remains the strongest bond throughout life (Jeffrey Hays 1). In particular, girlhood seems to be a restricted life in the eyes of a Westerner due to the fact that it is not customary for a girl to go out alone after she is sixteen or seventeen. The girl may go out with her aunt or her mother or she may go to the pictures with her friends, but there will be no question of her “dating” in the Western sense despite the fact that there is no form of purdah for the Burmese women (Daw Mya Sein 5).

In this regard, this literature review contributes to understanding the existing stereotypes and controlled images of South East Asian migrant mothers. Additionally, it underlines the knowledge gap about some under-researched minorities like the Myanmar, who are also part of the South East Asian migrant community. I will address this gap and contribute new knowledge by answering the following sub-questions, which are very important aspects of my entire project: Which mothering approach do Myanmar diasporic mothers use in order to achieve their own definitions of being good mothers? In what ways are their mothering practices similar to and different from that of their own mothers (in the context of Myanmar culture) when raising their children in Canada? To what extent do migrant mothers of the Myanmar diaspora differ from or are similar with respect to the existing stereotypes of South East Asian mothering in Canada? Do the intersections of home culture (Myanmar) and mainstream culture (West) contribute to how migrant mothers reconstruct their own accounts of good mothering in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in Canada?

Mothering and Labour Market Participation

Since the increase in women's participation in the labour market was one of the defining features of the post-war era contribution, debates about women's roles in the family and their ability to reconcile work, mothering, and family relations seem ongoing for feminist scholars (Guerrina 468). Despite the growing advocacy for shared parenting and work-life balance, many scholars have provided evidence that mothers remain the primary caregivers in affluent countries such as Canada (Glenda Wall and Stephanie Arnold); the United States (Suzanne M. Bianchi et al.; Clelia Anna Mannino and Francine M. Deutsch); Great Britain (Margaret O'Brien; O'Brien et al.); and Australia (Janeen Baxter; Lyn Craig) (qtd. in Limpangog 198). Why do mothers remain the primary caregivers even while they are participating in the labour market and contributing income to the household? As Bonnie Fox has discussed based on feminist literature and findings from various empirical studies, the source of the problem appears to be due to the fact that women and men remain intent on taking on conventional gender roles with respect to parenthood (Fox 31).

Notably, according to Limpangog's work, participants (i.e., employed migrant mothers) provided information about their husbands' childcare involvement as a way of covering up their spouses' seemingly inadequate participation. For example, the husband is described as a "helper" or "reliever" whose duties include reading books to children, taking children to the park and movies, playing with them, and dropping them off and picking them up from childcare or school, while the woman remains the principal caregiver (Limpangog 200). However, in the Filipina cultural context, the emotional and moral duties ascribed to a mother are nontransferable except as acceptable proxies. This includes close (female) members of the family and the domestic helpers (i.e., female maids) who are the customary proxies and temporary relievers. Given this traditional context, none of the participants challenged their spouse's "helper" attitude, which thus tended to reinforce the normalization of their roles as the principal care provider (Limpangog 199, 202).

Filipina migrant mothers believed that their children needed extensive attention, which included assistance in relation to their school assignments and the regular attendance of school during their early years of adjustment to the Australian educational system. However, rather than sending their children to daycares operated by non-Filipinas, some employed women who became mothers after migration to Australia opted for childcare services of co-nationals and relatives or for bringing transnational kin (mothers/sisters) to live with them in order to provide child care (Limpangog 195-197). Similarly, according to Christopher's study, the narratives of those employed mothers who were not satisfied with their husbands' participation in childcare suggest that the delegation of mothering duties typically falls to other women (whether childcare workers, relatives, or nannies). This combines with the ultimate responsibility of mothers for their children, while also reinforcing traditional beliefs that women are the best childhood caregivers (Christopher 93-94).

Gillian Bottomley notes that women's assertion of putting family and mothering duties first is also a way of maintaining their moral distinctiveness (even superiority) and preserving ethnic honour (qtd. in Limpangog 194). For example, Limpangog's in-depth interviews with immigrant Filipinas in Melbourne reveals that many participants expressed the idealized idea that "mothering duties come first" with sarcasm, while others evinced pride, albeit with ambivalence. Such ambivalent behavior highlights the intersectionality of gender and culture. For instance, a majority of Filipino women believed that mothering was their most vital responsibility and that they should, without complaint, put their mothering duties and family responsibilities above their paid work and careers, as well as above other facets of their lives. In this regard, a double burden seems to centre on the sociocultural displacement resulting from migration, which reinforces the insistence of immigrant Filipinas on an old "tried-and-tested" notions of mothering (Limpangog 195-199).

Another relevant example is provided by Maitra, who conducted in-depth interviews with 25 immigrant women from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, who were all living in the Greater Toronto Area. Maitra's findings suggest that these women placed key emphasis on the value and pride that they took in their mothering work. For those mothers with a small income who were mainly working from home, the practice of spending time with their children was an important issue. These participants were happy working from home, as they could take care of their children and did not have to regularly leave them at a daycare. Some felt that they should devote most of their time to their husbands/family, and they placed particular emphasis on caring for their children as they were growing up (Maitra 153, 156, 157).

Interestingly, although the women in Maitra's research were part of the paid workforce and held university degrees from their home countries, some found their lives complicated by increased gender control and domination upon migration. A few interviewees reported that after migration it was the husbands who were reluctant to let their wives work while they themselves worked long hours to make ends meet. Some men prevented their wives from looking for jobs by reminding them of their childcare and mothering responsibilities. In this regard, after multiple failures to enter the labour market, the last resource for these women to economically survive in Canada was often found in home-based small businesses or part-time work from home (Maitra 153-155). Another common sentiment that was shared by many mothers (in Maitra's sample) was their loss of support and help, which greatly increased their household and childcare responsibilities after migration. Before immigration, most of these women belonged to middle-class families and could have afforded domestic help in their home countries. Upon migration, however, financial instability forced them to avoid day care and tasked them with almost single-handedly carrying out all the domestic responsibilities (Maitra 156).

However, some women in Maitra's work remained active in negotiating patriarchal control and gendered divisions of labour. For instance, many women reasoned with their spouses (e.g., to buy a house or a car, to provide good education to their children, to trade off of private child care costs) in order to convince them of the necessity of them working, even though it took time to secure an agreement. While taking pride in their mothering roles of being primarily responsible for their children, these mothers remained simultaneously engaged in their home-based businesses and took several initiatives to underscore the socioeconomic importance of their work (Maitra 157-159). For example, most respondents from Maitra's study complained about how their work was often underestimated, which resulted in them having to change the attitudes of their families towards their work, especially when their home-based businesses grew bigger. In other words, the participation of these mothers in paid work became a crucial point of bargaining power with respect to gender roles, in addition to redefining the mother's role in the family milieu. The women's negotiation strategies included purposely not cooking or cleaning house in favour of letting the husband do the work, refusing to join a family vacation due to a big workload, and receiving a day off from home and asking the husband to take care of the housework and childcare on that day (159). Notably, some employed mothers (of the South East Asian Diasporas) also justified their paid work by referring to feelings of being confident and independent, while also stressing the importance of their gender roles and their sense of pride in their mothering roles. The mothers did not challenge their husbands explicitly with regard to the gendered division of labour within the domestic sphere, though they did focus on how they dealt with their husbands and garnered more respect from them (Christopher 88-89; Maitra 159).

On the other hand, as Abreau and Sori have discussed, the social organization of these women's lives remain rooted in gender/race hierarchies and an ideology of motherhood (qtd. in Marita 152). Findings from the literature also suggest that gender hierarchy and the ethnic framing of mothering in the context of the sending country's cultural traditions register as contributing factors when migrant women revise their roles and responsibilities with respect to domestic power relations in a new land. These mothers are usually the main sources of emotional support in their families, and they may share equal powers with their spouses while occupying specific roles that are embedded in the sending country's cultural context (Limpangog 193). For instance, despite increased women's participation in paid work, the Filipina is still expected to embody the "*ilaw ng tahanan*" ("light of the home") role, which regards her as the carer and spiritual nurturer of children whose care work is extended to the elderly and other family members. She also acts as family manager and a fund custodian. In this regard, by contrast, the woman is often blamed in the event of a family breakdown. On the other hand, the man is expected to be the "*haligi ng tahanan*" (pillar of the home), and he acts as a family leader as well as the breadwinner and protector of its members (Limpangog 193-194).

According to Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, the switching of gender roles is still not favoured by Filipino men, who do so only when women are sick (qtd. in Limpangog 194). In essence, fathers looked after the sick children only in extreme situations when the mothers could not miss work. Otherwise, when it comes to sick children, the mothers are set in default positions that require them to monitor children through the night and absent themselves from work. Filipina mothers from Limpangog's sample had to demand their husband's housework participation. If no help came from their husbands, the women trained their older child, regardless of the child's gender, to perform domestic chores and look after the younger child (Limpangog 200-201). Similarly, those interviewed mothers in Maitra's study who were mainly working from home (e.g., sewing or selling garments/ethnic clothes, catering, babysitting) did not have jobs that they desired or that were suitable to their qualifications, thereby orienting them towards fulfilling the traditional duties of a "good mother," which they reconstructed in Canada (Maitra 157).

The findings show that these mothers continued to be bound by idealized gender roles and rigid cultural traditions, which prescribed the husband as the breadwinner despite the demands of their own paid work. None of the participants challenged their spouse's "helper" attitude and no one reported any marital conflicts with respect to the childcare responsibilities that normalized their roles as principal care providers. In fact, the given self-expectations of success in both career/paid work and domestic life have enabled women to overcome hardships, though with a great deal of stress (Limpangog; Maitra). It is fair to conclude that women's income is not a source of gender power in patriarchy for migrant women, though it can be a part of bargaining power when they resist gendered control in the family unit. Nevertheless, the active negotiation strategies discussed in this section exemplify how patriarchal values can be challenged and renegotiated in order to reconfigure the gender power dynamic, even if patriarchy is not entirely diminished. The women did not reject their husbands' sharing of care work, and this was appreciated. However, as Limpangog has suggested, the employed women's choice of prioritizing their mothering duties within their gendered realities left the women remaining in a double burden or double shift (205).

Overall, this literature review section suggests that family negotiation is evident in how these women redefine their roles as working mothers by maintaining the value of their gender norms and motherhood, which are embedded in the sending country's cultural context. It is not found in challenging their spouses' various attitudes about participating in childcare. In fact, the literature emphasizes the acceptance of women's mothering roles with respect to the intersection of their gender, class, and ethnic identities. The flaw in the existing research literature is that it underexplores how the varied concept of gender equality in the sending countries affects the gendered negotiation of female migrants in relation to their spouses with respect to mothering and family responsibilities. This is in specific relation to how they participate in the workforce and reconstruct their new accounts of good mothering in the host country.

My thesis adds to the literature by focusing on Myanmar diasporic women in Canada, and this is vital for three reasons. Firstly, given the limited number of studies that exist on South East Asian immigrant women in conjunction with the mothering and work force participation dynamic, my study of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers in the Greater Toronto Area contributes to the literature on how the invisible immigrant mothers of Myanmar balance mothering and work responsibilities in the host country. Secondly, concomitant with the pressures of their mothering roles, the women of the Myanmar diaspora also have to endure the traditional gender stereotypes and norms that can emerge with migration and pose new challenges to them in the host community. For example, in the context of Myanmar, gender relations are structured not only via sociocultural norms but also via religious concepts. Nearly 88 percent of the Myanmar population is Buddhist and believes in the Buddhist concept of the male power known as *"hpon*," which is supposedly granted to men at birth. This power supposedly positions men on a higher spiritual level than women and establishes them as the "natural" head of the family and household. Moreover, the concept of "*hpon*" entails that women are inherently inferior to men in religious status, thereby ensuring that patriarchal power is reinforced and reflected in society and its cultural practices (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. viii; Tun Thein 3-6; Harriden 26). My study will explore to what extent the women of the Myanmar diaspora challenge or still maintain their gender norms when they have to juggle the responsibilities amongst their multiple identities as mother, wife, and employee.

Thirdly, my study will contribute to female migration scholarship in order to understand how the concept of gender equality in the domestic sphere, which is embedded in the sending country's cultural context, positively or negatively, enhances how migrant women revised their gender relations with respect to their spouses in the host country. It appears that the firm gender divisions between the men and women of Myanmar are not perceived as discriminatory, but rather as upholding feminine privilege that is oriented towards fairer gender concepts. By contrast, work and livelihood opportunities for men and women are strongly linked to gender norms: hard work vs. light work; outside work vs. inside work; and productive work vs. reproductive work. These gender stereotypes uphold and perpetuate a patriarchal society. For example, a man views strength, bravery, and tenacity as his ideal gender qualities and believes that women lack these qualities. Consequently, the idea that women should focus on reproductive work is largely taken for granted, and women are expected to engage in both housekeeping and the caretaking of family members, which are viewed as essential duties for women even when they are actively employed and contributing to income earning (Tun Thein 5-7). In this regard, I will explore how the cultural values, family relations, and varied concepts of gender equality in the sending country affect the maternal ideologies of Myanmar diasporic mothers in relation to their children when it comes to reconstructing new accounts of "good mothering" in the host country.

Chapter Three

Feminist Theoretical Perspectives

Overview

This chapter discusses mothering and employment in the 21st century through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: *motherhood* and *feminist mothering*. I examine how they contribute to an understanding of the ongoing debates in “empowered mothering and labour market participation” in the context of women’s migration. Additionally, I also specifically explore mothering-motherhood as it is examined in contemporary maternal theory. This chapter suggests that empowered mothering is a subject of feminist mothering and that its diverse practices constitute the culmination of mothers’ efforts to contest sociocultural myths relating to the right to work, the proliferation of anti-sexist sentiments about child-rearing, and the actualization of equitable parenting practices amongst spouses.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. First, I discuss the complexities of normative motherhood when scripting “the good mother” and “good mothering” as theorized by maternal scholarship. Specifically, I explore O’Reilly’s theorization of normative motherhood via ten ideological assumptions of patriarchal motherhood and Ruddick’s conceptualization of maternal practice, while also analyzing how their works contribute to understanding the complications of mothers’ reframing of their own accounts of good mothering within the context of women’s migration and work. Secondly, I discuss the integration of maternal practice and migrant women’s resistance to patriarchal motherhood when childrearing, which together develop into another mode of mothering that is empowering to mothers. Furthermore, I analyze the conflict of “patriarchal mothers vs. empowered mothers” in relation to conferring mothers with five attributes (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and advocacy-activism) that patriarchal motherhood denies them. Additionally, I also highlight some factors that complicate the definitions of patriarchal mothers and non-patriarchal mothers with respect to women's migration and work.

Thirdly, I explore how maternal theory contributes to scholarship on the subject of "feminist mothering" (i.e., a negation of patriarchal motherhood) as a diverse practice. Also, I explain how feminist mothering deconstructs the patriarchal profile and script of "good mothers" and "good mothering," while also highlighting the differences between feminist mothering and empowered mothering. Fourthly and finally, I address the complications and limitations of motherhood theory and feminist mothering in the context of migration, while also outlining some unanswered questions that motherhood scholars need to examine. Moreover, I explain why O'Reilly's theorization of feminist mothering is particularly appropriate to use as a theoretical framework for my research.

Normative Motherhood: Complexities

Normative motherhood is the dominant discourse that determines what is expected and required that mothers do, for to do otherwise would result in one being deemed a "bad mother." Generally, "good mothers" are the primary caregivers of their children. They put the needs of their children before their own by being available to them whenever needed. Mothers who do not fulfill or follow the script of "good mothering" either by choice or by circumstance (i.e., they are either too young or too old, working outside the home, and/or living apart from their children) are deemed "bad mothers" who are in need of societal regulation and correction (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 12-13).

How does normative motherhood influence migrant mothers' participation in the work force, and how do assumptions shape the maternal ideology and practice of migrant mothers? Many scholars (e.g., Guendon; Nomaguchi; Hammer, Neal, and Perrin; Krull and Semprunch) suggest that problems may arise with regard to relationships between working mothers and their male partners and others when said mothers attempt to juggle their mothering and work responsibilities within the inseparable spheres of family and work life (qtd. in Gazso 266). As discussed in the previous chapter, some studies (Maitra; Limpangog) of working mothers in South East Asian diasporas reveal that rather than seeking liberation from motherhood duties, immigrant mothers actually consider mothering to be their first priority, thereby positioning themselves in a double burden or double shift.

As DasGupta and Shamita Das DasGupta have noted, this is because mothers hold a special position in South Asian cultures and are vested with huge responsibilities in terms of the socialization of their children (qtd. in Maitra 156), as well as in regard to devoting time to the care of their families and children. These are expectations that have been embedded in the overall cultural context via patriarchy. For example, despite women's increased participation in paid work and contractual overseas labour that led to a global trend towards the feminization of labour, the Filipinas script their profile of "good mothering" by embodying a "*ilaw ng tabanan*" (light of the home) role, in which the mother is the care provider and spiritual nurturer of children in the host country. The husband is expected to be the *"haligi ng tahanan"* ("pillar of the home"), who will act as both the breadwinner and the protector of the family members (Limpangog 193). Similarly, Christopher's empirical study of diverse employed mothers suggests that even when married immigrant mothers are required to participate in the workforce, they nonetheless redefine good mothering as being "in charge" of and fully responsible for their children's well-being while simultaneously limiting the infringement of employment on family life (91-93). This mindset can be explained by two interrelated factors. First, as Rhacel Salazar Parrenas has noted, the switching of gender roles still seems unfavourable for men, as traditionally the husbands participate in care work only when women are sick (qtd. in Limpangog 194) or when they are pressured to do so (Limpangog 200; Christopher 88). Second, the privileging of husbands in the labour market and their dominance in the home as breadwinners tends to reinforce their lesser participation in housework (Gazso 258).

In this regard, O'Reilly illustrates how the discourse of normative motherhood shapes women's practices and beliefs about good motherhood via the following ten ideological assumptions of patriarchal motherhood: *(i) essentialization; (ii) privatization; (iii) individualization; (iv) naturalization; (v) normalization; (vi) idealization; (vii) biologicalization; (viii) expertization; (ix) intensification; and (x) depoliticalization of motherhood.* According to O'Reilly, "essentialization" positions maternity as being basic to and the basis of female identity, whereas "privatization" locates motherwork solely in the reproductive realm of the home. Similarly, "individualization" regards mothering to be solely the responsibility of one person, and "naturalization" assumes that all women naturally know how to mother. On the other hand, "normalization" limits and restricts maternal identity and practice to one specific mode, which is the nuclear family. In other words, the mother who is a wife to a husband assumes the role of the nurturer, and the husband assumes the role of the provider. Notably, "expertization" and "intensification" of motherhood, which are conveyed in what Hays has termed "intensive mothering" and what Michaels and Douglas coin "the new momism," rationalize childrearing as being all-consuming and expert-driven. "Idealization" posits unattainable expectations of and for mothers, while “depoliticalization” characterizes childrearing solely as a private and nonpolitical undertaking that involves no social or political import. Lastly, “biologicalization” places emphasis on blood ties and locates the birthmother as the “real” and “authentic” mother (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 14).

On the other hand, Ruddick describes maternal thinking, which includes the “intellectual capacities the mother develops, the judgments she makes, the metaphysical attitudes she assumes, and the values she affirms in the process of mothering” (Ruddick 96). According to Ruddick, maternal thinking is guided by a mother’s interest in their child’s preservation, growth, and acceptability. In other words, this maternal thinking is characterized by the maternal practice of mothers when responding to the demands of their biological children in a particular social world, which enables them to express the facts and values of their practices (97). Ruddick’s theorization of maternal practice further contributes to understanding the complication of normative motherhood, which has typically embedded the biological mother in holding an ultimate responsibility for her children when it comes to fulfilling their basic demands while also meeting the demands of others in their social group.

What basic demands do children make in their lives? Ruddick suggests that children demand that their lives be preserved and that their growth be fostered. Moreover, the social group (i.e., of the children) demands that growth to be shaped in a manner acceptable to the next generation (Ruddick 98). In order to respond to the demands of children and society, Ruddick’s theorization of maternal practice is governed by the following three motherly interests: (i) preservation; (ii) growth; and (iii) acceptability. Interest in *preservation*, which is the most invariant and primary of the three interests, begins when conception is recognized and accepted and occurs simultaneously in relation to the mother’s concern for the baby they carry. Once born, a child is physically vulnerable for many years. Even when the mother lives with the father of her child or other female adults and has sufficient money to purchase goods or is able to locate available supportive health and welfare services, she is typically viewed by both herself and others as being responsible for the maintenance of her child's life. Interest in growth --fostering the physical, emotional, and intellectual growth-- of her child soon supplements a mother's interest in its preservation. Although she is rarely given primary credit, a mother typically holds herself and is held by others as being responsible for the malfunction of the growth process (98).

By the middle years of childhood, a mother is governed by the third interest of *acceptability* as a way to the next generation, thereby shaping natural growth in such a way that her child becomes the sort of adult that she can appreciate and that others can accept. Mothers will vary enormously, both individually and socially, when it comes to the lifestyle traits that they will appreciate in their children. In essence, mothers' interests in preservation and in fostering physical, emotional, and intellectual growth are interrelated and reinforce how mothers are to be embedded in holding a primary caregiver as responsible not only for the malfunctioning of a child's growth process, but also in regard to shaping children in acceptable ways that mothers can appreciate and others can accept.

The combination of these three maternal demands (i.e., *preservation*, *growth* and *acceptability*) complicates normative motherhood when mothers reframe their own accounts of good mothering in the context of women's migration and work. This is especially true when the mothers need to respond to the demands not only of their children and their society/family unit, but also to the demands of economic survival in the new land. Studies reveal that migrant families rely on women's reproductive roles and highly value the mothers' family maintenance skills, which they regard as a woman's most vital responsibility (Limpangog; Maitra;

Christopher). Indeed, migrant mothers continue to hold a primary caregiver role when they are required to enter the labour market via creative mothering ideologies. Moreover, this combines with the ultimate responsibility of mothers for their children while also reinforcing traditional beliefs that women are the best childhood caregivers (Christopher 93-94).

For example, some employed women who became mothers after migration opted for the childcare services of co-nationals or for relatives and transnational kin (mothers/sisters) to live with them in order to provide childcare. Otherwise, the delegation of mothering duties typically falls to other women (e.g. childcare workers, relatives, or nannies) so that the working woman does not need to put a break on her career (Limpangog, 194-195; Christopher 93-94). As O'Reilly has explained, this is because the ideologies of "essentialization" and "naturalization" either reinforce how migrant mothers position maternity as the basis of female identity in relation to other women or operate under the assumption that all women naturally know how to mother when they elect to enter the workforce. As for those working migrant mothers who could arrange to bring transnational kin (e.g., mothers, sisters) into the host country, they delegate mothering duties to nuclear family members under the ideology of "normalization" (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14), thereby limiting and restricting maternal identity and practices to one specific mode in the absence of biological mothers.

With regard to women who had children and participated in the workforce before migration, they were able to afford domestic help and/or nannies in their home countries. Upon migration, these mothers faced a loss of support and help, which greatly amplified their household and childcare responsibilities while also increasing their financial instability, which forced some of them to avoid daycare facilities (Maitra 156; Limpangog 195). For instance, studies revealed that these types of migrant mothers opted not to work during the crucial years of adjusting to the host country's educational system (Limpangog 195). As for some mothers, they elected to start small businesses at home (Maitra 156), thereby single-handedly managing all of their childcare responsibilities. Moreover, Limpangog's study suggested that some of the Filipina mothers from the sample who opted to take a break from their careers for their children were more involved with their children's friends and their respective families, as they wanted to ensure that their children were not exposed to vices in the new sociocultural environment of the host country (196).

As for those migrant mothers from Limpangog and Maitra's sample, regardless of whether they opted to be stay-at-home-moms and take a break from their careers, or participate in workforce by outsourcing childcare services via co-nationals/relatives and transnational kin (e.g., mothers/sisters), their stances on motherhood-mothering still adhered to Sharon Hays's concept of intensive mothering under the notions of devoting great resources of time, energy, and finances to raising children in a new land (Limpangog 206). As discussed above, Ruddick's theorization of three maternal demands (i.e., *preservation, growth* and *acceptability*) complicates normative motherhood not just in relation to how mothers respond to the demands of their children, family unit, and society, but also with respect to the very issue of economic survival in the new land. Some of the assumptions of patriarchal motherhood theorized by O'Reilly (e.g., essentialization, intensification, naturalization, and normalization) continue to contribute to how mothers reframe their own accounts of good mothering in the context of women's migration and work.

By contrast, in the studies of Limpangog and Maitra, some migrant mothers' decisions to take a break from their careers upon migration could not be attributed to "biologicalization," "privatization," "individualization," or "idealization," as such decisions resulted from the mothers' loss of support and help in the household and/or their financial instability, which forced them to avoid daycare facilities in the host country. In fact, these migrant mothers, whether employed or taking a break from their careers, do not reflect most of O'Reilly's characterizations of patriarchal motherhood, which revolve around such issues as *privatization, individualization, idealization, biologicalization, expertization, and depoliticalization of motherhood*. Moreover, the works of Ruddick and O'Reilly also relate to those migrant mothers whose lives are complicated by the increased gender control and domination that occurs upon migration. For instance, some participants of Maritra's sample (i.e., women from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, who were all living in the Greater Toronto Area) reported that there were men who worked long hours to make ends meet in the wake of migration while remaining reluctant to let their wives work. Some men prevented their wives from looking for jobs by reminding them of their childcare and mothering responsibilities. Before immigration, most of these women could have afforded domestic help in their home countries, as they had belonged to middle-class families and had attended university and participated in the workforce prior to immigration (153, 156). In this regard, "normalization" limits and restricts a mother to being a wife to her husband and a nurturer while positioning the husband as the financial provider (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14).

Nonetheless, some women in Maitra's study remained active in negotiating patriarchal control and gendered divisions of labour. Even though it took time to result in an outcome, many women reasoned with their spouses (e.g., to buy a house or a car, to provide a good education for their children, to trade off of private childcare costs, etc.) in order to convince them that it was necessary for them to work too. While taking pride in their mothering roles of being primarily responsible for their children, these mothers were simultaneously engaged in their own home-based businesses (e.g., sewing or selling garments/ethnic clothes, catering, babysitting), which were neither jobs they desired nor jobs that were suited to their qualifications. Moreover, the participation of these migrant mothers in paid work and unpaid work (e.g., child care) at home became a crucial point of bargaining power with respect to traditional gender norms and the fulfillment of the traditional duties of being a "good mother," which they effectively reconstructed in Canada (Maitra 157-159).

Maitra's findings suggest that these migrant mothers placed particular emphasis on caring for their children as they were growing up. As Ruddick has suggested, the mothers' interests in preservation and in fostering the physical, emotional, and intellectual growth of their children entailed that they still fulfill a primary caregiver role (98). Basically, they were happy working from home due to the fact that they could take care of their children and could avoid having to regularly leave them at a daycare (Maitra 153, 156, 157). In summary, Ruddick's conceptualization of maternal practice and O'Reilly's overall characterization of normative motherhood (via ten ideological assumptions of patriarchal motherhood) enrich each other when it comes to how migrant mothers reframe their own accounts of good mothering with respect to the migrant experience and work. Moreover, the integration of maternal practice and migrant women's resistance to patriarchal motherhood when childrearing end up together developing into another mode of mothering that is empowering to mothers. This will be detailed in the following section.

Patriarchal Mothers vs. Empowered Mothers

bell hooks describes her concerns about the romanticization of motherhood by writing, "*motherhood is as romanticized by some feminist activists as it was by the nineteenth century men and women who extolled virtues of the 'cult of domesticity.'*" (146). Aside from in hooks's work, debates about motherhood have been chronicled by many scholars (e.g., Phyllis Chesler, Jessie Bernard, Elisabeth Badinter, Nancy Friday, Nancy Chodorow), who have reflected on growing concerns about motherhood that have both positive and negative implications for the future of the feminist movement (qtd. in hooks 146). A positive impact is that the movement supports the continual study and research of female parenting while also supporting women who choose to bear children. Women need no longer fear that this choice excludes them from recognition by the wider feminist movement, though some women may still be marginalized from active participation in it. A negative impact is the romanticization of motherhood (as hooks is concerned), which employs the same terminology that is used by sexists to suggest that women are inherently life-affirming nurturers, thereby reinforcing a central tenet of male supremacist ideology (hooks 147).

bell hooks's writing is a call for revolutionary parenting that emphasizes collective parenting (i.e., males and females will accept equal responsibility in childrearing), though her point is not to stigmatize single parents. In essence, hooks highlights the great need for both women and men to organize around the issue of childcare in order to ensure that all children will be raised in the best possible environments, which will not position women as the sole or primary childrearers (147, 148, 155). hooks also argues that feminist theorists point to problems that arise from single female parenting, which provides children with few role models for male parenting. As a result of this lack of male role models, the idea that parenting is a woman's "true" vocation is perpetuated, thereby reinforcing male domination and fear of women. hooks states that society is not concerned about this misconception during a time when men, more than ever before, avoid responsibility for childrearing while women frequently find themselves either parenting alone or parenting less because they are working more (150).

By contrast, recent information demonstrates an increase in male participation in domestic work and childcare as mothers with very young children are participating in the labour workforce. This is because the increased cost of living necessitates that couples be dual family earners (Gazso 263) in order to make ends meet. A 2011 Statistics Canada report showed a significant increase in the labour market participation of mothers with young children. As the report indicates, “In 2009, 64.4% of all mothers with children under the age of three participated in the labour market compared to 27.5% of women who did in 1976. In 2004, 69.7% of mothers with children ages 3 to 5 engaged in paid work compared to 36.8% of mothers with these ages in 1976” (qtd. in Gazso 263). On the other hand, interestingly enough, Marshall’s 2006 study of the overall time that Canadians spent in paid and unpaid work (i.e., daily housework) revealed that men’s increases in total work hours per day are attributable to increased time spent doing daily housework (e.g., meal preparation and vacuuming), whereas women’s increases stemmed from their greater time spent doing paid work outside the home (qtd. in Gazso 263). These findings underline the changing nature of society, especially with respect to married couples, in organizing issues of paid work and unpaid work, thereby challenging the idea that women are the sole or primary childrearers.

Notably, hooks has discussed two issues that must be of central concern for future feminist movements: (i) the right of children to effective childcare not only by parents, but also by other childrearers; and (ii) the necessity of restructuring society so that women do not exclusively provide such care (150). These two issues tend to reinforce maternal practices as a way to resist and refuse patriarchal motherhood (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 67) when responding to the three demands of preservation, growth, and social acceptance, thereby creating a mode of mothering that is empowering to mothers. Empowered mothering refers to the theory and practice of mothering that recognizes that women, children, and society at large benefit when women live their lives as mothers via positions of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy. Furthermore, O'Reilly contends that empowered mothers do not regard childcare as the sole responsibility of the biological mother and 24/7 intensive mothering as being necessary for children. Instead, empowered mothers look to friends, family, and their partners to assist with childcare, and they often raise their children with an involved community of what many term "co-mothers" or "other mothers" (O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 190-191).

Additionally, according to O'Reilly, empowered mothers combine mothering with employment, studies, and/or activism. These mothers do not practice the full-time intensive mothering that is demanded by patriarchal motherhood. Many of these mothers insist that only participating in paid employment can fulfill the mothering requirements of excessive time, money, and energy. In other words, they see the development of a mother's selfhood as being beneficial to mothering and not antithetical to it as it is assumed to be in patriarchal motherhood ("Feminist Mothering" 191). According to O'Reilly, "*empowered mothering aims to reclaim power for mothers and to imagine and implement a mode of mothering that mitigates the many ways that patriarchal motherhood, both discursively and materially, regulates and restrains mothers and their mothering.*" Notably, O'Reilly also suggests that empowered mothering, or what she terms "mothering against motherhood," has yet to be fully defined, documented, and dramatized in existing feminist scholarship on motherhood because it is understood as what it is not in patriarchal motherhood ("Matricentric Feminism" 66). In this regard, O'Reilly calls for the following questions that need to be addressed: How does empowered mothering operate as a counter-narrative to resist and reform patriarchal motherhood?; How do mothers individually or collectively refuse and resist the ideology and institution of patriarchal motherhood?; Why is empowered mothering essential for maternal well-being, and how does it contribute to society at large? ("Matricentric Feminism" 66-68)

As O'Reilly notes, *"*[*I*]n *patriarchal culture, women who mother in the institution of motherhood are regarded as 'good' mothers, whereas women who mother outside or against the institution of motherhood are viewed as 'bad' mothers"* ("Matricentric Feminism" 66). Rich argues that *"in order to resist patriarchal motherhood and achieve empowered mothering, mothers must be* '*bad*' *mothers or, more precisely,* '*mother outlaws*'." In other words, Rich conceptualizes *"empowered mothers as good mothers and patriarchal mothers as bad mothers"* (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 65-66). Based on the findings from a qualitative study of fifteen empowered mothers, Erica Horwitz has characterized empowered mothering in relation to the following seven themes: *(i) the importance of mothers meeting their own needs; (ii) being a mother does not fulfill all of a woman's needs; (iii) involving others in their children's upbringing; (iv) actively questioning the expectations placed on mothers by society;(v) challenging mainstream parenting practices; (vi) not believing that mothers are solely responsible for how children turn out; (vii) challenging the idea that the only emotion mothers ever feel towards their children is love* (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 69).

Petra Buesken, another scholar, has based her findings from interviews with fifteen "revolving mothers" and provided evidence that has essentially mandated the contributions of fathers, partners, and others in normative families with regard to the strategic absence of mothers beyond the standard workdays and/or outside standard work hours. Buesken's findings reveal that fathers gain valuable childcare and domestic skills when they are solely responsible for children during extended periods of time, whereas mothers negate the effects of the "second shift" when they absent themselves from the family. Notably, the majority of the mothers from

Buesken's samples preferred periods of intensive work combined with periods of intensive mothering, even though all of them benefited from the greater domestic contributions made by partners (and for the single mothers, other carers), which thus loosened the hold of the default positions of the mothers (qtd. in O'Reill "Matricentric Feminism" 68-69).

The studies of Erica Horwitz and Petra Buesken on empowered mothering examine the topic largely from the perspective of white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers. As for O'Reilly, she seeks to develop a theory of empowered mothering that considers how mothers from various cultural positions resist patriarchal motherhood in order to achieve identities and experiences of maternal empowerment ("Matricentric Feminism" 69). O'Reilly's theorization of empowered mothering is based on Wanda Thomas Bernard and Candace Bernard's definition of "empowerment," which refers to naming, analyzing, and challenging oppression. The empowerment occurs through the development of critical consciousness and is concerned with gaining control, exercising choices, and engaging in collective social action (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism"69). In this context, O'Reilly suggests that the overarching aim of empowered mothering is to confer to mothers the following five attributes that patriarchal motherhood denies them: *(i) agency; (ii) authority; (iii) autonomy; (iv) authenticity; and (v) advocacy-activism* ("Matricentric Feminism" 69). Furthermore, O'Reilly warns readers that these attributes of empowered mothering are to be read in the context of a resistance to patriarchal motherhood rather than being read as restricted to economic and educational resources.

According to O'Reilly, "agency" does not mean power, for she borrows Rich's notions of refusing to be a victim of patriarchal culture, attaining the ability to influence one's life, and exploring how women can gain agency via mothering. Similarly, maternal authority and maternal autonomy refer to confidence and conviction in oneself, holding power in the household, and gaining the ability to define and determine one's life and practices of mothering. This means possessing the refusal to, in Ruddick's words, "relinquish or repudiate one's own perceptions and values" ("Matricentric Feminism" 70). The concept of "authenticity" refers to the refusal to wear what Susan Maushart terms the "mask of motherhood." (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 74). In other words, to be an authentic mother is to be truthful and true to oneself in motherhood. The notion of "advocacy-activism" refers to any and all forms of formal and informal resistance to patriarchy ("Matricentric Feminism" 74).

O'Reilly's theorization of empowered mothering is as available to marginalized women as it is to women of privilege. In fact, O'Reilly argues that the agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy of empowered mothering are more evident in the maternal practices and theories of mothers who are poor, lesbian, young, or women of colour. She also suggests that privileged women with more resources and status in motherhood are often less able or less likely to perceive and oppose their oppression ("Matricentric Feminism" 74). Furthermore, according to O'Reilly, empowered mothers understand that they should have the attributes of empowered mothering (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy) or that they seek to attain them. As for patriarchal mothers, they do not believe that mothers need or want agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy ("Matricentric Feminism" (74-75).

O'Reilly explains the importance of empowered mothering, which is essential for maternal well-being and thus beneficial for families and society at large. Specifically, O'Reilly highlights its overall importance via the following three facts: (i) it enables women to mother comfortably, competently, and confidently; (ii) it enables mothers to effectively balance motherhood and paid employment; (iii) empowered mothers are more effective mothers for children, and they can also simultaneously be healthier women and more productive workers (“Matricentric Feminism” 67). While feminist researchers share the opinion that empowered mothering is better for mothers and their children, some questions nonetheless continue to remain in relation to discussions about how empowered mothering can, as both a practice and a politics, be achieved and sustained. Specifically, what is needed at both individual and cultural levels to empower women in engaging in this process of resistance to patriarchal motherhood? (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 67-68). Additionally, O’Reilly also warns that one should not assume that non-normative mothering is always rewarding or empowering. Instead, motherhood scholars are advised to emphasize that those who are non-normative mothers, whether by choice or by circumstance, cannot be the “good” mothers of patriarchal motherhood. In this regard, the non-normative mothers must imagine and implement non-patriarchal mothering practices that, in their very otherness, while simultaneously opening up new possibilities for mothering (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 76).

Notably, some findings from migration and motherhood scholars suggest that it is problematic to define “who exactly are the patriarchal mothers or non-patriarchal mothers,” though married women do perform their roles as economic contributors after migration while also enduring the burden of double shift. This issue appears rooted in three primary factors. First, there is a difference in “social class,” which is defined, according to Tania Das Gupta and et al., as a set of relations that has to do with how people (e.g., migrant mothers) re/produce their livelihood in the everyday world (qtd. in Hsiao 159). This very matter applies to how migrant mothers develop reactive mothering strategies in the new land. For instance, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the daily lives of the Chinese working-class immigrant women in Hsiao’s study are more challenging than other employed/career-oriented Filipina immigrants (Limpangog) due to their limited education, skills, and exposure to the English language in their country of origin.

Moreover, the Chinese migrant mothers in Hsiao's samples held positions of working-class status both before and after migration. For example, they worked in farming, in fishing, as technicians, in other manual jobs in China, and in such jobs as waitressing in local ethnic (i.e., Chinese) restaurants in the United States. These Chinese mothers faced language barriers, long work hours (e.g., twelve-hours a day, six days per week), the loss of childcare support, and a disconnection from the dominant English-speaking and Caucasian community, which further led them to conditions of isolation, helplessness, and powerlessness that stirred feelings of frustration and panic once they encountered problems related to their children's school matters (Hsiao 162-165). As Leslie Nichols has noted, these working-class women were compelled to become economic supporters for their families because of financial difficulties in the family unit (qtd. in Hsiao 164). With regard to the issue of childcare, the mothers from Hsiao's samples used either other mothers (i.e., informal daycare) or sometimes sent their kids back to China to receive care from their grandmothers before they reached school age (Hsiao 162).

Second, a sudden switch of social class (i.e., downward class mobility) re/shapes the mothering ideologies of migrant mothers when they are located in the intersectionality of race, gender, and class and attempting to balance family and work responsibilities in the host country. In other words, concomitant with the pressure of mothering roles, some migrant mothers also have to adapt to shifting racial and class dynamics in addition to intra-family gender dynamics. For example, Maitra's study of the lived experiences of South Asian immigrant mothers in Toronto illustrates the complexities in managing both their low-earning (i.e., informal) home businesses (e.g., sewing or selling garments/ethnic clothes, catering, and babysitting) and mothering responsibilities. The majority of these mothers was fluent in English, held university degrees from their home countries, and had previous professional work experience in teaching, IT, and sales administration. These mothers belonged to middle-class families and could afford domestic help in their sending countries before migration (Maitra 153, 156).

Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, Maitra's findings demonstrate that patriarchal control is complicated and enforced through the discounting of these women's pre-migration work experiences and the racial and systemic barriers that they face in the mainstream Canadian labour market as a result of lacking Canadian work experience and education (154-155). As Kiran Mirchandani has suggested, the class position of these women does not remain static given that they are middle-class in one dimension (e.g., in the sending countries) and working-class in another dimension, which is that of the host country (qtd. in Maitra 156). As a result of losing their careers, these migrant mothers were either forced into working-class positions and/or were forced to start low-income small businesses at home in order to negotiate the constraints they sometimes faced in the labour market and the household (Maitra 155-156). Nevertheless, under the combined effects of various social processes, existing systemic discrimination in the Canadian labour market, and patriarchal intra-family control, the mothers from Maitra's sample were driven not just by their aspirations to work but also by their common values and pride, which they shared as women in regard to mothering work. Notably, as Maitra has argued, these women also remake their personhoods and renegotiate intra-family gender dynamics via the strategic bargaining of their creative economic activities (i.e., home-based paid work) (160).

Third, the traditional patriarchal beliefs and cultural beliefs in the context of sending countries may influence the subjective aspect of "feeling oppressed" and objective measure of developing different types of mothering. Consequently, such factors may conflict with O'Reilly's theorization of empowered mothers as absolute non-patriarchal mothers and the notion of the "bad mother" of patriarchal motherhood with respect to women's migration and work. In other words, by effectively balancing motherhood and paid work, migrant mothers may maintain some aspects of patriarchal motherhood while simultaneously reframing their mothering ideologies around the five attributes of empowered mothering (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy). This is, according to Maitra, due to the two following reasons: (i) continuation of some traditional patriarchal beliefs that hold women responsible for caregiving and nurturance while simultaneously upholding the mother's cultural belief that mothering is her normal duty, which is unrelated to notions of oppression; (ii) predominant sentiments about the value and pride that women take in regard to mothering work and gender roles, which entail that mothers should not feel themselves to be "oppressed" (156-158).

For example, findings from the samples of Maitra, Limpangog, and Christopher revealed that the majority of married mothers with young children who participated in paid work were challenging patriarchal control and the gendered division of labour via active negotiations that allowed their spousal relationships to remain intact. None of these mothers complained or described feeling oppressed in relation to their husbands' attitudes towards care sharing, and this was in spite of the fact that their husbands shared in caregiving duties only when forced to do so. Indeed, some husbands never even offered to look after their children on a part-time basis. Specifically, these mothers were willing to compromise their careers by doing the following: opting to adjust their working hours or to take a break from their careers for some time (Limpangog); making the decision to start small informal businesses at home that discounted the migrant mothers' pre-working experiences and educational qualifications (Maitra); and replacing their own absences from the home due to work with transnational kin, daycare programs, or the hiring of nannies (Limpangog; Christopher). As Margaret Walton-Roberts and Geraldine Pratt have suggested, the bargaining of mothers with gendered expectations exemplifies how patriarchal values may not be merely reconfigured, but also transformed and renegotiated (qtd. in Maitra 159) in order to maintain good spousal relationships.

In regard to this broader context, my project will look at the following aspects when analyzing how employed Myanmar diasporic mothers reconstruct their "good mothering" via perspectives of empowerment and resistance with respect to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country: What factors cause or limit a mother's empowerment in the context of the sending country's cultural and traditional beliefs when it comes to how mothers reconstruct their own accounts of good mothering?; Does any switching of social class (i.e., downward mobility) exist in my sample, and, if so, how do such class differences that exist between the sending and host countries shape mothering ideology?; To what extent do married Myanmar women resist and/or maintain the patriarchal culture of the sending country via the assumptions of their own traditional values and cultural beliefs?

Feminist Mothering

The emergence of motherhood studies within the larger disciplines of feminist scholarship and women's studies, ranging from the publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* in 1976 to the present, tends to fill the scholarship gap on the subject of "feminist mothering" as a diverse practice. As O'Reilly explains, "feminist mothering is constructed as a negation of patriarchal motherhood and functions as a counter-narrative of motherhood in order to imagine and implement a view of mothering that is *empowering* to women" ("Matricentric Feminism" 136).

The concept of feminist mothering advocates any non-patriarchal practice of mothering, which many motherhood scholars have advocated over the years. Specifically, such practices entail that of being “courageous,” as termed by Rich; “radical mothering,” as termed by Copper; and being “rebellious,” as termed by Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (qtd. in O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism 136).

According to O’Reilly, the difference in theorizing feminist mothering in relation to other feminist theories is that it is determined more by what it is *not* in patriarchal motherhood that causes mothering to be limiting or oppressive to women (“Matricentric Feminism” 136). How can mothers resist such patriarchal ideologies for their own well-being and that of their children via an engaged feminist perspective that is primarily concerned with e*mpowered mothering?* How does feminism shape the ways we address feminist mothering? What is a feminist mother, and what factors contribute to being a feminist mother? How does feminist mothering deconstruct the patriarchal profile and script of “good” mothers and “good” mothering?

Maternal theorists delineate that women have specific rights not only in regard to their womanhood, but also in relation to motherhood via the concept of feminist mothering, which resists normative and stereotypical expectations of both motherhood and womanhood in patriarchal society. Tuula Gordon’s 1990 study of feminist mothers reveals how these women conduct their lives according to alternative women’s ideologies, which relate to the following factors: *the ways in which they challenge and criticize myths of motherhood; the way in which they consider their right to work; the anti-sexist and anti-racist ways in which they try to bring up their children; the way in which they expect the fathers of the children to participate jointly in everyday lives; and the way in which many of them are politically active*. Similarly, Rose L.

Glickman (1993) argues that no matter how ordinary the feminist mothers' lives seem from the perspectives of outsiders and casual observers, "*their feminism was a profound defiance of convention*" (qtd. in "Feminist Mothering" 188).

Based on her analysis of the work of numerous feminist scholars, O'Reilly summarizes how patriarchal motherhood constrains, regulates, and dominates women and their mothering via eight interrelated rules of "good" motherhood as dictated by patriarchal ideology. First, children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother. Second, this mothering must be provided 24/7. Third, mothers must always put their children's needs before their own. Fourth, mothers must turn to the experts for instruction. Fifth, the mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood. Sixth, mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children. Seventh, the mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother. Eighth, motherwork and childrearing are specifically regarded as personal and private undertakings that have no political import ("Matricentric Feminism" 145-146). Additionally, O'Reilly contends,

> *"The patriarchal ideology of motherhood makes mothering deeply oppressive to women because it requires the repression or denial of the mother's own selfhood; moreover, it assigns mothers all the responsibility for mothering but gives them no real power from which to mother. Such "powerless responsibility," to use Rich's term, denies a mother the authority and agency to determine her own experiences of mothering. Moreover, in defining mothering as private and nonpolitical work, patriarchal motherhood restricts the way mothers can and do create social change through feminist childrearing and maternal activism"* ("Matricentric Feminism" 146)

O'Reilly's writing highlights the patriarchal profile and script as assigning powerlessness and ultimate responsibility of mothering to a mother, thereby denying the mother her authority and agency to claim her own mothering ideology or maternal activism. Feminist mothering, however, refuses this patriarchal profile and script of good mothers and good mothering, thereby challenging and changing the various ways that patriarchal motherhood becomes oppressive to women as described in the eight aforementioned themes. In this regard, the central aim of feminist mothering is to reclaim the power that the mother lost in the patriarchal profile. Fundamentally, the process is concerned with the empowerment of mothers. Accordingly, feminist mothering does not limit childrearing to the biological mother. Additionally, it redefines mothering as being an explicitly and profoundly political and social process ("Matricentric Feminism" 146-147).

O'Reilly defines feminist mothering as "a practice that seeks to grant mothers" *agency* (i.e., mothering practices that facilitate women's power in challenging aspects of institutionalized motherhood); *authority* (i.e., confidence and conviction in oneself); *authenticity* (i.e., being true to oneself in making a decision that is consistent with one's own beliefs and values); *autonomy* (i.e., holding power in the household); and *advocacy/activism* (i.e., the potential political and social dimensions of motherworks expressed in anti-sexist childrearing or maternal activism), which are all denied to them in patriarchal motherhood. Regardless of whether feminist mothering manifested itself implicitly or explicitly in combining motherhood with paid work, these studies (which insist fathers be involved in childcare, engage in activism, and create a life outside of motherhood) reveal that feminist mothering has developed in response to the mother's dissatisfaction with and dislike of traditional motherhood via the notion of "empowered mothering" ("Feminist Mothering" 189).

For instance, Horwitz suggests that mothers can hold beliefs that are not in agreement with those promoted by the dominant Western discourses of motherhood. Additionally, Tuula Gordon's study of feminist mothers alerts us to the possibility that the very process of resistance entails making different choices about how a woman wants to practice mothering.

The studies of both Gordon and Glickman, cited above, look specifically at mothers who identify as feminists, while the women in Horwitz's study who believe that they resist the dominant discourse of mothering may or may not identify as feminists (qtd. in O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 190). In this regard, O'Reilly contends that empowered mothering signifies a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood. On the other hand, feminist mothering refers to a particular style of empowered mothering via which this resistance is developed from and expressed through a feminist identification or consciousness ("Feminist Mothering" 190). Moreover, feminist mothering attempts to balance the needs of women in managing multiple identities (e.g., mother, wife, caregiver, and student/employee) via the primary focus of "empowered mothering," which refers to the theory and practice of mothering that recognizes how women, children, and society at large benefit when women live their lives as mothers from positions of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy ("Feminist Mothering" 191).

In this broader context, O'Reilly underlines the significant differences between "feminist mothering" and "empowered mothering," even though the two seem similar. Empowered mothering signifies a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood. Feminist mothering refers to those mothers who identify as feminists and practice mothering from a feminist perspective or consciousness. Therefore, a feminist mother is a woman whose mothering, in theory and in practice, is shaped and influenced by feminism ("Feminist Mothering" 191). For example, in Horowitz's work in "Resistance as a Site of Empowerment" (2004), cited by O'Reilly, one woman in the study remarks, "[*I*]*f I was going to love that baby, have any quality of time with that baby, I had to get away from that baby, I had to meet my own needs."* Notably, another mother chose *"to paint her nails while her baby cried in the crib because she has needs and wants" (*qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism 143). These two women resist patriarchal motherhood in order to have a higher quality of life, but their specific resistances are more personal than political and do not originate from an awareness of how motherhood functions in patriarchal society as a cultural and/or ideological institution to oppress women.

Moreover, Christopher's in-depth interviews with employed single mothers requires that the majority of the participants justify their choice of employment by referring to two main reasons (rather than economic need), which are as follows: (i) the personal fulfillment gained by paid work (e.g., choosing the job that matches their hobbies and interests, such as going back to school to learn and discuss things that matter to them); and (ii) the need for breaks from caregiving (e.g., requiring "stimulation" in order to "get out" and away from the children) (90).

Notably, Christopher emphasizes how the resistance of all single mothers and some married mothers to patriarchal motherhood tends to reframe their employment and time away from their children as being important for their own needs rather than just being for their children or due to economic reasons. In fact, these women do not address how motherhood functions as a form of gender equality and/or a cultural or ideological institution. By contrast, feminist mothers resist patriarchal motherhood in order to have gender equality, and they refuse to raise children in a sexist environment and patriarchal culture. In essence, they demand more involvement from fathers and insist on a life outside of motherhood (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 143). For instance, one of the married mothers from Christopher's study, a middle-class Latina mother working on family policy for the local government, said she did not feel guilty working full-time because her younger son thrived in preschool. She noted how it was important for her sons to see that "*it isn't a woman's role unless she wishes it to be home with children all the time [...] you know, women can do whatever they want*" (Christopher 89). This mother illustrated her mothering agency via her construction of good mothering, which allowed her to resist the pressures associated with being raised in a sexist environment and culture. At the same time, however, she also emphasized the importance of her children learning that mothers have a life outside of them.

Moreover, some working immigrant mothers in Christopher's sample stated that their employment increased their gender power vis-à-vis the gender power of their husbands, though they nonetheless attempted to share a good deal of parenting with their spouses (84-90). For instance, a Burmese immigrant mother from Christopher's sample said,

> *"When you talk to your husband, it's not like a traditional Tibetan. Like you look eye-to-eye and you see that the clothes that I wear? I bought it. The shoes I wear? I bought it. So you know, you are the same level [….] If my husband would say, "you stay at home," like traditionally back home, I would feel unfulfilled"* (qtd. in Christopher 88)

Also, this Burmese immigrant mother admitted that she had to constantly struggle to push her husband -- who worked about forty-five hours a week as a carpenter -- to spend more time with the children and to share in the housework. She did find her home life stressful at times, but she also indicated that she was happy to come home after a shift at work. A few other lower-middle and lower-income mothers – one African Canadian, one African American, one Latina, and one Caucasian – said they worked in order to garner more respect from their partners (Christopher 89). Despite the fact that they might not personally identify as feminists, these married mothers from Christopher's work conveyed how they practiced mothering from a feminist perspective or consciousness. Specifically, they did so by combining mothering with employment and assuming a primary caregiver role with the assistance of outsourced caregivers and their partners. They justified their paid work by saying that it made them more fulfilled people whose actions were better for both the well-being of their children and their own well-being, arguing that it actually made them better mothers (92).

In other words, those mothers who practice feminist mothering see the development of a mother's selfhood as being beneficial to both her own motherhood and her child(ren). They do not see this process as being antithetical to their interests as it is often assumed to be in patriarchal motherhood. They are also empowered mothers because they do not regard 24/7 mothering (i.e., full-time intensive mothering that is demanded by patriarchal motherhood) as necessary for children, and they do not put their children's needs before their own but instead look to motherhood to define and realize their identities as mothers (O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 191).

Pertinent examples provided in this section support what O'Reilly has concluded in regard to the difference between empowered mothering and feminist mothering. The overall discussion presented in this section suggests that empowered mothering is a subject of feminist mothering, and that its diverse practices constitute the culmination of mothers' efforts to contest sociocultural myths surrounding the right to work, the proliferation of anti-sexist sentiments while childrearing, and the actualization of equitable parenting practices amongst spouses. Furthermore, feminist mothering embraces and promotes the idea that women need to challenge pre-existing stereotypical notions of the roles of mothers while also striving to find a balance that promotes social continuity and well-being. Additionally, feminist mothering is equally concerned with feminist practices of gender socialization and models of motherhood that relate to raising a new generation of empowered daughters and empathetic sons (O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 193-195). Feminist mothers are aware that the changes they pursue in childrearing are made possible only through changes in mothering via the feminist concepts of identity and subjectivity that relate to all empowered mothers.

Maternal Theory: Complications and Limitations

Feminist mothering offers clear-cut pathways towards delinking childrearing from sociocultural constructs. It seeks to challenge and change the many ways that patriarchal motherhood is oppressive to women via ideas of empowering mothers. Feminist mothers view the development of a mother's selfhood as being beneficial to her life and the lives of her children when it comes to positions of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy, while also recognizing how this development is not antithetical to the intensive mothering aspects that are assumed in patriarchal motherhood (O'Reilly, "Matricentric Feminism"). Feminist mothers thus epitomize women's empowerment, for they resist social dictums on parenting and create and/or embrace active mothering strategies that boost their own self-perceptions as humans, women, feminists, and members of society.

Nonetheless, "feminist mothering" remains problematic with respect to its application in real life due to the fact that mothers, mothering, and motherhood ideologies differ across cultures, racial dynamics and social class difference. As black scholars Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks have argued, many black women understand the term feminism to be a "white" term. For example, in a study by Glickman (a woman of color), two young girls note, respectively, that "*feminism has overwhelmingly, statistically, benefited white women disproportionately to women of color"* and *"here you are reading all these feminist writers, who are telling you to bust out of the kitchen and get into the work force, what does that have to do with the majority of women of color who have always been in the kitchen and the work force at the same time*?" (qtd. in O'Reilly, "Feminist Mothering" 193).

Notably, this also extends to women in some developing countries like Myanmar, where the very notions of “feminism” and “feminists” are regarded with particular fear by many women when it comes to political, cultural, and religious contexts, though younger people are expressing a growing interest in feminism due to social media (Than, Tharaphi, et al. 2-12). For instance, traditional groups and state-sponsored women’s groups in Myanmar regard feminism as a tool of Western neo-imperialism that allows the West to exert control over developing countries. These traditional groups believe that feminism demands radical change while ignoring the values of local people (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 15). Additionally, patriarchal Buddhist religious institutions exert influence over communities not only from religious perspectives but also from political perspectives. Overall, extreme Buddhist nationalist groups, patriarchal religious institutions, concepts of national unity based on non-secular ideology, participation of Buddhist monks in independence struggles under the British rule and the junta, and the interdependence between state and religious power (i.e., Buddhism) have distorted the rise of feminist ideology in Myanmar (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 15-16).

In this regard, as O’Reilly details, developing a specific study of feminist mothering that does not exclude diverse women (e.g., women of color and women from developing countries) who eschew or disavow the term “feminism” is an ongoing project (“Feminist Mothering” 193), especially when it comes to migrant women’s identities as mothers. In fact, the concept of feminist mothering fails to consider the possibility of contradiction between theory and the subjective or emotional feelings of mothers when it comes to participating in paid work. Some of the mothers may not discuss the idea that women need to challenge pre-existing stereotypical notions of the roles of mothers. This is because, as discussed in the previous section, the feelings of value and pride that many women assume in relation to their mothering work and gender roles may prohibit them from conceiving of themselves as being “oppressed.” Instead, they may view their participation in paid work as being in response to the economic demands of family life to make ends meets while also being necessary to manage childcare along with the assistance of spouses, kin, nannies, and daycare programs. Therefore, feminist mothering should also be discussed as a combination of both structural conditions (i.e., cultural, material and economic demand) and subjective feelings about paid work and unpaid work (e.g., domestic and child responsibilities).

Moreover, motherhood theory and feminist mothering do not adequately discuss how a migrant woman’s socio-cultural and political background influences her desire to embrace empowered mothering in the host country’s socio-cultural context. In fact, these two theories fail to address how the gender stereotypes that are embedded in the cultural norms and related social practices of the sending country contribute to mothering practices within the contexts of migration, mothering, and work. Given the limitations and the resulting knowledge gap in assessing mothering and work outcomes amongst migrant women, there are still some questions that are unanswered.

Specifically, to what extent does the sociopolitical and cultural background of migrant women contribute to the empowered mothering in host countries? How does empowered mothering and employment influence the longevity of heterosexual relationships in the context of family immigration from developing countries to Western countries? Finally, to what extent does the concept of gender equality in the sending country context positively or negatively contribute to employed migrant mothers reconstructing their own “good mothering” accounts via their perspectives of empowerment and resistance with respect to motherhood challenges in the host country?

Notably, O'Reilly's theorization of "feminist mothering" has particular relevance to my research, to employ it as a theoretical framework because it is defined by what it is *not* in patriarchal motherhood. I want to discover how the employed mothers of the Myanmar diaspora resist patriarchal motherhood ideologies in the Canadian host country in spite of neither self-identifying as feminists nor having any real conception of feminist mothering. Ultimately, I intend to highlight how the mothering experience can be envisioned as an overall position of empowerment and agency for migrant women in the host country via a challenging of gender stereotypes that are embedded in the cultural norms and related social practices of the sending country

Chapter Four

Findings and Discussion

Overview

This chapter is composed of two sections. In the first section, I outline the research methodology, the structure of my questionnaire, and some of the challenges encountered in the interview process. Secondly, I provide information on my qualitative survey questionnaire that focuses on eight employed mothers from the Myanmar diaspora in the GTA region, and I analyze and discuss the findings through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: *motherhood* and *feminist mothering*. This second section will explore nine themes that have emerged from my data in order to address my research questions and contribute to the overall conclusions made in my ensuing final chapter. These themes are as follows: (i) constructing a *good mother* profile in a new land; (ii) mothering ideologies and approaches; (iii) delegating mothering duties when working; (iv) empowered mothering in the context of Myanmar diasporic mothers; (iv) gender roles and concepts of gender equality; (v) co-mothering between two parents; (vi) the challenges mothers face in raising children in a new land; (viii) perceptions of being successful mothers; and (ix) feminist mothering as it relates to employed Myanmar diasporic mothers. Notably, the *Myanmar diaspora* discussed in this study refers to those citizens of *Myanmar* (formerly known as Burma) who have migrated to Canada, regardless of their ethnicity, their religion, and their given status as either immigrants or refugees.

FIRST SECTION:

Research Methodology

Eight GTA mothers were recruited from amongst employed heterosexual couples in the Myanmar diaspora. There is no adequate database of the Myanmar diaspora in the GTA from which to select respondents. In this regard, a sampling of research subjects was achieved via a combination of convenience and snowball techniques (Bryman and Bell 245). I first approached some women from the Myanmar community to recruit the right participants (i.e., mothers) who meet four specific requirements as follows: (i) they must be older than twenty, and they must be first-generation migrant women from Myanmar; (ii) their husband must be of any ethnic origin of Myanmar; (iii) they must have at least one child ranging in age from infancy to thirteen years, and they must be living with said child; (iv) they must be employed (e.g., part-time, full-time, self-employed, working-from-home) and financially contributing to the household income. Moreover, I requested that some of my initial participants refer me to other relevant participants.

My thesis employs an interpretive methodology via a qualitative research survey method. This is administered through a set of questionnaires, which are essentially structured and standardized in accordance with fifty questions that are inclusive of some open queries (these are provided at the end of my thesis under the "Appendix" section). I employ a questionnaire survey methodology for three reasons. First, it can ensure greater accuracy and ease in processing the answers of respondents. Second, it is inexpensive and more convenient for the researcher when compared to telephone or Zoom interviews, as one is not required to use any transcribing software, thereby ensuring that there is less times spent in compiling data (Bryman and Bell 94). My recruitment process was made smoother due to the fact that some respondents were not comfortable in giving consent for such recordings (this was one of the concerns that some of my participants verbally raised with me before agreeing to participate in my research). Third, at the time of my study the Research Ethics Board required a 100% non-physical context data collection process. This was because my interviews were coincident with the Covid-19 pandemic.

I was also aware of the following two possible disadvantages that might arise as a result of employing a questionnaire survey: (i) including some important open questions that respondents must write down on paper or type down on computer without an interviewer; and (ii) issues arising from respondents whose literacy might be limited when attempting to answer some of the open questions (Bryman and Bell 94, 96). In this regard, I applied the following two tactics to overcome the possible risk factors that might affect the quality of my research data: (i) I provided individual virtual meetings with every respondent via either phone or messenger so that the meetings would accord with their various time preferences, and I allowed all the respondents to contact me if any clarifications were required about my questionnaire; (ii) I offered respondents the bilingual option of choosing to answer some key open questions in either their home language or in English. Fortunately, all of my respondents were currently working in roles that required that they possess adequate English language skills. Their linguistic fluency seems to have made them comfortable and confident when it came to marshalling said skills to reply to my questions.

I provided all the participants with electronic copies of both the interview questionnaire and a "consent document," which were delivered via email and by prepaid postal service in accordance with the given participant's preference. Interview questions cover the following topics mentioned in earlier sections of my thesis: the respondent's background information; employment information; spousal information; motherhood experiences and challenges in workforce participation; mothering experiences and perceptions of *good mothering* and being a "successful mother"; and caregiving, family negotiation, and mothering-related perceptions of gender roles in relation to both Myanmar and Canada.

The analysis of my interview questionnaire follows a process of compiling, reviewing, cataloguing, and analyzing the answers by relating them to the issues raised in the literature review via the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: *motherhood* and *feminist mothering*. I have carefully read the answers to open questions and coded the relevant words, phrases, and sentences under the following five themes: (i) the qualities/characteristics that come into the minds of participants when they are thinking of being a *good mother* for their child(ren); (ii) the mothering approach that Myanmar diasporic mothers use in achieving their own definition of being *good mother*s; (iii) the ideologies of participants in relation to managing motherhood-mothering and employment; (iv) the understandings of participants in relation to the concept of gender equality in their homes with respect to their relationships with their husbands (v); the varied meanings of the term “feminism” to participants; and (vi) participants’ varied perceptions of being a successful mother with respect to migration and work.

I determined relevant coding based on the following various factors: whether something was repeated by many respondents; whether something was explicitly stated by the respondents as a challenge or was important to them; whether it specifically reminds me of any theory (e.g., motherhood and/or feminist mothering) or concept; and whether it is something new or interesting to me. The names of the participants presented in my findings and my discussion are pseudonyms.

Ethical Challenges

In this project, I position myself as an “insider” because I belong to the same (Myanmar) diaspora as my research participants, and I have similar migration experiences and cultural commonalities with them. This acknowledged, however, I am also an “outsider” for two reasons: (i) some of the participants were just getting to know me for the first time; and (ii) when conducting the interview, my position switches to an “outsider” because I am investigating my participants’ mothering ideologies and experiences of juggling their responsibilities amongst three identities (i.e., mother, employee, and wife) in the host community.

My insider status supported me in establishing a good rapport with my participants prior to the interview, while also aiding me in formulating interview questions given my awareness of cultural sensitivity with regard to the context of the sending country. By contrast, a level of trust and openness did not automatically come from some participants because they were concerned about a loss of social status in their community due to participating in my research, even though my interview questions did not require that participants disclose their household income or other sensitive information related to their spouses and family members. Some participants checked with me to see if there would be any political issues with the sending country with respect to answering the questionnaire via messenger or phone. In this regard, I had them read the entire questionnaire first, and then proceeded to explain about the consent document before allowing them the opportunity to decide whether or not to participate.

I approached ten potential participants who met the requirements to participate in the project. Eight agreed to give consent and participate in the interview process. One participant did not identify her religion, though she did answer other important questions very well. In order to protect the privacy of my participants, I do not indicate the cities they live in, the organizations for which they work, and the nature of their given businesses (this has specific relation to one participant in this chapter, who was working as a Client Service Manager of a family-owned business). Because my interview time was coincident with the Covid-19 pandemic and the attendant emergency situation in my province and country, some of my participants were unfortunately having a hard time working from home and some frontline healthcare workers were stuck at home with their children. Moreover, all the participants were dealing with online learning programs for their children, and attending to other matters pertaining to the pandemic.

Nevertheless, all the participants returned the completed questionnaires and signed consent forms within sixty days. Two surprises awaited me upon the return of their questionnaires. The first surprise was that some participants provided very specific responses with long paragraphs that evinced their desires to give voice to the challenges they faced. Another surprise was that the majority of the participants indicated that the two questions they really enjoyed answering were questions number 46 and 50. Question number 46 asked, "*Do you believe that your employment makes you a better mother? Why or why not?*, and question number 50 asked, *"Does your employment positively contribute to maintaining a happy married life? Why or why not*?" I will discuss more how the participants responded on these questions in later section (Empowered Mothering: In the Context of Employed Myanmar Diasporic Mothers)

SECOND SECTION: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Interview Participants: Background

The research participants belong to different ethnic groups of Myanmar: five are Bamars; two are a mix of Kayin-Bamar, Kachin-Bamar; and one is Kayin. The majority of individuals in my sample are Buddhist, some are Christian, and one does not identify with any religion. The age range for my sample is not younger than thirty-five and not older than fifty-four. They have been in Canada for more than six years and less than 21 years. Except for two participants, the rest of the participants became mothers in Canada (i.e., their children were born in Canada). All of them speak English fluently and they are comfortable answering all the interview questions in English. Below are brief backgrounds for my following eight participants: Cherry, Cindy, Lily, Mar Mar, Maywin, Myat, Pandora and Thidar.

Cherry comes from a mixed Kayin-Bamar ethnic background. She migrated to Canada as a teenager with her mother twenty-one years ago. They were both sponsored by Cherry’s father, who previously migrated to Canada via a work permit. Cherry graduated from high school and earned a university degree here, and she currently works as a client relations manager at her family’s business in Canada. At the time of my survey she was upgrading her education via virtual learning due to the stay-at-home period that had emerged during the global Covid-19 pandemic. Cherry’s husband is self-employed given that he owns the family business. He and Cherry have two children, an eleven-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter, who are both living with them and their extended family members (i.e., Cherry’s parents). Cherry did not specify any religious affiliation for herself and her husband on the questionnaire, though she responded very well to all the other questions.

Cindy migrated to Canada under a landed immigrant category over eleven years ago. Prior to migration, she worked as a caregiver in Singapore. She upgraded her education in Canada in order to attain a diploma to qualify as a personal support worker (PSW). She met her then boyfriend who had also migrated to Canada, in his case via a landed immigrant visa, and they subsequently got married. Her daughter was seven-years-old at the time of the survey. Both Cindy and her husband belong to the Bamar ethnic group, and they identify as Buddhists. Currently, Cindy is working as a part-time PSW in the healthcare industry and her husband is employed in a full-time position.

Lily joined her husband over ten years ago via a spousal sponsorship. Her husband arrived in Canada as a refugee much earlier than Lily, and he was working full-time when she joined him in Canada. According to Lily, her husband often took business trips inside and outside Canada. Lily holds an MBA and worked in Singapore as a client service manager before migrating here. She studied in some human resources (HR) certification programs and worked in the HR field as a full-time employee until she became a mother in Canada. In terms of religion, Lily is a Buddhist and her husband is a Christian. Lily belongs to a Kachin-Bamar mix, whereas her husband belongs to a pure Bamar ethnic group. She has a seven-year-old son and is currently working from home as a part-time data entry clerk while also studying in a graduate program at a reputable Canadian university. Lily aims to seek full-time employment with an earned Canadian graduate degree by the time her son reaches twelve years of age.

Mar Mar migrated to Canada with her six-year-old daughter in 2014 to join her husband who had previously moved to Canada as a landed immigrant. Mar Mar holds a Master’s degree in Engineering and worked as a research associate in Singapore before migrating to Canada. When Mar Mar joined her husband in Canada, he was comfortably settled, self-employed, and had obtained a reliable income. The couple belongs to the Bamar ethnic group and is Buddhists. It took about four years for Mar Mar to get her first and current full-time job here that was relevant to her education, and this was after she had successfully obtained a Professional Engineer (PE) license in Canada.

Maywin and her husband migrated to Canada as landed immigrants with their three-year-old son roughly fifteen years ago. They both belong to the Kayin ethnic group and their religion is

Christian. Maywin hold a vocational degree, and she was a housewife prior to migrating from Myanmar. She completed a PSW diploma program in Canada and worked as a full-time PSW. Her husband is currently self-employed on a full-time basis. Maywin’s other two children were born in Canada, and she and her husband currently have three children (ages eighteen, twelve, and seven).

Myat migrated to Canada via a spousal sponsorship over fifteen years ago. Her husband immigrated under refugee status a couple of years earlier than her. She earned a Master’s degree and worked as an IT programmer in Myanmar before migrating here. Both she and her husband are of the Bamar ethnic group and are Buddhists. Myat returned to school after migrating and studied in an IT support diploma program that she hoped will allow her to attain a related career in Canada. Currently, she is working as a full-time IT application developer, and her husband is also working full-time. After she became a mom, she sponsored her own mother to come to Canada. At the time of my research, she had two daughters (ages four and twelve).

Pandorea migrated to Canada with her husband via a student pass over sixteen years ago. The couple belongs to the Bamar ethnic group, and they are Buddhists. Pandorea earned a vocational engineering diploma and worked as a process engineer in Singapore before migrating to Canada. She subsequently studied in an engineering degree program in a reputable university in Canada, where she pursued a course of study that was relevant to her past career. At the time of my research, Pandorea had two children (ages ten and nine) and was working full-time as an operation and process engineer. Her husband was a full-time employee and the nature of his job required that he be out of the country quite often.

Thidar was a married housewife in Myanmar and completed high school before migrating to Canada. She migrated to Canada over ten years ago under a sponsorship via her spouse, who came here via refugee status about twenty years ago. They both belong to the Bamar ethnic group and are Buddhists. When she joined her husband in Canada, he was employed in a full-time position. She is the only respondent who did not go back to school in Canada. At the time of my survey research, Thida had a ten-year-old child and was working at a Canadian-owned coffee shop as a customer service representative.

As summarized above, among the eight participants, five participants held university degrees from their home country and had previous professional work experience in such fields as healthcare, engineering, IT, marketing, client services, and research. One participant was a student, and the other two were housewives who held high school diplomas prior to migrating to Canada. Six participants in my sample upgraded their education in Canada in order to attain their current professions in human resources, healthcare, engineering and information technology industries. In particular, Lily and Myat indicated that their husbands were very supportive of them attaining careers in Canada. Myat praised her husband, noting,

> *"He supported me a lot to get back my career in Canada. I needed to upgrade my career in Canada, and I did not get a match job immediately. He really worked hard and tried to earn more money for family until I get back to my career."*

Pandorea, who studied for her engineering degree in one of the reputable universities in Canada, also stated that her husband supported her in her journey from school to career. In this regard, the findings from my interviews suggest the following: when migrant women join their husbands in the host country after their husbands have settled in and found suitable employment, these women are themselves likely to attain a significant profession. None of the mothers spoke about a loss of career or downward mobility though they admitted that it took time for them to get a suitable job in Canada after migration. As for the case of Thidar, who did not attain a Canadian educational credential and had worked for the coffee shop, she seemed happy with her current full-time employment given that she had been an unemployed housewife prior to migrating.

Constructing Good Mother in a New Land

Normative motherhood is defined as the dominant discourse that determines what is expected and required of mothers to do, for to do otherwise would result in one being deemed a "bad mother." Generally, as O'Reilly has discussed, *good mothers* are portrayed as primary caregivers who put the needs of their children before their own by being available to their children whenever needed ("Matricentric Feminism" 12-13). When scripting their profiles of being *good mothers* in a new land, none of my participants spoke about the physical proximity of mother and child or the importance of mothers being home with their children. Instead, it seems that all of the participants had an understanding of being a *good mother* that was centered on the benefits and needs of their children and the importance of determining and observing the "pros" and "cons" of childrearing in a new environment (i.e., Canada). My interview findings suggest that my participants had a collective investment in generating personal scripts of "good mothering" that emphasized the importance of four key characteristics or qualities that they believed *good mothers* should possess.

First, some participants acknowledged the learning opportunities for migrants in Canada while also citing the challenges of raising their children in a new sociocultural environment of the host country. They believed that they should be able to observe the positive and negative aspects of raising their children in the host country via a "take it" or "leave it" outlook. When it came to educating their children, there were certain key aspects of Canadian diversity that they prized, and these tended to relate to certain personal characteristics that they valued, such as being hardworking, honest, self-motivated, and prone to avoid "immoral" behaviour. For instance, when it came to Cherry, who migrated as a teenager with her mother under the family sponsorship category (she is now a mother of two children, ages eleven and seven), she stated the following:

> *"I am lucky to have my father who migrated here with a work permit 7 years ahead of my mom and [……] But the first thought that came to my mind was to study and work harder than before knowing that I won't be having private tutoring, study guide like I used to have back home. On top of that I had to learn French which I never learned before. I spent most of my times studying, and working. I did not have much fun time while trying to graduate. That's how I started my life in Canada. I hate seeing people who don't work and get allowance from the government while others are working hard and paying taxes even though they are capable of working. That's why I always preach my kids to work hard and have pride in being honest. Nothing is free in this world and do not think of wanting to have free things in life. Earn your own income and earn the respects from your own ability. Most people respect others who are honest and work hard."*

Cherry regarded the challenges of schooling in a new, unfamiliar educational system as allowing her opportunities for intellectual growth like learning French. She devoted most of her time to studying, as she knew that she would not have access to private tutoring as she did back home. This experience transformed her into a hardworking, confident Canadian woman. Still, she does not appreciate seeing people who are taking social welfare from the government, as she personally thinks that many of these individuals are capable of working. In this regard, she asserts that working hard, being honest, and earning income based on your own abilities rather than expecting free things are important personal values that she must instill in her children in order to be a *good mother*.

Similarly, Mar Mar, who is the mother of a twelve-year-old daughter, expressed concerns about the opportunities and challenges posed by the Canadian educational system and its pedagogical approaches, while also noting key concerns about her daughter with regard to related social matters. As Mar Mar notes,

> *"Education system of Singapore is more stressful than Canada so I do not worry for my daughter about coping stress with education in Canada. But one thing in Canada is that teacher will not force the student to learn so student must have self-motivation [.....] I also worry about social related matter such as if my daughter is having friends who use drugs or drink alcohol in teenage. I tried to educate her about the bad image of using drugs and alcohol. I showed movies related to those to my daughter and encouraged her to more focus in education."*

Mar Mar acknowledges that the Canadian educational system is less stressful than in Singapore, where she worked before migrating to Canada. She suggests that one potentially negative aspect of general Canadian pedagogical approaches is that they essentially depend on students motivating themselves. Consequently, she suggests that she has no worries about her daughter coping with education in Canada. Nonetheless, she is very concerned about her daughter becoming friends with someone at school who uses drugs or drinks alcohol. As a result, Mar Mar has sought to educate her daughter about the dangers of using drugs by showing her movies about this issue, in addition to encouraging her to become a self-motivated individual who can remain focused on attaining a good education in Canada.

Second, participants believed that they should set boundaries and apply discipline when it came to letting children know what they can and cannot do with respect to traditional Myanmar cultural values and religious concepts (Buddhist/Christian). The majority of participants suggested that being a *good mother* entails being a coach for one's child(ren) and training them to be morally responsible so that they can meet the requirements of good citizenship in their given community. In other words, the participants applied the cultural values and religious concepts of the sending country as a framework when constructing their notions of "good motherhood" in a new land. The following illustrates a summary of the perceptions of some respondents, who believed that they had an obligation to teach and discipline their children in the following ways:

> Cherry *[…..] I always preach my kids to work hard and have pride in being honest. I told my children to be humble and do not act arrogant and never forget to put yourself in someone else's shoes […..] I strive to raise them (children) to become a responsible, kind, loving and caring adults […..]*
>
> Mar Mar *I educate my daughter to be an obedient, polite and respectful person.*
>
> Maywin *As a first generation immigrant mother, I believe it is important to teach them (children) self-control, to be humble and be self-confident.[…..] My expectations for my children here in Canada are to be responsible citizens.*
>
> Lily *I have been guiding him (my son) to be a good person who is respectful, kind, working hard and caring about parents and elders, and then contribute to family and society as a good citizen.*

In essence, the traditional Myanmar cultural values that the respondents perceived as important to introduce to their children and discipline them in accordance with were in line with the following personal qualities: *humble*, *respectful*, *honest*, *kind*, *hardworking*, *obedient*, and *caring* about *parents/elders*.

Interestingly, all of the participants who identified their religion as being either Buddhist or Christian believe that introducing basic religious concepts and teaching their children to follow them are essential duties of mothers when it comes to coaching their children to become morally responsible individuals in their homes, schools, and communities. In this regard, both the Buddhist temple and church are religious institutions that Myanmar migrant mothers rely on and send their kids to on a regular basis. For example, Lily said,

> *"I drive him (my son) to Sunday school provided by Burmese Buddhist temple which is a bit far from home, in order to give him opportunity to learn how to become a morally acceptable good person at home and in the community. Another reason is I am unable to teach some religious aspects in English which are very important to become a*

> *morally good person at home and in the society. Now my child knows some Buddhist concept of do and don't in socialization with family, friends, teachers and others."*

For Maywin, she feels satisfaction with her children's behaviour at home when they listen to her and are respectful. Additionally, her satisfaction with the attitudes of her children in relation to society are also supported by the compliments that she receives about them from the pastor at the local church that she attends with them. She notes, "*I experience satisfaction through the awards and feedback from the teachers at school. At home, I experience satisfaction when they listen and be respectful, and at church, when the pastors compliment my children's behaviour/attitude. My expectation for my children here in Canada is to be responsible citizens".*

Thirdly, in constructing a *good mother* profile, each of the participants placed strong emphasis on being a facilitator or supporter of the general well-being and interests of their children. For example, Lily, a mother of a seven-year-old child, said: "*To be a good mother, I wanted to provide appropriate accommodation, education, healthy life style to my child, while simultaneously coaching him to be a good citizen".* In order to fulfill her definition of being a *good mother*, Lily made a deal with her husband to not have a baby until they could manage to purchase a house in Canada. According to Lily, she had to work two part-time jobs in two different cities, as she was unable to find full-time employment at that time. When she became pregnant, she also attended maternity workshops provided by the neighborhood community centre in order to learn how to take care of her child from infancy until toddler age. As for Cherry, she notes, "*I want to encourage them (my children) to reach their goals and let them soar on their own. I will not be the person who decides their future endeavors but instead I will only be guiding them towards their goals*".

Notably, seven of the eight participants indicated that a *good mother*, no matter how busy she was, had to devote attention to her child/ren by constantly observing their strengths (i.e., interests or talent) and encouraging their talent in these areas. By contrast, it was expected that these mothers also try to focus on the weaknesses of their child/ren and figure out how to correct these problem areas. For instance, Myat dedicated plenty of time to teaching her two daughters traditional Myanmar dance and modeling after observing their talents and interests. She proudly shared with me how her older daughter had won the Junior Miss Galaxy Canada 2020-21 title and had been invited to perform traditional Myanmar dance in both the GTA and the U.S. With respect to Cherry, she and her husband noticed their older son's talent in reading and memorizing English vocabulary when he was three years old. Cherry sent this older son to coaching sessions and let him practice at home in preparation for participating in the Spelling Bee contest of Canada, where he won first place and second place in different years.

Cherry also observes that her son likes to complete tasks at the last minute, because he knows that he is capable of doing so very quickly. She has been trying to convince her son to rid himself of this behaviour, which she views as a bad habit. When it comes to her younger daughter, Cherry notices that she loves to draw and is talented when it comes to acquiring knowledge and independently expressing herself in a pragmatic manner. Academically, her daughter is an "average outstanding student" in her class. In this respect, Cherry made her own judgment about her daughter and decided to wait to send her to art school until she could better adapt to her school routine and further excel. This is similar to the situation of Cindy, who indicates that her six-year-old daughter is very interested in music, which is an interest that she and her husband are quite happy to support. Nonetheless, they caution their daughter that she must not allow this interest to take precedence over her academic focus and commitments.

The other mothers (Pandora, Lily, and Mar Mar) also discovered their children's interests and talents with respect to sports, art, music, and public speaking. Mar Mar indicated that her daughter received a Best Art prize in grade six after she and her husband sent her to painting class and provided her with the necessary painting materials at home. By contrast, Mar Mar also shared with me that she was very concerned about her twelve-year-old daughter's behaviour when it came to being influenced by some friends and wanting to go out quite often. She dealt with this issue by giving a ride to her daughter and arranging for her to meet her friends outside or by monitoring her daughter's social media time.

A fourth characteristic pertaining to the varied accounts of being a *good mother* centred on establishing an overall "do and don't" model of parenting. The following constitutes a summary of the views of some participants:

Mar Mar	*I always practice and follow Myanmar cultural values such as obedient, polite and respect as a role model for my daughters*
Cherry	*I strive to raise them (my children) to become a responsible, kind, loving and caring adults by teaching them the principle of lives. Also, as a good role model for my children, I show them my love, caring and commitments for family by giving time as much as possible whenever I can.*
Lily	*I also tried to be a role model of what is a good mother means in our Myanmar culture and always consult my child whenever my son insists the differences between me and parents of his friends. [.....] I and my husband do not consume alcohol or do not smoke. That is one way of modelling for our child when educating him the dis-advantages of alcohol & drugs.*
Cindy	*I teach my child to become a morally acceptable person within Myanmar's cultural values and Buddhist religion concept. I also follow all the life principles that I set for my child as a role model.*

In essence, for the participants the construction of being a *good mother* was influenced by the sending country's cultural norms and values in addition to its religious concepts, regardless of whether these concepts be Buddhist or Christian. As Sara Ruddick has explained, the maternal thinking of these mothers in reconstructing an account of good mothering includes three stages in the process of framing what a *good mother* is. These three stages are as follows: (i) developing "intellectual capacities"; (ii) assuming metaphysical attitudes; and (iii) affirming values for the process of good mothering (Ruddick 96). Firstly, the respondents emphasize the importance of the characteristics or qualities they should have in order to develop "intellectual capacities" and observe the new opportunities that come about in a new environment. Secondly, they make their own "judgements" about good (i.e., "take it") and bad (i.e., "leave it") practices when it comes to educating their children. Moreover, the respondents also realize that children need clear boundaries when it comes to establishing life principles and teaching them what they can and cannot do with respect to various reasons and their corresponding outcomes. Thirdly, they claim that metaphysical attitudes, which they believe are good to have, affirm a set of values that relate to the sending country's cultural norms and respective religious concepts. At the same time, these migrant mothers show their children how they should behave with respect to embracing the principles that they role model.

Good Mothering: Ideologies and Approach

Sayantani DasGupta and Shamita Das DasGupta have noted that mothers hold a special position in South Asian cultures and are vested with huge responsibilities in terms of the socialization of their children (qtd. in Maitra 156), in addition to the time that they devote to caring for their children and families. These are the expectations that have been embedded in the overall cultural context via patriarchy. With specific relation to women's migration and work, Schultes and Vallianatos suggest that the act of mothering in contemporary society extends across borders in both physical and ideological ways (3).

In this context, some motherhood scholars have discussed the mothering approach of migrant mothers based on the following two factors: i) How they were raised in the sending countries or inculcated in the Western ideal of intensive mothering, which Vandenbeld Giles discusses in relation to children as social capital who can be "invested in" (qtd. in Schultes and Vallianatos 3); ii) How their families were reproduced in the host country via the adaptation of familiar mothering practices in relation to new cultural and physical contexts (Kackute). Within the cultural context of Myanmar, parenting appears as a strict disciplinary approach that contradicts Western ways of parenting. Relations between parents and children are exceptionally strong in both good and bad times, and the relationship between mothers and daughters remains the strongest bond throughout life (Jeffrey Hays 1).

I asked participants in what ways they are similar to and different from their mothers when it comes to raising their children in Canada. To this end, Jeffrey Hays's aforementioned view relates to what I have observed from my interviews with Myanmar diasporic mothers in the GTA. Findings from my interview reveal that all the participants essentially follow their mothers' way of a "strict disciplinary approach," especially in regard to matters related to schoolwork, for they believe that their children's education should be their foremost priority given that it will likely pay off when it comes to looking for a job and enjoying a comfortable old age.

Some of the participants provided specific examples in relation to this matter. Lily did not let her son play until he had finished his school homework or practiced and learned something that she wanted him to focus on. Similarly, Cherry remarked of her children, "[*T*]*hey (kids) must do all their assignments and meet the deadline*." This is the way that she was treated during her childhood. Another similarity that the participants maintained in Canada that was similar to their mothers was with respect to teaching their children what they can and cannot do in relation to Myanmar cultural values (e.g., treat people politely, respect elders, and care for and love parents, etc.) and religious (i.e., Buddhist/Christian) concepts (e.g., forgiveness, kindness, and chanting/praying before going to bed). By contrast, the participants have also adjusted their mothering approaches, which are different from their mothers in relation to two factors.

First, some mothers adjusted their mothering approaches to acclimatize to the culture of the host country or to provide more opportunities for their children and instill more confidence in them, for they believed that things "should be changed" for the benefit of their children in a new nation and sociocultural environment (i.e., Canada). For example, four mothers from my sample made the following remarks:

> *"I do adjust my parenting style according to the culture of the country we live in for the kids to be able to be flexible and not to feel too much indifference from the world they live in. In most cases, I listen to my kids first and act accordingly for their needs instead of ordering them you must do this or do that" (Cherry).*
>
> *"My mother does not like visiting to a friend house but I allow my daughter (in Canada) sometimes as I want her to control herself and independent. But I always keep on eyes upon her" (Mar Mar).*
>
> *"Difference to my mother back home is: giving (my) kids opportunities to learn and speak their desire in Canada" (Pandora).*
>
> *"Difference to my mother is I gave my children more freedom and ability to choose more options here in Canada" (Maywin).*

Second, some participants acknowledged and appreciated how their mothers had been strict to them in virtually every matter when they were children. At the same time, however, these mothers also felt that the strict disciplinary regimes of their own mothers had left them ignorant of what they truly wanted or needed at the time. In this regard, these participants made changes to their parenting styles so that they could raise their children differently than how they were raised during their own childhoods. Three mothers from my sample expressed the following sentiments:

> *"Difference to my own mother's mothering way is that I build relationship with my child friendly (not only as mother, but also like a frend) to give my daughter a chance of being dare to say anything with mom without fear" (Cindy)*

> *"Difference (to my mother is) establishing boundaries, rules and consequences, and then I try to understand when they are dealing with some difficulties" (Myat).*

> *"Difference to my mother is that I observe weakness, strengths, like/dislike, and interests of my child and I facilitate my child's interest besides asking him what I expect him to do. I try to be flexible or negotiable within boundary if his request is not directly conflicting with academic matter and Myanmar cultural matter" (Lily).*

Cherry's narrative about how and why her mothering approach is opposite to the one employed by her mother with respect to showing affection to her children is interesting to consider. It highlights how Cherry did not want her children to experience their childhoods as she experienced hers in Myanmar. Cherry remarked,

> *"Quite different I guess. Back home, my Mom was very strict and barely praised me for when I do well at school. She liked to push me to the maximum and was concerned that if she praised me, I might not continue to do well. For example; I get 99% but she would say why did I lose 1 mark and could have been a perfect score. She does not show too much affection but she did the best she could as a Mom. She would only kiss me at night when I was sleeping.(later I found out from my mom because I asked her that why did she never kiss me) I am the only daughter she has and she does not want me to be spoiled. That's how she also was raised when she was young. But I do appreciate my Mom for being strict, because of her I have the habit of working hard, being punctual and see things with high detail and accuracy. The elders in the family said to never show too much love in front of the kids but give them good discipline to raise them. In that sense I do not follow that principle when I had my kids. I praise them when they do a good job and motivate them to do better and let them know that it is ok to make mistakes but just don't repeat them and learn from their mistakes. No one is perfect. I kiss them and give them hugs as much as I could to show my affection and to make them feel secure."*

Some motherhood scholars (Duncan and Wong; Tiu Wu; Hsiao) have discussed important aspects of migrant mothering practices within an overarching set of stereotypes and controlling images such as the authoritarian approach, the Western approach (i.e., facilitating the child's interest), and the tradeoff approach (i.e., a balance between authoritarian and Western concepts) in the context of South East Asian communities in Western countries. In order to gauge the extent to which employed mothers of the Myanmar diaspora relate to and/or differ from the overarching set of stereotypes and controlling images that these scholars have discussed, I provided three multiple choice questions to the participants, who had to select the sentence which best described their ideology of mothering with respect to raising their children in Canada.

Among the eight participants, three (Pandorea, Maywin and Cherry) selected the Western way of mothering, which meant that they first listened to and then facilitated their children's interests. The other five participants (Cindy, Mar Mar, Myat, Thidar, and Lily) said that they tried to find a balance between maintaining their parental expectations and being responsive to their children's interests. Mar Mar provided an extra note in response to this question, writing, *"I try to find a balance between maintaining my parental expectations and being responsive to my child's needs but it depends on situation. If the situation not good for her (child), we do not find a balance."* Mar Mar maintains that she cannot be flexible with her child if the outcomes will not be good for them. This underlines how Mar Mar can switch to authoritarian mothering whenever she deems necessary. In this respect, Mar Mar's views link to what Lily said when she noted, *"[.....] I try to be flexible or negotiable [with son] within boundary if his request is not directly conflicting with academic matter and Myanmar cultural matter*".

In summary, it seems that the mothering ideologies of the participants have been influenced by the cultural aspects and beliefs of the sending country (Myanmar) and by how they were raised in the sending country (Myanmar). Also, the intersections of home culture (East) and mainstream culture (West) contribute significantly to how mothers reconstruct their own accounts of good mothering practices and approaches in relation to new cultural and physical contexts in Canada. None of my participants admit that they are using "authoritarian mothering" approaches when attempting to develop their own accounts of "good mothering." Nonetheless, the narratives of Mar Mar and Lily indicate that there could be a sudden switch from a "balancing approach" to an "authoritarian approach" when the child's needs conflict with academic matters or Myanmar cultural matters.

Mothering and Employment: Delegating Mothering Duties

None of the participants were met with disagreement from their husbands in regard to participating in the workforce or engaging in paid work after becoming a mother. Notably, Lily remarked, "*My husband also does not accept the idea of educated mom stops working because of mothering duties".* Other participants indicated that their husbands respected their decisions to return to work after becoming mothers and indicated that their husbands tried to help with domestic work and childcare. Nevertheless, the question of who should be assigned mothering duties for the children when mothers are working outside of the home – especially in those instances before the children have reached school age – was dealt with in differing ways by the participants. Moreover, some of the ten ideological assumptions (i.e., *essentialization*, *privatization*, *individualization*, *naturalization*, *normalization*, *idealization*, *biologicalization*, *expertization*, *intensification*, and *depoliticalization*) of patriarchal motherhood (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14) influence the maternal ideologies of participants when dealing with certain issues.

Cindy is the only mother who sent her daughter to daycare. She did this so that she could return to work once her maternity leave was finished, though she managed to work less than forty hours per week in order to reduce her daughter's hours in daycare. As a result, Cindy effectively outsourced her mothering duties to the daycare facility due to her employment. As for the other mothers (Mar Mar and Myat) who returned to work once their maternity leave was finished, they delegated their mothering duties to transnational kin (i.e., their mothers) in the host country. For instance, Mar Mar indicated that her daughter was born in Singapore and that she could return to work after maternity leave, as she brought her mother to Singapore (from Myanmar) at that time to help her with her childcare until her daughter reached school age. Similarly, Myat sponsored her mother to come to Canada and lived with her so that she could return to work after maternity leave.These employed mothers' arrangements for dealing with childcare were shaped by the ideologies of "normalization" and "essentialization" (O'Reilly, "Matricentric Feminism" 14), thereby limiting and restricting maternal identity and practices to one specific mode (i.e., kin mothers) while also positioning female identity in the absence of biological mothers.

As for Pandorea, Maywin, Thidar, and Chery, they returned to work only when their children had reached school age (i.e., kindergarten). Instead of sending their kids to daycare, these four mothers essentially put a brake on their work in keeping with the assumptions of "biologicalization," which locates birth mothers as the real and authentic mothers (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14). On the other hand, Lily's approach to dealing with this issue is interesting. As Lily explained,

> *"I was unable to work after maternity leave in Canada. What happen was, I did not have any relatives to help me in childcare other than my husband who was working FT as well as his job nature required him to travel very often both domestic and overseas. We were not comfortable to send our baby to nursery before school aged (KG). Also, I did not want to be unproductive women because of having a baby. Finally, I accepted a very good job offer from one MNC company based in Singapore and located me in Myanmar. I was offered senior management level position and benefit package was more than double of working in Canada like clerical position. I brought my baby to Myanmar where I could have more support from my kin for babysitting arrangement. Because of my good income, I could afford to hire female nurse aid for day time and female live-in maid until my child was in certain age to send to international day care centre in Myanmar. Despite my parents passed away, my siblings take care of my baby whenever I needed to have business trip to overseas. When my child turned to 4, I resigned my job in there and came back to Canada to start him KG in Canada."*

In response to another question, Lily also discussed whether she faced any disagreement from her husband in regard to her decision to work and mother back home in Myanmar:

> *"When I was working and mothering in Myanmar for a couple years, my husband came and visited to see wife and child on long holidays. He trusted only kin or female caregiver from Myanmar when the child was young. So he was ok and just told me to back to Canada when son turned to school aged of four. It was good that I also could have some extra cash saving because of I did not stop working and jut residing in home country with good income that I could not make in Canada. When I backed to Canada, I worked PT, less stressful nature job (data entry) and I could work from home, on the other hand I studied graduate program at one reputable University in Toronto. As I said before, my husband's job nature involves a lot of travelling so I do not prefer working FT until my son is in certain independent age. For example, I can take care of my son when he is not well because of my working nature. For school, no professors will harm any mothers who cannot show up in class because of her child's illness. When my son turns to 12, my Master degree plus current and past working experience will be useable to look for a good pay FT job in Canada."*

Lily's narrative clearly suggests that she has had a consistent mindset when it comes to focusing on her child's needs in any given situation. This is because aside from her husband, she has no help in Canada to care for her son if he is ill. Moreover, Lily's mothering ideologies have always been strongly tied to "essentialization" and "naturalization" (i.e., facilitating childcare to female identity under the assumption that all women naturally know how to mother), even when she was unable to arrange to bring any type of transnational kin to Canada.

These findings from the interview link to the work of O'Reilly, who maintains that motherhood is a cultural construction and that its meaning varies with time and place. Thus, there is no essential or universal experience of motherhood ("Matricentric Feminism" 16). Moreover, my findings are consistent with the findings of some contemporary feminist scholars (e.g., Limpangog; Maitra) when it comes to the following: The migrant mothers' re-designation of motherhood remains fixed on delegating care duties to biological mothers and/or a female kin member rather than on challenging traditional patriarchal assumptions about gendered responsibilities.

In regard to the question of *who* is the primary caregiver of their children, there were basically three different answers (migrant mothers' parents, mothers themselves, and co-caregiver between the spouses) that came from the collection of participants. Myat and Cherry, who are currently living with their parents in Canada, said that their parents constituted the primary caregiver because they took care of their children during the afterschool hours. The rest of the participants who sent their kids to afterschool programs or daycare responded by saying that they (i.e., the mothers) are the primary caregivers due to the following three reasons: (i) their kids spent most of the time outside of school with them; (ii) they monitor and manage virtually every child-related matter, such as school activities, school performances, and selecting appropriate programs for their children on weekends and holidays even when they are working; and (iii) as mothers, they best know and understand their children's psychology, and this is beneficial because children prefer a mother's care to that of a father's care.

Interestingly, Thidar assertively stated that she and her husband equally shared in caregiving. Consequently, she maintained that both she and her husband were the primary caregivers. Thidar did not need to send her son to an afterschool program despite the fact that both she and husband were engaged in full-time work. To work around this issue, she worked morning shifts and her husband work afternoon shifts, thereby allowing both of them to work out a schedule via which her husband dropped off the kids at school during the morning while she picked them up after school in the afternoon.

In this context, the findings suggest that the participants' perceptions of a "primary caregiver" relates to the amount of time they spend with their children outside of school hours, attempts to decipher the child(ren)'s needs and desires, and the replacement of an absent working mother with family members, spouses, or appropriate programs for the child(ren)'s well-being.

Such a perception still relates to the “intensive mothering” ideology explained by Sharon Hays (qtd. in Christopher 75), even though biological mothers do not devote their entire physical, emotional, and intellectual energies on a 24/7 basis to their children.

Empowered Mothering: In the Context of Employed Myanmar Diasporic Mothers

According to O’Reilly, empowered mothers are those who understand that they should possess or seek to possess such key qualities as agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy. Nonetheless, patriarchal mothers do not believe that mothers should need or desire such qualities (“Matricentric Feminism” 74-75). In both theory and practice, O’Reilly’s overall argument for empowered mothering is both defined and defended as being necessary and essential *for children* due to its primarily being based on two factors, which O’Reilly outlines as follows: (i) empowered mothers make mothering better for themselves in order to provide better care for their children; (ii) empowered mothers practice empowered mothering techniques such as anti-sexist childrearing and women-centred initiatives, which call for the abolition of patriarchal motherhood and the achievement of feminist mothering (“Between the Baby and the Bathwater” 328).

My participants seem to be “empowered mothers” who do not regard childcare as the sole responsibility of the biological mother and 24/7 intensive mothering as being necessary for children. Instead, these participants look to family, their partners, and their service providers (e.g., daycare, afterschool programs, holiday camps, etc.) to assist them with childcare. None of the participants practice the full-time intensive mothering demanded by patriarchal motherhood (O’Reilly “Feminist Mothering” 190). There are, however, nuances in the ways that my participants “do” empowered mothering and seek ways of attaining its five key attributes (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy)

As I have discussed in earlier sections, the participants attain the ability to influence their child’s life when constructing notions of being a *good mother*, which emphasize the characteristics or qualities that they should possess for the benefits of their children rather than focusing on first making mothering easier for themselves. Overall, this allows them to gain agency via mothering. When the participants were asked to list the reasons that accounted for why they decided to work after becoming mothers in the host country, most justified seeking out paid work by emphasizing the potential benefits of doing so for their child(ren) rather than citing the need to contribute to household income or to send money back home to their parents and relatives. For example, these mothers justified their employment as follows: “*To raise my daughter as a mature, self-discipline and independent person […] then to contribute my income to family and to support my mom in Myanmar* ” (Mar Mar); “ *To raise my professional career based on my experience and knowledge while supporting my children education for future and to my family”* (Myat); “*Role model as a hardworking mother for my kids and save more money to invest more for future business endeavors*” (Cherry); *“To contribute income that is very important to facilitate my child’s needs* (Lily); *I wanted to contribute my employment income to family* (Thidar)

As for Maywin, she justifies her employment in a manner that suggests that it is primarily for the benefit of herself when compared to the justifications of other respondents. This is because Maywin stresses how her employment allows her to financially contribute to her family while also enabling her to fulfill her own needs for social interaction via established relationships with co-workers and friends. Specifically, she notes: “*I worked in Canada for financial reason and social reason of interacting with co-workers and friends outside of the family*”. When I asked participants how they prioritized their mothering duties, domestic work, and paid work, the majority of them responded that childcare and family responsibilities were the most important to them. Only Pandorea said that family responsibilities and her career were equally important to her, though she also indicated that she decided to work so that she could resume her career in Canada and establish a better overall lifestyle for her family: "*I continue my same career as before in Canada so more chance to explore better opportunities and lifestyle for my family*".

It appears that some of the employed migrant mothers' perceptions about prioritizing their mothering and domestic responsibilities in relation to other factors would contradict O'Reilly's theorization of empowered mothering, which calls for challenging oppressive versions of normative motherhood. These mothers assert the following: "*As a mom, I believe that my child's future is most important so mothering duties is most important"* (Cindy); "*My family is more important than others [...] I mainly prioritize time with family over work"* (Maywin); "*My family is my first priority and planning things ahead of time are the crucial skills in order to keep things running"* (Cherry); *"For me, my mothering duties are on top of others. Secondly, my work and career that is needed to facilitate my child's needs"* (Lily)

Some participants from my sample indicated that they felt confident and had an overall sense of life security as a result of being a "supermom" (i.e., a mother who successfully manages a home and raises her children while also being employed). In other words, these mothers believe that they hold the power in their households as income contributors to their families, and they feel that they are able to maintain their own lifestyle choices (whether being home for their children or working outside the home) while also upholding their personal mothering ways. This seems relevant to O'Reilly's notions of "maternal authority" and "maternal autonomy," which refer to possessing confidence and conviction in oneself, holding power in the household, and gaining the ability to define and determine one's life and practices of mothering (O'Reilly

"Matricentric Feminism" 70). Nonetheless, the ways in which the participants attain the two attributes of authority and autonomy still conform to notions of normative motherhood via the "supermom" model that they uphold in the new land.

For instance, Cherry works as a customer relations manager of a family-owned business. She justifies her paid work because it allows her to be a role model for her children given that she is a hardworking mom who is contributing her earnings towards investment opportunities for the family and its overall life security. At the same time, Cherry felt that she could maintain self-confidence and function as a successful woman (both in business and mothering), thereby contributing to society. Lily's justification about her employment is similar to that of Cherry's justification, but she explains hers in more detail:

> *"I decided to continue working after becoming a mother: to contribute income to family that is very important to facilitate my child's needs; to let my child learn that a good mom or a house wife does not mean to be with kid always at home; I want to be a successful woman in both career and mothering; only relying on husband's income is risky as employment may not be 100% secure to everyone and everywhere; and I believe mother should have their own choices of lifestyle whether being home for children or work outside but with their own mothering ways."*

The concept of "authenticity" (one of the five key attributes of empowered mothering) refers to the refusal to wear what Susan Maushart terms the "mask of (normative) motherhood" (qtd. in O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 74). By contrast, the concept of "authenticity" relates differently to my participants when it comes to how they look for the forms of comfort and reassurance that affirm both their adherence to the "supermom" model and their beliefs that they are "authentic mothers" who provide rewarding motherhood experiences for their children. "Supermom" discourse, in the context of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers, appears as a modified version of normative motherhood via which mothers perform paid and unpaid work with help from partners or other sources, thereby emphasizing how these mothers focus on fulfilling their children's needs rather than their own. Nonetheless, the participants believe that this overall discourse made them feel that they were authentic mothers for their children, thereby gifting them with an "empowered" sensibility that allowed them to overcome any feelings of oppression by making them feel happy and fulfilled in their motherhood roles.

For example, all the employed mothers of my sample believe that their employment made them better and happier mothers, though they had slightly different perceptions of this matter. Basically, their justifications in this matter centered on the following four factors: (i) wanting to be a "supermom"; (ii) emphasizing employment benefits for their children; (iii) believing that their various given professions enhance their mothering skills; and (iv) focusing on their children's needs for good programs rather than on staying home as unemployed moms. The majority of mothers indicated that they were very pleased and happy to be able to maintain their careers and mothering while also using their employment to effectively contribute to the well-being of their children in various ways (e.g., facilitating appropriate programs for their children and providing them with a better lifestyle via extended health and dental coverage from two working parents, etc.). For instance, Lily explained,

> *"I can be a better mom if I work because not only income, but also my work's health care benefits contribute my child's needs. [.....] my child can be covered 100% health insurance if combine the health care benefits of dad and mom. [...] I can also send my child to extracurricular activities and programs such as holiday camps, PA day, swimming, skating…etc. My husband's income is finished after paying monthly bills and mortgage. I believe that being able to provide good programs to a child is much better than keeping him with unemployed mom."*

All of the positive feelings that the participants expressed via the "supermom" model were for their children and family, though the mothers also still felt a general responsibility to engage in traditional motherhood work. In other words, they did not feel compelled to challenge the sexist childrearing that is embedded in patriarchal motherhood. Notably, many participants displayed their "advocacy-activism," another attribute of empowered mothering (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 74), which refers to any and all forms of formal and informal resistance to patriarchy. In particular, some participants stated how their employment/profession could enhance their mothering skills by allowing them to resist the concept of normative motherhood, which suggests that "good mothering" is full-time mothering ("Matricentric Feminism" 45): "*I am able to help my children when they need my help in technology*" (Myat - IT Programmer); "*my career as a caregiver has contributed positively to my parenting skills"* (Maywin - PSW); "*I can teach my children to become career oriented persons*" (Pandora- Process Engineer). On the other hand, Lily also highlights a resistance to normative motherhood that emphasizes the importance of mothers being home with their children (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 47): *[....] to let my child learn that a good mom or a house wife does not mean to be with kid always at home [.....] only relying on husband's income is risky as employment may not be 100% secure to everyone and everywhere*. Nonetheless, as discussed in the earlier section, most of the participants did not attain "advocacy-activism" until their children reached school age (e.g., most of the mothers did not return to work until their children could be sent to kindergarten).

Moreover, all of the participants believe that their employment contributes to their maintenance of a happy married life. Accordingly, they provide the following four key reasons: (i) money is one of the most important matters, as it allows the couple to have a better living standard; (ii) only a happy mother can raise happy kids and maintain a happy married life; (iii) two working parents can better provide for the financial welfare of the family; and (iv) their husband and children are extremely proud of having a supermom in the family who can maintain her career and mothering and family responsibilities. Overall, the findings from the interview relate to O'Reilly's explanation of the importance of empowered mothering via the following three facts: (i) Empowered mothering enables women to mother comfortably, competently, and confidently; (ii) Empowered mothering enables mothers to effectively balance motherhood and paid employment; (iii) Empowered mothering produces mothers who are the most effective in raising their children while at the same time being healthy women and productive workers ("Matricentric Feminism" 67). Nonetheless, the meaning and practice of empowered mothering still conforms to normative motherhood via general notions of the "supermom" model.

Notably, two of the four key reasons that the participants believe that their employment contributes to their maintenance of a happy married life are related to economic reasons. My participants cite their employment as a necessity for the financial welfare of the family rather than being a "choice" (for them) to work. Consequently, as Nancy Mandell has discussed, mothers' participation in paid work contribute to husbands' enjoyment of being relieved from sole responsibility for financial support (Mandell 41), while simultaneously making arrangements as best as they can via their own accounts of good mothering.

Gender Roles and Concept of Gender Equality

With respect to social and cultural contexts, a Burmese woman may not necessarily need consent from her husband to work outside of the home if there are extended family members who are available to take care of the children. On the other hand, Myanmar women are responsible for most domestic chores, and they have considerable authority in the home when it comes to managing cash flow and family finances (Jeffrey Hays 1; Daw Mya Sein 4). Myanmar women usually maintain traditional cultural practices and manage domestic issues in the household with a certain power related to their given gender roles. As Rich has discussed, it is a Burmese woman's emphasis "on reproduction and [the] potential relationship to her children" (Rich 7) that renders her the queen of the family. At the same time, this emphasis entails that women expect their husbands to provide them with financial support and a stable relationship. It is a culturally common Myanmar practice that a father's income is given to the mother, who can then design her own budget in a very pragmatic way to allow for payments towards food, clothing, shelter, health, and education of the family (*Jotikadhaja* and Nyunt 1).

Findings from the interviews reveal that the majority of the participants perceive gender roles in relation to their status as the "woman" of the house and their husband as the "man" of the house. This tends to put pressure on mothering roles, especially for those mothers who cannot seek the mothering assistance of family members and live-in caregivers in Canada. The majority – six out of eight – of the participants describe their additional familial roles (i.e., supporter to husband, decision maker, financial controller, advisor, and administrator), which exist apart from their roles as mothers/wives. Some of the participants' explanations underscored how they took on extra roles to make up for the skills that their husbands lacked:

> *"My role in the family includes but not limited to be the decision maker of important decisions such as applying for a mortgage, house moving, financial decisions, etc. This is due to the fact that my husband is not fluent in English and has not adapted as well as I have*"(Maywin).
>
> *"I control cash flow of household income to balance expense and total income. My husband is very honest to me and report me any single dollar income of him. He is an Engineer and he knows that he is not good in financing and budgeting"* (Lily).

Notably, the participants expressed their additional roles with confidence, pride, and kindness rather than complaining that their husbands lacked skills. Such behaviour clearly results in the participants managing domestic issues in the household via a certain power related to their given gender roles. Some examples are: *"My husband is very honest to me and report me any single dollar income of him" (Lily); "My husband also always ask me to make a* decision *for child matters despite he may suggest something" (Cindy); "I am advisor of the family because I enjoy to suggest better ways" (Myat); "I make most of the final decisions on my own because I* *want to share the burden of responsibility of my husband and help him keep his peace of mind"*(Cherry).

Only two participants, Pandora and Mar Mar, mentioned their roles as co-decision makers for household domestic issues. This also highlights how Myanmar migrant women from my sample do not have gender control with respect to making important decisions within the family unit. Moreover, the participants describe the multiple roles that their husbands play in the family as follows: Breadwinner, Family Leader, Helper in Parenting, and Lord of the forefront of the house or "*Ein Oo Nat*." Notably, Mar Mar described her husband as a family leader and financial controller who was also a fifty-percent caregiver to their child. She remarked,

> "*He has more knowledgeable about business, economic and political situations than me. So he explained me pros and cons of the situation that we need to consider and decide. He is also 50% caregiver to children (because he has to prepare food for her every day and he also controls her usage of electronic stuff and social media and educating do and don't)".*

Mar Mar's profession is Engineering, and she works full-time, including some Saturdays. Her husband is self-employed and works from home. In this regard, Mar Mar's husband has to assume some mothering responsibilities as a co-caregiver at home. Mar Mar's explanation suggests that she is pleased about her husband's multiple roles in the family given how these roles complement "her lacking skills" and "care sharing." Moreover, interestingly enough, switching gender roles does not seem to be a problem for the working couples in the Myanmar migrant family context within Canada. Among the participants, seven responded that they *"strongly agree"* and one responded that *"agree somewhat"* in regard to the following sentence that I included in the questionnaire, which reads: "My husband shares some domestic work at home." The specific examples that the participants provided relate to how their husbands contribute to domestic housework such as cleaning the house/kitchen, cooking, grocery shopping, and babysitting.

With respect to gender equality in the Myanmar cultural context, it appears that firm gender divisions between men and women are not perceived as discriminatory but rather as upholding feminine privilege that is oriented towards a fairer gender concept (i.e., women are treated as the weaker sex, but only in relation to their own perceived virtues of feminine modesty and feminine privilege, which are respected and protected by men). In this context, certain jobs, work, and places are regarded as being unsuitable for women because they are viewed as being specifically for men. This is not attributed to gender discrimination but rather fairer gender concepts (Jotikadhaja and Nyunt 1-2).

For example, in a traditional Myanmar family, the mother is the queen who holds the power behind the throne by running the whole family and managing everything from the kitchen to budgetary concerns, thereby essentially maintaining the daily life of the family. In the process of conferring this power to the mother, the father dedicates his income to her, thereby allowing her to budget in a very pragmatic way for food, clothing, shelter, and the general health and education of the family. Generally speaking, both the husband and the wife are happy, and they neither feel superior nor inferior to one another as a result of conforming to such traditional Myanmar family dynamics. By contrast, work and livelihood opportunities for men and women are strongly linked to gender norms: hard work vs. light work; outside work vs. inside work; and productive work vs. reproductive work. These gender stereotypes uphold and perpetuate a patriarchal society. For example, a man views strength, bravery, and tenacity as his ideal gender qualities and believes that women lack these qualities. Consequently, the idea that women should focus on reproductive work is largely taken for granted, and women are expected to engage in both housekeeping and the caretaking of family members, which are viewed as essential duties for women even when they are actively employed and contributing to income earning (Tun Thein 5-7). Notably, in the Myanmar cultural context, the father of a family is termed “Ein Oo Nat” (Lord of the forefront of the house). During the family meal, out of respect, the wife gives the first choice morsel to the husband, though this also implies that the mother rules the rest of the household as a queen (Jeffrey Hays 2-3).

When I ask the participants whether there are any specific tasks that their husbands perceive themselves as having to do because of their gender role as the “man of the house,” the majority of the participants’ answers are as follows: lawn mowing, snow plowing, car repairing, and small renovations at home. This is because these jobs all involve outdoor work and/or physical work that the participants believe should be done by men. On the other hand, with the exception of Cherry and Thidar, all the participants indicated that there were some specific tasks that they believed they must complete as the “woman of the house.” These tasks are the following: childcare, shopping for children’s goods, cooking, cleaning the house, and coaching the children. Cherry said that because she was partially raised in Canada (she migrated as a teenager), she and her husband never viewed domestic jobs from gendered perspectives.

Additionally, some participants emphasized that there were certain cultural traditions that they were still following in Canada with respect to their husbands. These cultural traditions are as follows: preparing traditional Burmese food for their husband; giving the first choice of curry or soup to their husband and/or parents when dining together; occasionally cleaning their husband’s rest/reading room; and doing laundry for their husband whenever needed. As Lily explained,

> *“I clean my husband’s room occasionally (his rest/reading room and bed), doing laundry for him whenever needed. Because of we both are busy couple with different schedules, it*

> *is very rare chance to have lunch or dinner together except some special holidays. However, whenever chance to have dinner together at home, I always give a first bowl of soup or curry to my husband as a respect to him. He says not really necessary because this is Canada. But I loved to do it that was the way my mom showing her respect and love to my dad when I was young".*

Clearly, Lily was not forced to maintain such a tradition, but she upheld out of a sense of love and respect for her husband and that tradition was carried from generation to generation. By contrast, some mothers (Mar Mar, Myat, and Maywin) mentioned that they maintained *"understanding"* between spouses while adapting to more customs associated with modern Western culture. Therefore, they did not follow any Myanmar traditions in Canada with respect to their relationship with their husbands. These examples highlight the existence of contrasting gender ideologies among the participants. These contrasting gender ideologies clearly manifest themselves in the intersectionality of the cultures of the sending and host countries. Overall, this suggests that the participants made their own choices in regard to whether they should follow the sending country's tradition in the host country in accordance with their own autonomy.

Another interesting point is that the majority of the participants discussed understanding the concept of gender equality between spouses in their homes with respect to the following four aspects: *respect*; *autonomy; sharing domestic work and childcare*; and *complementing different skills and different gender roles in each other*. In essence, they believed that these were the key elements to their gender relations. Amongst the Myanmar migrant women of my research sample, the meaning of "respect" was not viewed in relation to "superior or inferior" dynamics due to being men and women. Additionally, the participants emphasized that "respect" was a means of maintaining love between the spouses. For instance, Pandora affirmed that she enjoyed gender equality at home and reasoned that "*My husband gives me respect with love. We have no superior because of man and woman. We respect each other is the key of our relationship".*

Also, "respect" became interrelated with attaining "autonomy" when the husband did not reject the wife's decision of not wanting to be a full-time housewife. Cherry explained why she had the feeling of enjoying gender equality while also self-identifying as a feminist: "*I do quite enjoy gender equality at home. I appreciate how he (husband) adapts to my nature of being feminist and respect my decision for not wanting to be a full-time housewife. I want to be active, productive and contribute to a society*". Cindy, Thidar, Mar Mar, Maywin, and Myat indicated that they did not have gender issues and that they enjoyed gender equality in their homes due to the fact that their husbands shared in childcare duties and domestic work when required. As for Lily, she remarked,

> *"Paying respect, loving each other, and complementing our different skills and responsibilities to maintain a happy family are my understanding of gender equality in my home. For example, my husband does cooking and preparing meal that he wants to eat himself to limit my kitchen time and also he does not mind to cook for family on holidays. He does not mind about switching gender roles. I enjoy gender equality in my family because my husband tries his best to fulfil his primary roles as "a leader/ breadwinner of the family" (for example, if one income not enough, he tries to have 2nd income job out of office hours). He always does outside-jobs (snowplowing, lawn mowing, gardening…etc). He never expects me to do these works and he hires someone for snowplowing if he is on business trip in winter. In winter, he wakes up earlier than me and he goes to work only after he cleans up my car as well. But, he expects me to give more time for child care (eg., cooking healthy food and watching child whether he eats well or not). I think this is fair treat on me as a woman, wife and mother. He believes on that mother's mothering is the best for our child but it does not mean he does not want to mother our child. And this is something I can be proud of that."*

Lily's understanding of gender equality relates to a strong sense of fairer gender concepts (e.g., the man does physical domestic jobs and the woman does carework) and traditional gender stereotypes (e.g., mothering duties are a woman's job as the man is the provider and breadwinner for the family). Lily views these issues positively. In essence, the fairer gender concepts and traditional gender stereotypes of the sending country positively contribute to how women understand and interpret them in order to attain feminine power in the household.

In summary, the findings from this section suggest that the traditional patriarchal beliefs, cultural beliefs, and concepts of gender equality within the contexts of the sending countries influence subjective aspects of motherhood. All of the participants from my sample do not regard their mothering responsibilities as oppressive or gender discrimination. Instead, they maintain a gender consciousness between spouses in their homes with respect to four aspects: *respect*; *autonomy; sharing domestic work and childcare*; and *complementing different skills and different gender roles in each other*. Moreover, continuation of some traditional patriarchal beliefs that holds these mothers responsible for caregiving, as well as their cultural belief which sees mothering as part of their normal duty rather than feeling of being oppressed, further contributed positively to the objective measure of developing their mothering ideologies around the five attributes of empower mothering (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy). By contrast, the general meaning and practices of empowered mothering pertain to respecting and appreciating gender roles rather than challenging gendered childrearing. This is because the participants possess a general understanding of the phenomenon of household spousal gender equality via four key aspects (*respect*; *autonomy; sharing domestic work and childcare*; and *complementing different skills and different gender roles in each other)*, which contribute to the general participant assumption of "doing our gendered roles, no problem."

Co-Mothering Between Two Parents

The participants believe that the practice of mothering can be equally shared by both the mother and the father, though they provide slightly different justifications for this belief. Mar Mar, Myat, and Maywin asserted that co-mothering was a "must" when both parents were working. Cherry's justification on co-mothering is that the father can mother as long as he has a will to do it. As for Thidar, Pandora, and Cindy, they believed that co-mothering benefited the children with regard to two aspects. First, the children could enjoy the benefits attained from the differing mothering ideologies of two parents. Second, as result of co-mothering, the children would receive full love from two parents along with a life of safety. Interestingly, Lily expressed her concerns relating to the quality of a spouse's mothering, though she agreed that the practice of mothering could be equally shared by both the mother and the father. In providing her explanation, Lily referred to her own experiences:

> *"In my personal experience from birth of my child to now, I believe practice of mothering can be equally shared by both the mother and father if the father is willing to do, but I do not believe the quality of mothering is equal. For example, my husband can be assistant or reliever to wife in child caring, but still need to tell him how to and what to do. I cannot ask my husband to shop baby/kid stuff independently because I am only the person learning and researching about those stuff. When husband is in a breadwinner role and [.....] when he is on business trip [.....] he cannot even have time to do mothering. Another challenge is that my child resist if daddy doing mothering jobs and he prefers only mommy doing that. My husband, himself believe in that mother is the best nurturer for child. He says, I do not have to do any responsibilities including cooking meal for him and other domestic chores that he can do. Also, he eager to provide very good quality kitchen/ cooking stuff including dish washer, pressure cooker..etc to spend less time in domestic works and to get more time for child caring".*

Lily's experiences highlighted the following three things: the quality of mothering between the spouses; the nature of the husband's job; and the child's resistance to a father's mothering. bell hooks has called for revolutionary parenting that emphasizes collective parenting (i.e., males and females will accept equal responsibility in childrearing), while also highlighting the tremendous need for women and men to organize co-mothering around the issue of childcare. bell hooks's intention was to ensure that all children be raised in the best possible frameworks without positioning the mothers as the sole or primary care providers (hooks 147 , 148, 155). By contrast, Lily's specific examples illustrate that co-mothering between the two spouses is not a panacea for all the mothering problems that relate to the context of working married couples.

Challenges

There is a commonality amongst all the participants, and this is that they are pleased about their spouses' attitudes with respect to sharing in the responsibilities of childrearing and domestic work. All mothers acknowledged that their husbands offered to provide childcare whenever needed. Lily and Pandora have husbands who frequently travel due to the nature of their jobs, and they indicated that their husbands offer to provide childcare only "occasionally" whereas the rest of the participants said that their husbands "always" provided childcare. The ways that the husbands of the participants contributed to childcare activities included dropping and picking up the children from school and outdoor activities, preparing meals and feeding the children, helping the children with their schoolwork, and reading stories to the children at bedtime. The participants from my sample did not address any significant challenges relating to their husbands' participation in childcare.

Nonetheless, when I asked the participants to rank the factors they found most challenging – ranging from least to most – in regard to their mothering experiences in Canada, their responses were consistent with the construction of being a *good mother* in the host country (this is discussed in the early section of this chapter). The majority of the participants indicated that *raising children in a new culture and environment* and *balancing employment with family commitments* were the most challenging factors when compared to such other factors as *coping with financial stressors*, *learning a new education system*, and dealing with a *language barrier in the host country*. In particular, Mar Mar, who is a mother of a twelve-year-old daughter, and Lily, who is a mother of a seven-year-old son, provided specific examples relating to the mothering challenges between the different cultures of the home and host countries:

> *"As a teenager, her (my daughter) behaviour a bit change compared to her younger age. [……] for example, they wanted to go to the mall together. Last time, we (parents) brought four of her friends to this mall to watch movie on her Birthday. But this time, they wanted to go on their own. We said 'No' to her. She cried out loud…[…..] I told her*

> *that I would like to talk with her friend's mother to discuss about how two of them to go to a mall. Then, she called her friend and they discussed for a while. Later on, they cancelled their trip to the mall".*

As I discussed in the Chapter Two, within the cultural context of Myanmar, parenting appears as a strict disciplinary approach that contradicts Western ways of parenting. In particular, girlhood appears as a restricted life in the eyes of a Westerner. For example, it is not customary for a girl to go out alone after she is sixteen or seventeen (Daw Mya Sein 5). This does not mean that a girl may be allowed to go out with friends before sixteen without a parent's supervision or permission. Given this cultural context, Mar Mar would not be flexible with her daughter's demand to be allowed to go out without a parent accompanying her. Mar Mar has clearly expressed in one question (discussed in an earlier section) that she applies a "balancing approach," which entails trying to find a balance between maintaining her parental expectations and being responsive to her daughter's interests or demands. Still, she asserts that she cannot be flexible in relation to this particular issue, which conflicts with Myanmar's cultural context. As for Lily, she detailed her challenges relating to her seven-year-old son's social issues in relation to his peers and friends:

> *"I set the rule that mommy will not buy a phone until he (my son) turns to 12. But, he insists that some of his friends have personal phone although he understands after I explain why mommy will not follow to what your friends have had. I discipline my child that he is not allowed to initiate a call from or pick up home phone unless he is told to do so. When some of his same aged friends do not have such a rule by parents, it becomes a challenge for me when receiving calls from other kids in the wrong time. [.....]Another issue is that I and my husband are busy couple with FT jobs and a lot of commitments, so that we cannot accommodate for my child when some of his friends' parents call for play dates or outing together. For me, I more prefer to drive my son to Buddhist Temple's Sunday school where he can be trained to become morally acceptable person in the society, than dating with other kids for playing. They got plenty of time for playing at school and after school programs. It is hard to deal kids' social matters in Canada for busy immigrant couples. I cannot be flexible with my son for everything he demands when he was too young."*

Lily is one of the mothers who admitted that they applied a "balancing approach" in mothering their children in Canada. Nonetheless, Lily's mothering narrative sounded like she would reject some social matters relating to her child if she felt that these were in conflict with her home country's cultural beliefs and practices, especially when her child was young. Another notably challenging factor that all participants mention is *balancing employment with family commitments*. This is because the participants recognized and appreciated their husbands' sharing of carework, though as Limpangog has discussed, the choice of employed women to prioritize their mothering duties and commitments in family relations within their gendered realities left women in a "double burden" or "double shift" (205) even though they are also employed.

Perception of Being a Successful Mother

There are two primary aspects amongst the participants that relate to their perceptions of being a "successful mother" in Canada. Some of the participants' definitions of being a "successful mother" were based on a "child centered" view, which allows their children to pursue their own definitions of success rather than pressuring them to conform to their own motherly beliefs. For these mothers (Cindy, Cherry, and Maywin), being a successful mother meant supporting a child's needs and interests and then ensuring that the child was confident and happy throughout life. In other words, such mothers believe that "our children's success is our success."

By contrast, the rest of the participants defined the notion of a "successful mother" in relation to a "self or mother centered" position. These mothers believe that they are successful mothers if their children listen to and follow the discipline and guidelines that they establish from childhood to adulthood. These mothers are very confident about their mothering ideologies and the ways that they attempt to raise their children. Additionally, they also understand that

Canadian diversity can have a positive impact if their children understand what is to be rejected and what is to be accepted or slightly modified. For example, these mothers acknowledged the various learning opportunities for migrants' children in Canada. However, as discussed in earlier section, they also faced mothering challenges related to cultural and social matters when these were in conflict with their home country's cultural beliefs and practices.

In this regard, some mothers (Lily, Mar Mar, and Pandora) have consistently instilled the pros and cons of Canadian diversity in their children's minds by scripting their own definitions, which range from "good mothering practice" to being a *good mother* and "successful mother." In other words, such mothers believe that "our [motherly] success is our children's success". Notably, there is a commonality among the participants of my sample, and this is that they feel satisfied with their children' performance at school. All the mothers from my sample expressed that "getting positive feedback from school regarding disciplinary matters", and "maintaining Myanmar cultural and religious aspects" are the factors that they perceive more important than getting a good grade of A at school. This finding consistently relates to their construction of being a *good mother* within the framework of the sending country's cultural norms / values and its religious concepts, as discussed in earlier sections.

Feminist Mothering: In the Context of Myanmar Diasporic Mothers

As O'Reilly has explained, "feminist mothering is constructed as a negation of patriarchal motherhood and functions as a counter-narrative of motherhood in order to imagine and implement a view of mothering that is *empowering* to women." The difference in theorizing feminist mothering in relation to other feminist theories is that it is determined more by what it is not with respect to patriarchal motherhood, which causes mothering to be limiting or oppressive to women ("Matricentric Feminism" 136). I have analyzed my interview findings by relating to O’Reilly’s summarization of eight interrelated rules of “good” motherhood as dictated by patriarchal ideology, which are as follows: (i) children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother; (ii) mothering must be provided 24/7; (iii) mothers must always put their children’s needs before their own; (iv) mothers must turn to experts for instruction; (v) the mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood; (vi) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children; (vii) the mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother; and (viii) motherwork and childrearing are specifically regarded as personal and private undertakings with no political import (“Matricentric Feminism” 145-146).

The findings from the interviews appear to be in contradiction to most – but not all – of the eight interrelated rules of “good” motherhood as dictated by patriarchal ideology. In fact, as explored in an earlier section, the participants reconstructed their own definitions of being a “good mother” and embracing “good mothering” practices. Generally speaking, these reconstructions did not completely challenge the varying ways in which patriarchal motherhood becomes oppressive to women as described in accordance with the eight aforementioned themes theorized by O’Reilly. In particular, there have been nuances in the various ways that my participants practice empowered mothering with respect to its potential benefits to themselves and their children. Such benefits are measured in relation to the overall extent to which they contribute to the general practice of feminist mothering.

For example, my participants reconstructed motherhood-mothering in relation to their perceptions of successful motherhood, which were strongly centered on the needs and benefits of their children rather than on the anti-sexist childrearing and women-centred practices of mothering. This general finding illustrates how mothers put their children’s needs before their own, thereby conforming to the third rule of "good" motherhood as dictated by patriarchal ideology (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 146). Another example is how the "supermom model" developed by Myanmar migrant mothers becomes further complicated when it comes to analyzing whether it is empowering to them.

Generally, it appears that the maintenance of traditional patriarchal beliefs in the sending country combined with the choice of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers to prioritize their mothering duties/commitments in family relations via gendered realities, left women in a "double burden" or "double shift". Additionally, being positioned under the supermom "model." has created extra emotional work, which Hochschild (1997) identifies as constituting a "third shift" that establishes efforts that are required to plan and schedule quality time for children in addition to necessitating the need to manage children's resistance in the host country (qtd. in Gazso 270). In fact, the majority of the participants were simply engaging in additional roles via the notion of being the "woman" of the house (e.g., decision maker, financial controller, advisor, and administrator). These roles entailed an overload of unpaid domestic work, though the women embraced this extra labour and proudly regarded it as imbuing them with power. This is another finding that partially contradicts O'Reilly's seventh rule of patriarchal ideology, which holds that "*the mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother*" (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 146).

In essence, the findings suggest that the participants generally practice empowered mothering in a manner that conforms to normative motherhood via the established "supermom" model. Empowered mothers are those who engage in anti-sexist childrearing and women-centered practices that call for the abolition of patriarchal motherhood and the achievement of feminist mothering (O'Reilly, "Between the Baby and the Bathwater" 328). In regard to the

Myanmar migrant mothers in my sample, they possessed an understanding of empowered mothering in the host country that was different because of the following three interrelated factors: (i) the influence of the sending country's values and customs; (ii) the general attitude towards "gender equality" with respect to married couples, which related to "doing our gender roles, no problem"; and (iii) the lack of challenges in gender renegotiation between spouses (in the host country) via the assumption that women's employment contributes to the maintenance of a happy married life.

As discussed in the previous section, the respondents' perceptions of being a "primary caregiver" are associated with the amount of time spent with their children during out-of-school hours, attempts to decipher the needs and desires of children, and the replacement of a mother's absence while working with family members, spouses, or appropriate programs for the child(ren)'s well-being. Such perceptions relate to the "intensive mothering" ideology outlined by Sharon Hays (qtd. in Christopher 75), even though biological mothers do not devote their entire physical, emotional, and intellectual being on a 24/7 basis to their children. The central aim of feminist mothering is to reclaim the power that the mother lost as a result of the patriarchal profile. As for the participants, they do not limit childrearing to themselves as the biological mother and get fathers to be involved in childcare, and create a happy life outside of motherhood via the notion of "empowered mothering" but with more nuances (i.e., they seek to attain the following attributes of empowered mothering without challenging normative gender roles: agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy).

Some participants redefined mothering as being political or maternal activism rather than a personal practice. They accomplished this by justifying their decisions to work after they became mothers:

> *"Mothers should have own choices of lifestyle whether being home for children or work outside but with their own mothering ways [...] let my child learn that a good mom/housewife does not mean to be with kids always" (Lily); "[...] we women have so much potentials when you have confidence and not thinking that you are a woman but think of in a way that we all are equal and human beings. We have to continue supporting to pave the equal rights for men and women" (Cherry)'; "Women contribute as much as men in the society. Women are educated and successful in work places and raising the family at the same time. We should have right equally in terms of job place and fairness"* (Pandora).

However, as Ericka Horwitz has observed, some women who believe they resist the dominant discourse of mothering but they may or may not identify as feminists (qtd. in O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 190). In other words, from a theoretical perspective, a feminist researcher may observe that her research participants tend to apply a "feminist mothering" practice, which is a negation of patriarchal motherhood that functions as a counter-narrative of normative motherhood. By contrast, not all of these respondents will self-identify as feminists and their very processes of resistance may involve embracing different choices and ideologies depending on how they want to practice mothering.

In this regard, O'Reilly contends that empowered mothering signifies a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood. On the other hand, feminist mothering refers to a particular style of empowered mothering via which this resistance is developed from and expressed through a feminist identification or consciousness ("Feminist Mothering" 190). Moreover, feminist mothering attempts to balance the needs of women in managing multiple identities (e.g., mother, wife, caregiver, and student/employee) via the primary focus of "empowered mothering," which recognizes how women, children, and society at large benefit when women live their lives as mothers from positions of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy ("Feminist Mothering" 191). Therefore, a feminist mother is a woman whose mothering, in theory and in practice, is shaped and influenced by feminism. Feminist mothers resist patriarchal motherhood in order to have gender equality, and they refuse to raise children in a sexist environment and patriarchal culture. In essence, they demand more involvement from fathers and insist on a life outside of motherhood (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 143).

In this project, the concept of gender equality in the context of the sending country contributes to the employed Myanmar migrant mothers' reconstruction of their own "good mothering" accounts via their perspectives of empowerment and resistance with respect to motherhood challenges in the host country. All of the respondents spoke about how they enjoyed gender equality in their homes, appreciated the benefits of co-mothering with spouses, and felt that the "supermom model" reinforced the maintenance of a happy married life. The majority of the participants noted how their employment was important for their children, as it provided them with learning opportunities and a life beyond their children. In essence, they felt that a *good mother* does not need to be at home 24/7, and they believed in the benefits of co-mothering. Moreover, some participants indicated that their employment increased their gender power and autonomy in the family via the holding of important roles such as decision maker, financial controller, and advisor, which existed aside from their given roles of mother and wife. Additionally, they felt that their employment impressed their husbands and gained them additional respect from them.

From my feminist researcher's point of view, I conclude that most of the participants tend to seek feminist mothering via their perceptions of empowered mothering, though this quest does not fully occur via anti-sexist childrearing practices and it does not result in the challenging of normative gender roles. Interestingly, when I asked the participants whether they self-identify as a feminist, six responded "yes" and cited the reason of supporting and practicing gender equality at home while simultaneously advocating the idea that no one is superior because of their gender role. Some of the mothers who self-identify as feminists still follow Myanmar traditions, such as offering the first choice morsel to their husbands when having a meal together and considering the husband as "Lord of the forefront of the house" or "*Ein Oo Nat*" via notions of "respect" and "love." This was regardless of whether or not they identified with a religion (i.e., Buddhist/Christian) in the questionnaire. Cherry and Lily expressed their concerns about the "gender equality" issue for other women in society, even though they maintained that they enjoyed gender equality at home:

> *"We have to continue supporting to pave the equal rights for men and women. But beyond doubts, we still do have gender discrimination and we are not quite there yet even though we are in the 21st century"*(Cherry).
>
> *"I think I am a feminist if I relate to how I perceive about gender related issues. For example, I dislike treating unfair (domestic violent by men at home, wage difference at work, different requirements for school admission to certain institutions and politics especially in Burma), as well as restricting women in dress and their women's rights. In my home, I am fortunate to enjoy gender equality. But, what about other women? Gender equality is not only for one family and one community. Therefore, we (both men and women) continue to support with regards to equal rights for men and women. We also should be the role models for our children in order to respect gender equality from one generation to another"* (Lily).

In other words, these two mothers emphasize the importance of "gender equality" beyond the family (i.e., more political than personal issues).

By contrast, two participants (Mar Mar and Thidar) simply answered the same question by indicating that they are not feminists and do not have gender issues at home where they enjoy gender equality. For these two mothers, the issue of "gender equality" is more personal than political. On the other hand, Mar Mar and Thidar are the empowered mothers whose mothering practices signify a general – though not total – resistance to patriarchal motherhood. Specifically, these two mothers consistently emphasized the importance of co-mothering when enduring employment and motherhood challenges in Canada, thereby contending that co-mothering is one of the key factors when it comes to reframing “good mothering” and engaging in a renegotiation of gender roles in a new land. Overall, the participants from my sample signified a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood via their own choices and ideologies, which arose in relation to how they want to practice mothering.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Overview

In this concluding chapter, I evaluate the findings from my interviews in light of the literature review in my second chapter. I give particular consideration to the primary research questions and objectives detailed in my introductory chapter, and I acknowledge that my interview participants (i.e., eight employed Myanmar migrant mothers in the GTA) are not representative of all migrant Myanmar women residing in Canada. Nonetheless, my research reveals how traditional cultural beliefs travel via mothering practices from the Global South to the Global North. Furthermore, my research contributes to existing literature on motherhood studies by providing an overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the minority of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers who have been under-researched in mothering and migration scholarship. Based on my research findings, I outline two primary arguments. First, I argue that the sociocultural constructions of motherhood that are embedded in patriarchal society do not preclude attempts of migrant mothers to actualize power/agency via creative mothering ideologies and practices despite the crossing of borders and continents. Second, rather than consistently framing feminist mothers as absolute non-patriarchal mothers, I argue that feminist mothering should be discussed as a combination of both structural conditions (e.g., cultural beliefs, and material and economic demands) and subjective feelings about paid and unpaid work (e.g., domestic and child responsibilities). Moreover, my conclusion highlights the limitations and implications of maternal theories and feminist mothering, as these limitations and implications are associated with the ongoing redefinition of what constitutes good mothering from the perspectives of those mothers who are managing their families via both income contribution and maternal strategies. Finally, I provide suggestions for further feminist inquiry in relation to mothering, migration, and women's studies.

Reframing "Good Mother" to "Good Mothering"

The first objective of my thesis is to examine the experiences of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers in the GTA who seek to challenge normative motherhood and the patriarchal culture of the sending country via the perspectives of empowerment and resistance in relation to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country. The findings from my questionnaire survey illuminate how Myanmar diasporic mothers understand the meanings of motherhood and empowered mothering, while also interrogating what factors influence their mothering ideologies and practices in relation to migration and work. One of the foundational ideas that motherhood scholars have discussed surrounds providing a key distinction between *motherhood* as an institution and *mothering* as a woman's lived experience of raising her children (Rich; O'Reilly). As Duncan and Wong have suggested, this draws attention to the ways in which motherhood is socially and culturally constructed via race, class, culture, sexuality, and other social categories. Also, this framework rejects any easy formation of a "universal" experience of motherhood and allows for an understanding of how motherhood as an institution has often been oppressive for many groups of women, even though the act of mothering may provide a space for resistance, empowerment, and joy (Duncan and Wong 164-165).

This acknowledged, such a framework (i.e., motherhood vs. mothering) fails to consider the possibility that some of the mothers may not express a desire to challenge pre-existing stereotypical notions of maternal roles. This is due to the feelings of value and pride that the mothers assume in relation to their mothering work and the given gender roles that might prevent them from conceiving of motherhood as being oppressive. It appears that all of my participants' understandings of being *good mothers* are centred on the benefits and needs of their children. Furthermore, these mothers have a shared desire to remain dedicated to observing and determining the "pros" and "cons" of childrearing in a new environment (i.e., Canada). The findings from my interviews suggest that the participants have a shared investment in an overall script of "good mothering," which emphasizes the importance of the following four characteristics or qualities that mothers should possess: (i) the ability to determine positive and negative aspects of raising children in the host country via a "take it" or "leave it" outlook; (ii) the ability to set boundaries and apply discipline for children by relating to the cultural values and religious concepts of the sending country in order to train children to be morally responsible citizens in their given communities; (iii) being a facilitator or supporter of the general well-being and interests of their children; and (iv) establishing an overall "do and don't" model of parenting (i.e., to maintain being a good role model for their children).

In essence, the participants' constructions of being "good mothers" were influenced by the sending country's cultural norms and values as well as its religious concepts, regardless of whether these concepts be Buddhist or Christian. The traditional Myanmar cultural values that the respondents perceived as being important to introduce to their children and discipline them in accordance with were in line with the following personal qualities: *being humble, being respectful, being honest, being kind, being hardworking, being obedient,* and *caring about parents/elders*. All of the participants who identified their religion as being either Buddhist or Christian believed that introducing basic religious concepts to their children and teaching them to follow them are essential duties for mothers. This was especially true when it came to coaching their children to become morally responsible individuals in their homes, schools, and communities. In this regard, both the Buddhist temple and the church are religious institutions that Myanmar migrant mothers rely on and send their kids to on a regular basis.

In keeping with Sara Ruddick's explanation, all of my participants express forms of maternal thinking when reconstructing their accounts of good mothering, which collectively entail three stages (Ruddick 96). Firstly, the respondents emphasize the importance of the characteristics and qualities that "good mothers" should possess in order to develop "intellectual capacities" and take note of the opportunities that come about in a new environment. Secondly, they make their own judgments about "good" (i.e., "take it") and "bad" (i.e., "leave it") practices in relation to educating their children. Moreover, the respondents also realize that children need clear boundaries. Specifically, children must have clear life principles established for them, and they must be taught what they can and cannot do with respect to various actions and their corresponding outcomes. Thirdly, the participants claim that metaphysical attitudes, which they believe are good to have, affirm a core set of values (i.e., *being humble, being respectful, being honest, being kind, being hardworking, being obedient,* and *caring about parents/elders*) that relate to the sending country's cultural norms and given religious concepts. At the same time, however, these migrant mothers show their children how they should behave with respect to embracing the principles that they actively model.

The findings from my interview underline the following two points: (i) the mothering approach of my participants is based on migration theorist Irene Gedalof's notion of reproducing the family in the host country via the adaptation of familiar mothering practices from the sending country to new cultural and physical contexts (qtd. in Kackute 61); and (ii) there is an exceptionally strong bond between my participants and their mothers (Jeffrey Hays 1) with respect to the mothering approaches that they apply in the host country. All of my participants essentially followed their mothers' "strict disciplinary approach," especially in regard to matters related to schoolwork, for they believe that a child's education should be a mother's foremost priority given that it will likely pay off when it comes to looking for a job and enjoying a comfortable old age. By contrast, my participants have also adjusted their mothering approaches, which are different from the approaches of their own mothers in two respects. First, some mothers adjusted their mothering approaches to acclimatize to the culture of the host country or to provide more opportunities for their children and instill more confidence in them, for they believed that things "should be changed" according to the culture of the host country (i.e., Canada) for the benefits of their children. Second, some participants acknowledged and appreciated how their mothers had been strict with them in virtually every matter when they were children, though they also felt that the strict disciplinary regimes of their mothers had left them ignorant of what they truly wanted or needed as children. In this regard, these participants made changes to their own parenting styles. They did this in order to become friendlier and more flexible. In doing so, they could raise their children differently than how they had been raised.

In essence, the mothering ideologies of the participants have been influenced by how they were raised in relation to the cultural aspects and beliefs of the sending country (Myanmar). Also, the intersections of home culture (East) and mainstream culture (West) contribute significantly to how mothers reconstruct their accounts of good mothering practices and approaches with respect to the new Canadian cultural and physical contexts. Among the eight participants, three employed the Western way of mothering, which means that they first listened to and then facilitated their children's interests. The other five participants used a "balancing approach," which revolved around finding a balance between maintaining their parental expectations and being responsive to their children's interests. None of my participants admitted that they are using “authoritarian mothering” approaches (i.e., applying demanding parental expectations of their children) when attempting to develop their own accounts of “good mothering.” Nonetheless, as suggested by the remarks of some participants, there could be a sudden switch from a “balancing approach” to an “authoritarian approach” when the child’s needs conflict with academic matters or Myanmar cultural matters.

Delegating Mothering Duties

One of the key highlighted areas in my second chapter’s literature review pertains to the theme of contemporary “motherhood” and how it relates to assuming the ultimate caring responsibility for children by transforming womanhood into motherhood by rendering it subject to patriarchal control (Doucet; O’Reilly). This highlighted area was supported by some empirical studies conducted by mainstream motherhood scholars (Maitra; Limpangog; Christopher), whose findings reveal that domestic responsibility remains chronically gendered and female-centric even when mothers participate in the workforce and financially contribute to the family. Moreover, the findings from the samples of Maitra, Limpangog, and Christopher suggest that the majority of married mothers with young children who participated in paid work were challenging patriarchal control and the gendered division of labour in their homes via active negotiations that allowed their spousal relationships to remain intact.

In fact, the findings of these scholars (Maitra; Limpangog; Christopher) underscored the following two things in relation to the challenges faced by migrant mothers who are under patriarchal control: (i) the male spouse’s attitudes towards co-mothering or switching gender roles remain problematic when the mothers are participating in the workforce (Limpangog; Christopher); and (ii) some men prevented their wives from looking for jobs by reminding them of their childcare/mothering responsibilities in the host country despite the fact that these mothers were part of the paid workforce and held university degrees from their home countries (Maitra). There is a discrepant finding in my thesis with respect to patriarchal control and how Myanmar migrant mothers decide to participate in the workforce in Canada. None of the employed mothers from my sample met with disagreement from their husbands in regard to participating in the workforce or engaging in paid work after becoming mothers. Also, all of the participants were pleased with their husbands' willingness to participate in care sharing and domestic responsibilities. Such a finding highlights the changing nature of society with respect to married couples when it comes to organizing around issues of paid and unpaid work, thereby challenging the idea that women are the sole or primary childrearers.

Nevertheless, my participants embraced differing ways of delegating mothering duties when it came to the periods that existed before and after their children had reached school age (i.e., kindergarten). Some of the ten ideological assumptions of patriarchal motherhood (i.e., *essentialization*, *privatization*, *individualization*, *naturalization*, *normalization*, *idealization*, *biologicalization*, *expertization*, *intensification*, and *depoliticalization*) (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14) influenced the maternal ideologies of Myanmar migrant mothers from my sample when it came to dealing with issues pertaining to their children, especially before they had reached school age. Out of eight participants, only one mother (Cindy) outsourced her mothering duties to the daycare facility so that she could return to work once her maternity leave was finished. Nonetheless, she managed to work less than forty hours per week in order to reduce her daughter's hours in daycare. In particular, one participant's (Lily) approach to dealing with this issue suggests that she had a consistent mindset when it came to focusing on her child's needs in any given situation. Specifically, her mothering ideologies have always been strongly tied to "essentialization" and "naturalization" (i.e., facilitating childcare to female identity under the assumption that all women naturally know how to mother), even when she was unable to arrange to bring transnational kin to Canada. To this end, she decided to work and practice mothering back home (Myanmar) where she could have more support from her kin for babysitting arrangements while also being able to afford a female live-in caregiver until her child turned four and she could start him in kindergarten in Canada. Once her child was in kindergarten, she looked for a part-time work-from-home type job while upgrading her education at a reputable university in Canada with the aim of eventually seeking full-time professional employment.

As for the other two mothers who returned to work once their maternity leave was finished, they delegated their mothering duties to transnational kin (i.e., their mothers) in the host country. These employed mothers' arrangements for dealing with childcare were shaped by the ideologies of "normalization" and "essentialization" (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14), which limited and restricted maternal identity and practices to one specific mode (i.e., kin mothers) while also positioning female identity in the absence of biological mothers. The remaining four mothers opted to take a break from their careers until their children had reached school age. In other words, instead of sending their kids to daycare, these four mothers essentially put a brake on their work, thereby adhering to the assumptions of "biologicalization," which locates birth mothers as the "real" and "authentic" mothers (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 14).

The delegation of mothering duties after children had reached school age was based on the three following options: (i) relying on "after school programs" and holiday camps; (ii) sharing mothering duties via the management of working shifts (e.g., morning and afternoon shifts) or the strategic attainment of certain employment (e.g., self-employment, work-from-home jobs) amongst spouses to cover the child's school drop-off and pickup timetable; and (iii) having transnational kin (i.e., parents/mothers) in Canada. Notably, the participants possess shared perceptions of what constitutes a “primary caregiver,” and these perceptions all relate to the amount of time that a caregiver spends with children outside of school hours. Those participants who are currently living with their parents in Canada believe that their parents constitute the primary caregivers given that they take care of their children during the afterschool hours. All of the participants who sent their kids to afterschool programs or daycare responded by saying that they (i.e., the mothers) are the primary caregivers due to the following three reasons: (i) their kids spent most of their time outside of school with them; (ii) they monitor and manage virtually every child-related matter, such as school activities, school performances, and selecting appropriate programs for their children on weekends and holidays even when they are working; and (iii) they best know and understand their children’s psychological makeups, and this is beneficial because young children generally prefer a mother’s care to that of a father’s care.

Only one participant from my sample (Thidar) assertively stated that she and her husband were the primary caregivers. This is because they did not need to send their son to an afterschool program even though they were both engaged in full-time work. She worked morning shifts and her husband worked afternoon shifts, thereby allowing them both to work out a schedule via which her husband dropped off their son at school during the morning while she picked him up after school in the afternoon. The overall findings from my work link to the work of O’Reilly, who contends that motherhood is a cultural construction and that its meaning varies with time and place. Thus, there is no essential or universal experience of motherhood (“Matricentric Feminism” 16). The Myanmar migrant mothers’ re-designation of motherhood remains favourable with regard to delegating care duties to biological mothers and/or a female kin member (especially before their children are school aged) and relying on afterschool programs and daycare or co-mothering (i.e., sharing childcare duties between the spouses).

Empowered Mothering: Nuances

All of the participants from my sample seem to be "empowered mothers" who do not regard childcare as the sole responsibility of the biological mother and 24/7 intensive mothering as being necessary for children. Instead, these participants look to family, their partners, and their service providers (e.g., daycare, afterschool programs, holiday camps, etc.) to assist them with childcare. None of the participants practice the full-time intensive mothering demanded by patriarchal motherhood (O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 190). There are, however, nuances in the ways that my participants "do" empowered mothering and seek ways of attaining its five key attributes (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy).

The participants attain the ability to influence their child's life when constructing notions of being a *good mother*. Such notions emphasize the characteristics or qualities that mothers should possess for the benefits of their children rather than focusing on first making mothering easier for the mothers themselves. Overall, this process allows the participants to gain agency via mothering. The majority of the participants indicated that they felt confident and had an overall sense of life security as a result of being a "supermom" (i.e., a mother who successfully manages a home and raises her children while also being employed). In other words, these mothers believe that they hold the power in their households as income contributors to their families, and they feel that they are able to maintain their own lifestyle choices (e.g., being home for their children or working outside the home) while also upholding their personal mothering ways. This seems relevant to O'Reilly's notions of "maternal authority" and "maternal autonomy," which refer to possessing confidence and conviction in oneself, holding power in the household, and gaining the ability to define and determine one’s life and practices of mothering (“Matricentric Feminism” 70). Nonetheless, the ways in which the participants attain the two attributes of authority and autonomy still conform to notions of normative motherhood via the “supermom” model that they uphold in the new land.

As for the employed Myanmar diasporic mothers from my sample, the concept of “authenticity” does not refer to a refusal to wear the mask of normative motherhood. They look for comfort and reassurance and conform to the “supermom” model by being “authentic mothers” who provide the most rewarding motherhood experiences for their children. “Supermom” discourse, in the context of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers, appears as a modified version of normative motherhood via which mothers perform paid and unpaid work with help from partners or other sources, thereby emphasizing how mothers focus on fulfilling their children’s needs rather than their own. It is arguable that being a supermom does not necessarily empower a mother if one considers O’Reilly’s rationale for empowered mothering, which is both defined and defended as being necessary and essential for children based on the following two factors: (i) empowered mothers make mothering better for themselves in order to provide better care for their children; (ii) empowered mothers practice techniques such as anti-sexist childrearing and women-centred initiatives, which call for the abolition of patriarchal motherhood and the achievement of feminist mothering (“Between the Baby and the Bathwater” 328). By contrast, the supermom model actually seems to cause more oppression than patriarchal motherhood given that it requires that women do everything by engaging in both paid and unpaid labour.

Additionally, the supermom model creates extra emotional work, which Hochschild (1997) identifies as constituting a “third shift” that establishes efforts that are required to plan and schedule quality time for children while simultaneously necessitating the management of children’s resistance in the host country (qtd. in Gazso 270). Nonetheless, the participants believe that this overall discourse made them feel that they were authentic mothers for their children, thereby gifting them with an “empowered” sensibility that allowed them to overcome any feelings of oppression by making them feel happy and fulfilled in their motherhood roles. All of the positive feelings that the participants expressed via the “supermom” model were for their children and family, though the mothers also still felt a general responsibility to engage in traditional motherhood work. In other words, they did not feel compelled to challenge the sexist childrearing that is embedded in patriarchal motherhood.

Notably, many participants displayed their “advocacy-activism,” which is another attribute of empowered mothering (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 74) that refers to any and all forms of formal and informal resistance to patriarchy. In particular, some participants stated how their employment/profession could enhance their mothering skills by allowing them to resist the concept of normative motherhood, which suggests that good mothering is full-time mothering (O’Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 45). On the other hand, some participants highlight a resistance to normative motherhood that emphasizes the importance of mothers being home with their children (“Matricentric Feminism” 47), thereby indicating how their employment out of the home could let their children learn how to be a “good” mom or a housewife who does not always need to be home. Nonetheless, as discussed in the earlier section, most of the participants did not attain “advocacy-activism” until their children had reached school age (e.g., most of the mothers did not return to work until their children could be sent to kindergarten).

All of the participants believe that their employment contributes to their maintenance of a happy married life due to the following four reasons: (i) money is one of the most important matters, as it allows the couple to have a better living standard; (ii) only a happy mother can raise happy kids and maintain a happy married life; (iii) two working parents can better provide for the financial welfare of the family; and (iv) the husband and children are extremely proud of having a supermom in the family who can balance her career, mothering, and family responsibilities. Notably, two of these four key reasons are related to economic factors, thereby emphasizing how employment is a necessity for the financial welfare of the family rather than a "choice" made by the mothers. By participating in paid work, these mothers enhance the general happiness of their husbands by relieving them of the burdensome responsibility of being the sole breadwinners (Mandell 41). In doing this, these mothers secure the best arrangements they can via their own accounts of good mothering. Overall, the findings from my interviews relate to O'Reilly's explanation of the importance of empowered mothering via three facts: (i) empowered mothering enables women to mother comfortably, competently, and confidently; (ii) empowered mothering enables mothers to effectively balance motherhood and paid employment; (iii) empowered mothering produces mothers who are the most effective in raising their children while at the same time remaining healthy women and productive workers ("Matricentric Feminism" 67). However, the meaning and practice of empowered mothering still conforms to normative motherhood via general notions of the "supermom" model. In other words, my participants seek to create empowered mothering without challenging sexist childrearing and engaging in women-centred initiatives.

Empowered Mothering: Contributing vs. Limiting Factors

According to O'Reilly, the aim of empowered mothering is to reclaim the power that has been stolen and withheld by patriarchal motherhood, thereby allowing mothers to imagine and implement a mode of mothering that is empowering to them ("Matricentric Feminism" 66). Empowered mothers are deemed more effective mothers due to two interrelated factors: (i) they first make mothering better for themselves in order to provide better care for their children and protect them; and (ii) they practice empowered mothering via anti-sexist childrearing and women-centered practices, which call for the abolition of patriarchal motherhood and the achievement of feminist mothering ("Between the Baby and the Bathwater" 328). However, it should be noted that no patriarchal setting is quite the same or continues to be the same throughout time with respect to cultures, racial dynamics, and social class differences (Kaufman 162)

In the case of Myanmar diasporic mothers, the intersections of the sending country (East) and the mainstream culture (West) contribute significantly to how these mothers reconstruct their own accounts of good mothering practices, which give them an "empowered sensibility" that allows them to resist the challenges associated with motherhood within the new cultural and physical contexts of Canada. The findings from my thesis reveal the extent to which married Myanmar women resist and maintain the patriarchal culture of the sending country via the assumptions of their own traditional values and cultural beliefs. Consequently, while all of my participants register as empowered mothers, they neither challenge normative gender roles nor practice anti-sexist childrearing. As discussed in the previous section, the overall practice of empowered mothering for employed Myanmar diasporic mothers is generally child-centered, though it is constructed under the supermom model that these mothers reconstruct in the new land. There are four interrelated factors that cause and contribute to the empowerment of Myanmar migrant mothers within the context of the sending country's cultural and traditional beliefs, which they reconstruct via their own accounts of good mothering in the host country.

First, in the Myanmar cultural context, the general understanding of gender roles and gender equality is strongly tied to gendered concepts of the "woman" of the house and the "man" of the house, which are tied to notions of a gendered division of labour (e.g., hard work vs. light work; outside work vs. inside work; and productive work vs. reproductive work). These gender stereotypes seem to uphold and perpetuate a patriarchal society. By contrast, in a traditional Myanmar family, women are rendered the queens of the family via reproduction and their relationships to their children. They are expected to manage the budgeting of household income in relation to payments towards food, clothing, accommodation, health, and education. On the other hand, men are regarded as the financial supporters or breadwinners, and it is a culturally common Myanmar practice that a father's income is given to the mother so that she can maintain a stable relationship between the spouses (Jeffrey Hays 1; Daw Mya Sein 4; Jotikadhaja and Nyunt 1). Moreover, it appears that firm gender divisions between men and women are not perceived as discriminatory but rather as upholding feminine privilege that is oriented towards fairer gender concepts (i.e., women are treated as the weaker sex, but only in relation to their own perceived virtues of feminine modesty and feminine privilege, which are respected and protected by men) (Jotikadhaja and Nyunt 1-2). Such beliefs about "gender roles" and "gender equality" within the context of the sending country reinforce how women and men perform their respective traditional gender roles as the "good woman" and "good man" of the house. Such a factor provides the foundational belief for Myanmar women in upholding the cultural belief that mothering is their normal duty, which is unrelated to notions of oppression.

As I detailed in my fourth chapter, the majority of my participants discussed the issue of equality between spouses within the household with respect to the following four factors: *respect*; *autonomy; sharing domestic work and childcare*; and *complementing different skills and different gender roles in each other* when it comes to the mother juggling the responsibilities between mothering and employment. My participants believed that these four factors were the key elements pertaining to their gender relations in their new home of Canada. For instance, their interpretation of the word “respect” was not viewed in relation to “superior or inferior” dynamics with regard to being either male or female. Instead, the participants emphasized how “respect” was a means of maintaining love between the spouses. Also, “respect” became interrelated with attaining “autonomy” for some mothers when their husbands respected their desires to avoid being full-time housewives.

Surprisingly, my findings suggest that switching gender roles (when the couples participate in the workforce) posed no problem for the husbands of all my participants. In this regard, these employed Myanmar diasporic mothers believed that they did not have gender issues and that they enjoyed gender equality in their homes because their husbands shared in childcare duties and domestic work when required. In essence, the continuation of some traditional patriarchal beliefs that hold these mothers responsible for caregiving – combined with their shared belief that mothering is a part of their normal duty rather than an oppressive phenomenon -- further positively contributes to their objective measure of developing mothering ideologies around five key attributes of empowered mothering (i.e., agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy). By contrast, the general meaning and practices of empowered mothering pertain to respecting and appreciating gender roles rather than challenging gendered childrearing. Moreover, my participants possess a general understanding of household spousal gender equality via four key aspects (*respect*; *autonomy; sharing domestic work and childcare*; and *complementing different skills and different gender roles in each other),* which contribute to their shared belief in "doing our gendered roles, no problem."

Second, the practice of co-mothering between two parents reinforces objective measures of developing new modes of mothering practice, which are empowering to employed Myanmar migrant mothers from my sample. All of my participants believe that the practice of mothering can be equally shared by both the mother and the father as long as the fathers have a will to do it, though they provide slightly different justifications via two aspects: (i) the children could enjoy the benefits attained from the differing mothering ideologies of two parents; and (ii) as a result of co-mothering, the children would receive full love from two parents along with a life of safety. By contrast, some expressed their concerns in relation to the following three points: (i) the quality of mothering between the spouses; (ii) the nature of the husband's job (e.g., he is on a business trip very often); and (iii) the child's resistance to a father's mothering.

This second factor (i.e., the practice of co-mothering) both positively and negatively contributes to making empowered mothering achievable for my participants. The positive contribution resides in how my participants acknowledge the benefits of fathers becoming involved with their children's lives in active and nurturing ways, thereby underscoring a phenomenon that has been explored in the work of Nicole L. Willey (Willey 20). On the other hand, a negative contribution can be found in the observations of some of my participants, who acknowledge that while co-mothering between the spouses decreases a mother's child-responsibility workload, this process may also limit the achievement of empowered mothering via the following three scenarios: i) the mothers concern themselves with the quality of mothering between the spouses; ii) the spouse cannot often be physically present at home because of the nature of his job; iii) the child is resistant to the father's mothering. Overall, this illustrates how co-mothering between two spouses – an aspect of what hooks terms "revolutionary parenting" (147) given its focus on raising children in the best possible frameworks without positioning the mothers as sole care providers – is not a panacea for all of the mothering problems that relate to working married couples.

Third, the pattern of migration in this particular group sample significantly prohibits a sudden switching of social class (i.e., downward class mobility) in the host country, which can (re)shape the mothering ideologies of migrant mothers when they are located in the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. My research participants migrated to Canada via three different types of immigration categories (student pass, single landed immigrant, and family/spousal sponsorship). Those who journeyed to Canada via first and second patterns of migration studied the relevant programs in the host country in order to attain the same career they had in the sending country. The rest of the participants came to Canada via third patterns of migration (i.e., family/spouse sponsorship) after their sponsors – who had previously migrated to Canada via employment permit or refugee status – had settled in and found suitable employment. Overall, none of these migrant mothers experienced a loss of career or downward mobility, though they admitted that it took time for them to attain suitable jobs in Canada after migration. This is largely due to the fact that these mothers got the opportunity to upgrade their educations in Canada while also receiving the financial support of their sponsors (e.g., husbands, parents) upon migration.

Fourth, it appears that the majority of my participants have husbands who possess non-patriarchal mindsets. Consequently, my participants were able to make empowered mothering ideologies "doable" in the host country, though they were still following certain cultural traditions in Canada with respect to their husbands. In particular, Lily indicated that her husband did not accept the idea that an educated mom should stop working because of mothering duties. Additionally, Lily's husband reminded her that it is not really necessary to maintain some cultural traditions in Canada. Moreover, most of the participants indicated that their husbands respected their decisions to return to work after they had become mothers and even tried to help with domestic work and childcare. Such findings relate to the research of Nicole L. Willey, who notes the following: *"Breaking down rigid gender roles in the home is one way to ensure that such patterns do not replicate in the next generation* […] *will prevent the reproduction of traditional gender roles"* (Willey 25).

In summary, my research sheds light on the following four interrelated factors: (i) the cultural beliefs about gender roles and the concept of gender equality in the context of the sending country; (ii) revolutionary parenting practice (i.e., co-mothering between two parents); (iii) the pattern of migration in this particular group sample; and (iv) the role of non-patriarchal fathers in the host country, greatly contribute to how employed Myanmar diasporic mothers reconstruct good mothering practices via empowered perspectives that relate to the challenges associated with motherhood in the Canadian host country. By contrast, the concept of gender equality and traditional cultural beliefs in relation to Myanmar married couples limits the participants to becoming absolute non-patriarchal mothers (i.e., prohibits them from becoming empowered mothers who practice empowered mothering via anti-sexist childrearing and women-centered practices that aim for the abolition of patriarchal motherhood and the achievement of feminist mothering).

Perception of Being a Successful Mother

Despite there being similarities in the mothering issues experienced during post-migration, the examination of migrant motherhood identities necessitates an understanding of the role of motherhood in the construction of identities amongst female migrants. Such an understanding allows for nuances to emerge, as one considers how social class, gender normative roles, responsibilities, ethnic-racial identities, and other cultural factors affect mothering experiences (Vallianatos and Kuroczycka-Schultes 263). As I detail in my second chapter, there are some motherhood scholars who have explored the mothering practices of South East Asian women in Canada (Limpangog; Meiyappan and Lohfeld; Maitra). However, while the in-depth interviews in these studies cover migrant women from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Tamils), they do not include women from Myanmar.

In this regard, the second objective of my thesis is to contribute to existing literature on motherhood studies by providing an overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the minority of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers who have been under-researched with regard to their perceptions of "successful motherhood." My findings reveal two key factors amongst my participants with respect to their perceptions of being successful mothers in Canada. The first factor pertains to those participants who define being a "successful mother" in relation to a "child-centred" approach via which they allow their children to pursue their own definitions of success rather than pressuring them to conform to their motherly beliefs. With regard to these mothers, being a "successful mother" means supporting a child's needs and interests and then ensuring that the child is confident and happy throughout life. In other words, such mothers believe that "Our children's success is our success". Notably, such findings link to three empirical studies, which reveal the following: most Asian-heritage parents are warm, supportive, and loving towards their children (Susie D. Lamborn et al. and Niobe Way et al.), and Chinese immigrant mothers perceive contrasts between Chinese and U.S. parenting styles that lead them to learn how to acculturate and become more flexible in their parenting beliefs and practices so that they can promote their children's holistic development in the U.S. (Clarissa Cheah et al., qtd. in Tiu Wu 111).

By contrast, the rest of the participants defined being a "successful mother" in relation to a "self or mother-centered" position. These mothers believe that they are successful if their children listen to them and follow the discipline and guidelines that they establish for them from childhood to adulthood. These mothers are very confident about their mothering ideologies and how they raise their children. Additionally, some mothers have consistently instilled the "pros" and "cons" of Canadian diversity within their children with regard to sociocultural matters that conflict with the traditional values of their home country. In other words, these mothers believe that "our [motherly] success is our children's success.

In the context of the East Asian community, one qualitative study (Chang and Greenberger in 2012) suggests that Chinese American mothers felt more parent satisfaction when their children were getting good grades as compared to European American mothers. Consequently, this tends to create another controlling image of East Asian mothers that depicts "Asian mothering" as "Tiger Mothering," which is an authoritarian parenting approach idealized by Amy Chua (qtd. in Duncan and Wong 174; Tiu Wu 110). Notably, such a controlling image contradicts my findings, for there is a commonality amongst all of the participants in my sample. Specifically, all of the mothers from my sample expressed that "getting positive feedback from school regarding disciplinary matters" and "maintaining Myanmar cultural and religious aspects" are the factors that they regard as being more important than receiving an A grade at school.

These findings consistently relate to their constructions of being “good mothers” within the framework of their shared sending country’s cultural norms/values and its religious concepts, which are all discussed in an earlier section.

Are they Feminist Mothers?

O’Reilly defines feminist mothering as “a practice that seeks to grant mothers agency” (i.e., mothering practices that facilitate women’s power in challenging aspects of institutionalized motherhood); *authority* (i.e., confidence and conviction in oneself); *authenticity* (i.e., being true to oneself in making a decision that is consistent with one’s own beliefs and values); *autonomy* (i.e., holding power in the household); and *advocacy/activism* (i.e., the potential political and social dimensions of motherwork that are expressed in anti-sexist childrearing or maternal activism), which are all denied to them in patriarchal motherhood. Additionally, feminist mothering has developed in response to the mother’s dissatisfaction with and dislike of traditional motherhood via the notion of “empowered mothering,” thereby mandating that fathers be involved in childcare, engage in activism, and help facilitate a life for their spouses outside of motherhood (O’Reilly “Feminist Mothering” 189).

However, studies (Horwitz; Gordon and Glickman) have shown that all the women who resist the dominant discourse of mothering via their own mothering ways may or may not identify as feminists (qtd. in O’Reilly ““Feminist Mothering” 190). By contrast, some married or single mothers resist patriarchal motherhood and either reframe their employment or go back to school. However their justification for doing so was to be time away from children that was for their own needs rather than just being for the benefits of their children or due to economic reasons (Christopher 90), In this regard, O’Reilly underscores the significant differences between “feminist mothering” and “empowered mothering,” even though the two seem similar.

Empowered mothering signifies a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood. Feminist mothering refers to those mothers who identify as feminists and practice mothering from a feminist perspective or consciousness. Therefore, a feminist mother is a woman whose mothering, in theory and in practice, is shaped and influenced by feminism (O'Reilly "Feminist Mothering" 191). Moreover, O'Reilly emphasizes how anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism (i.e., mother-centred rather than child-centred empowered mothering) are the significant and essential tasks of feminist mothering given that they address the needs of mothers on behalf of children and support feminist childrearing for children ("Between the Baby and the Bathwater" 325-326).

There are nuances in the various ways that the Myanmar migrant mothers in my sample practice empowered mothering with respect to its potential benefits for their children and themselves. Such benefits are measured in relation to the overall extent to which they contribute to the general practice of feminist mothering. For example, my participants reconstructed motherhood-mothering in relation to their perceptions of successful motherhood, which were strongly centred on the needs and benefits of their children rather than on the anti-sexist childrearing and women-centred practices of mothering. This general finding illustrates how mothers put their children's needs before their own, thereby conforming to the third rule of "good" motherhood (i.e., mothers must always put their children's needs before their own) as dictated by patriarchal ideology (O'Reilly "Matricentric Feminism" 146). Another issue is that the "supermom model" developed by Myanmar migrant mothers tends to become complicated when it comes to analyzing whether or not it is empowering for these mothers.

The participants' reconstruction of motherhood-mothering in relation to their perceptions of successful motherhood was strongly centered on the needs and benefits of their children rather than on the anti-sexist childrearing and women-centred practices of mothering. In fact, the continuation of some traditional patriarchal beliefs in the context of the sending country along with the choice of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers to prioritize their mothering duties and commitments in family relations within their gendered realities leaves these women in a double shift. Additionally, being positioned under the supermom "model" creates extra emotional work, which Hochschild (1997) identifies as constituting a "third shift" that establishes efforts that are required to plan and schedule quality time for children in addition to necessitating the need to manage children's resistance in the host country (qtd. in Gazso 270). The majority of the participants were simply engaging in additional roles via the notion of being the "woman" of the house (e.g., decision maker, financial controller, advisor, and administrator). These roles entailed an overload of unpaid domestic work, though the women embraced this extra labour and proudly regarded it as imbuing them with power. In essence, my findings suggest that the participants generally practice empowered mothering in a manner that conforms to normative motherhood via the established "supermom" model.

As discussed in the previous section, the respondents' perceptions of being a "primary caregiver" are associated with the amount of time spent with their children during out-of-school hours combined with attempts to decipher the needs and desires of children. This overall process is also influenced by the replacement of a mother's absence while working with family members, spouses, and appropriate programs for the child(ren)'s well-being. Such perceptions relate to the "intensive mothering" ideology outlined by Sharon Hays (qtd. in Christopher 75), even though biological mothers do not devote their entire physical, emotional, and intellectual being on a 24/7 basis to their children. The central aim of feminist mothering is to reclaim the power that the mother lost as a result of the patriarchal profile. As for the participants, they do not limit childrearing to themselves as the biological mothers. They get fathers to be involved in childcare, and they create happy lives outside of motherhood via nuanced notions of "empowered mothering" (i.e., they seek to attain the following attributes of empowered mothering without challenging normative gender roles: agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy). My participants possessed an understanding of empowered mothering in the host country that was different because of the following three interrelated factors: (i) the influence of the sending country's values and customs; (ii) the general attitudes towards "gender equality" with respect to married couples, which related to "doing our gender roles, no problem"; and (iii) the lack of challenges in gender renegotiation between spouses (in the host country) via the general assumption that women's employment contributes to the maintenance of a happy married life.

Interestingly, when I asked the participants whether they self-identify as feminists, six responded "yes" and cited the reason of supporting and practicing gender equality at home while at the same time advocating the idea that nobody is superior because of their gender role. Some of the mothers who self-identify as feminists still follow Myanmar traditions, such as offering the first-choice morsel to their husbands when having a meal together and considering the husband as "Lord of the forefront of the house" or "*Ein Oo Nat*" via notions of "respect" and "love." They did this regardless of whether or not they identified with a religion (i.e., Buddhist/Christian) in the questionnaire. Also, some of those mothers emphasize the importance of "gender equality" beyond the family (i.e., more political than personal issues) by expressing concerns about the "gender equality" issue for other women in society, even though they maintain that they personally enjoy gender equality at home.

By contrast, two participants (Mar Mar and Thidar) simply answered the same question by indicating that they are not feminists and do not have gender issues at home where they enjoy gender equality. For these two mothers, the issue of "gender equality" is more personal than political, though they nonetheless qualify as empowered mothers whose mothering practices represent a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood. Specifically, these two mothers consistently emphasized the importance of co-mothering when enduring employment and motherhood challenges in Canada, thereby contending that co-mothering is one of the key factors when it comes to reframing "good mothering" and engaging in a renegotiation of gender roles in a new land. Overall, my participants signified a general resistance to patriarchal motherhood via their own choices and ideologies, which arose in relation to how they want to practice mothering. From a feminist researcher's point of view, I conclude that most of my participants tend to *partially* seek feminist mothering via their own perceptions of empowered mothering. I say partially, because they do not emphasize anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism, which are the significant and essential tasks of feminist mothering that are required in order to address the needs of mothers on behalf of children and feminist childrearing for children.

Understanding "Feminism"

As I explained in my first chapter, historical and political factors have also influenced Myanmar's patriarchal setting. These factors have in turn shaped how diasporic Myanmar women understand their gender roles and womanhood/motherhood while also underscoring how they interpret the meaning of "feminism" in the host country. Based on my review of the literature of various researchers and scholars, I have found that social rejections of feminism in Myanmar and the general reluctance of Mynamar women to identify as feminists emanate from the fact that there has been no actual Burmese translation of the term “feminism,” which is mostly referred to as “ei-hti-ya-wada” (female ideology), meaning something that focuses only on women’s issues. In this regard, most Burmese people perceive feminism as being biased in favour of women or as being an ideology that promotes female dominance and misandry. Such a misperception has cultivated divergence and competition between men and women rather than fostering social cohesion and gender complementarity. As a result, many men tend to perceive feminists as misandrists. Additionally, the Burmese method of translation and negative labeling has turned many people away from feminist causes (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 15; Than, Tharaphi, et al.1-2).

As Maber has discussed, the very term “feminism” has been viewed as problematic within various contexts of Myanmar society, where English language terms are employed for a variety of strategic reasons that include both emphasis and obfuscation (423). Moreover, traditional groups and state-sponsored women’s groups in Myanmar, which were formed by the military government and led by the wives of generals and other authorities, regarded feminism as a tool of Western neo-imperialism that allowed the West to exert control over developing countries. These traditional groups believe that feminism demands radical imposed change while ignoring the values of local people. Moreover, these state-sponsored women’s organizations have generally only served to strengthen traditional and patriarchal notions of femininity, thereby establishing a rivalry of ideology between the traditional femininity that exists inside the country and the progressive feminism that exists outside of it (Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 10, 15).

The majority of participants from my sample (who self-identified as feminists) understand that the terms “feminism” or “feminist” relate to gender equality beyond the family (i.e., more political than personal issues), though they have maintained that they enjoy gender equality at home. They believe that gender equality does not stand only for one single family and one community but instead has more to do with society at large. To this end, they express their concerns about the "gender equality" issue for every woman in society (e.g., violence against women, equal rights/equal pay between men and women, etc.). In particular, two of the participants indicated their concerns about the issues of gender equality in Myanmar with regard to treating girls/women unfairly in university admissions and in the political arena. They also emphasized the importance of receiving the continual support of both the men and women of Myanmar so that they could challenge these issues form one generation to the next.

By contrast, some participants simply relate the term "feminism" to the gender issues at home, and they do not self-identify as being feminists so long as they enjoy gender equality in their homes (i.e., the issue of "gender equality" is more personal than political). My observations relate to empowered mothers' differing perceptions of "feminism" and underline the possibility of a rivalry of ideology that exists between traditional femininity and progressive feminism within the same diaspora (i.e., the feminism rooted inside the country of Myanmar and the progressive feminism that existed outside the country) [Tun, Aye Lei, et al. 10, 15]).

Overall Conclusion

My research reveals how cultural and traditional beliefs travel via mothering practices from the Global South to the Global North, thereby contributing to existing literature on motherhood studies by providing an overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the minority of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers who have been under-researched in mothering and migration scholarship. Moreover, the findings from my work outline how the culture and values of the sending country play an overall determinant role in shaping the "sense of self" possessed by various migrant mothers when it comes to their relationships with their spouses and families. The findings from my sample relate to the research of other scholars (e.g., Bandana Purkayastha, Usha George and Saira Maiter, Sangeeta R. Gupta, Shamita Das Gupta and Diya Kallivayalil), who note the following: "[M]others *are not passive transmitters of South Asian Culture, rather, they play an active role in setting the terms and conditions in which culture is reproduced in the South Asian diaspora*" (qtd. in Sangha and Gonsalves 5).

Overall, the general discussion that runs throughout my separate but interrelated chapters highlights the intersectionality of culture, race, gender, and class, thereby drawing attention to how they all matter in reshaping the mothering ideologies of migrant mothers with respect to balancing family and work responsibilities in the host country. In particular, my literature review and the findings from my thesis suggest that it is problematic to define "who exactly are the patriarchal mothers or non-patriarchal mothers" with respect to migration and work. This acknowledged, the women performed their roles as economic contributors after migration while simultaneously enduring not only the burden of the double shift but also the third shift (i.e., emotional work in making efforts that are required in planning and scheduling quality time with children). This issue appears rooted in three primary factors as follows: (i) difference in social class (before and after migration) plays a crucial role in how migrant mothers develop reactive mothering strategies in the new land; (ii) a sudden switch of social class (i.e., downward class mobility) re/shapes the mothering ideologies of migrant mothers when they have to resist not only patriarchal control but also economic needs in the host country; and (iii) the traditional patriarchal beliefs and cultural beliefs in the context of the sending countries influences subjective aspects of "feeling oppressed" and the objective measure of developing different types of mothering.

Nonetheless, in each of these situations, either working-class or employed mothers remake their womanhood/motherhood and renegotiate intra-family gender dynamics in the following ways: via reactive mothering activities (e.g., using informal daycare or sometimes sending their kids back to the sending country to receive care from their female kin before they reach school age); via the strategic bargaining of their creative economic activities (e.g., home-based paid work); and via gender re-negotiation with their spouses (e.g., co-mothering and sharing domestic duties). All of these mothers attain power/agency in their households by choosing a particular mothering way. In this regard, I argue that sociocultural constructions of motherhood (i.e., those embedded in a patriarchal society) do not preclude attempts of migrant mothers to actualize power/agency via creative mothering ideologies and practices despite the crossing of borders and continents. Moreover, the mothering experience can be envisioned as an overall position of empowerment and agency for migrant women in the host country via a challenging and renegotiation of gender stereotypes that are embedded in the cultural norms and related social practices of the sending country.

My participants do not limit childrearing to themselves as the biological mothers, but rather get the fathers to be involved in childcare so that they can create a happy life outside of motherhood via a nuanced notion of "empowered mothering" (i.e., they seek to attain the attributes of empowered mothering without challenging the following normative gender roles: agency, authority, autonomy, authenticity, and activism-advocacy). They possessed an understanding of empowered mothering in the host country that was different because of the following three interrelated factors: (i) the influence of the sending country's values and customs; (ii) the general attitude towards "gender equality" with respect to married couples, which related to "doing our gender roles, no problem"; and (iii) the lack of challenges in gender renegotiation between spouses (in the host country) via the general assumption that women's employment contributes to the maintenance of a happy married life. Moreover, the findings from my thesis suggest that these mothers maintain some aspects of the patriarchal culture of the sending country via assumptions about their own traditional values and cultural beliefs, thereby reinforcing empowered mothering when it comes to the circumstances surrounding the switching of gender roles – a phenomenon that is not regarded as a problem by the spouses.

Most of the participants from my sample tend to seek feminist mothering via their own perceptions of empowered mothering. However, they do not emphasize anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism, which are the essential tasks required by feminist mothering. In the Myanmar cultural context, it seems that firm gender divisions between men and women are not perceived as discriminatory but rather as upholding feminine privilege that is oriented towards fairer gender concepts (i.e., women are treated as the weaker sex, but only in relation to their own perceived virtues of feminine modesty and feminine privilege, which are respected and protected by men). Such beliefs about "gender roles" and "gender equality" in the context of the sending country reinforce how men perform the role of the "good man" of the house and women perform the role of the "good woman" of the house. The foundational belief for Myanmar women pertains to upholding the overarching cultural belief that mothering is their normal duty – a belief which is unrelated to notions of oppression.

As I explored in my second and third chapters, the mothers from the samples of Limpangog and Maitra did not discuss how they needed to challenge pre-existing stereotypical notions regarding the roles of mothers due to the following two reasons: First, the feelings of value and pride that these women assume in relation to their mothering work and gender roles prohibited them from conceiving of themselves as being "oppressed"; second, some mothers viewed their participation in paid work as being in response to the economic demands of family life, which required that they make ends meet while also managing childcare along with the assistance of spouses, kin, nannies, and daycare programs.

In summary, the findings from my empirical work and literature review underline how feminist mothering fails to consider the possibility of contradiction between theory and the subjective or emotional feelings of mothers when it comes to participating in paid work. Consequently, I argue that feminist mothering should also be discussed as a combination of both structural conditions (i.e., cultural beliefs, material and economic demands) and subjective feelings about paid and unpaid work (e.g., domestic and child responsibilities) rather than relying on a consistent framing of feminist mothers as absolute non-patriarchal mothers. This is due to the fact that no patriarchal setting is quite the same or continues to be the same over time when it comes to cultures, racial dynamics, and social class differences (Kaufman 162). As Willey notes, *"the fight against the patriarchy, is not a singular monolithic effort or unified theory either"* ("Fathering and Feminism" 28).

However, this is not to say that combating patriarchy is impossible. As Rich notes, "*Patriarchy is the power of the fathers, a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male*" (qtd. in Willey 27). Consequently, combating patriarchy is possible only if we fully recognize and acknowledge non-patriarchal fathers. Specifically, I define a non-patriarchal father as a father who fully challenges some of the ten ideological assumptions (i.e., *essentialization*, *privatization*, *individualization*, *naturalization*, *normalization*, *idealization*, *biologicalization*, *expertization*, *intensification*, and *depoliticalization*) of patriarchal motherhood outlined by O'Reilly ("Matricentric Feminism" 14). It is these ideological assumptions that influence women's maternal ideologies.

The majority of my participants' husbands have non-patriarchal mindsets that significantly contribute to how my participants form empowered mothering ideologies that are "doable" in the host country. Some of the mothers from my sample still adhere to certain traditional cultural values with respect to their husbands, though their husbands do not demand that they do so. In particular, some men do not accept the idea that educated mothers should stop working due to mothering duties. Additionally, it should be noted that such men do not reject co-mothering, as my findings indicate that their participation in domestic work and mothering duties are not limiting for them even though they are actively engaged in full-time work. Moreover, most of the participants indicated that their husbands respected their decisions to return to work after becoming mothers and tried to help them with domestic work and childcare. These findings relate to the research findings of Nicole L. Willey, who writes, *"Breaking down rigid gender roles in the home is one way to ensure that such patterns do not replicate in the next generation* […] *will prevent the reproduction of traditional gender roles"* (Willey 25).

In her book *Maternal Thinking* (1995), Sara Ruddick terms the fit between fathering and feminism a "revolutionary" idea, noting, "*"It is argued that the most revolutionary change we can make in the institution of motherhood is to include men in every aspect of childcare"* (qtd. in Doucet "Feminist Fathering/Fathering Feminists" 12). Ruddick's notion of pairing fathering and feminism to fight against patriarchy was an incredibly important development for feminist scholarship. To make Rich's dream come true for the current and next generation of parents, I agree with Willey's suggestion that fathers "do" fathering outside of current gender roles, thereby enabling a future of gender equality (24). While the primary finding of my thesis reveals that most of my participants tend to avoid challenging normative gender roles by seeking *partial* feminist mothering via their own perceptions of empowered mothering, my secondary finding reveals that most of my participants' husbands practice non-patriarchal fathering/parenting.

Based on these findings, I contend that undoing patriarchy (in the context of Myanmar married couples) is possible only if these mothers first fully recognize and acknowledge the parenting of non-patriarchal fathers, though none of my participants specifically discussed challenging patriarchy. As Doucet is concerned, there could be times when the fit between theory and practice is awkward (Doucet "Feminist Fathering/Fathering Feminists" 11). Nonetheless, feminist motherhood is not possible without revised conceptions and practices of fatherhood (Willey 21). For society to move forward with gender equality – a key concept of feminist motherhood-mothering – fathers must alter their fathering practices in order to get on board. Some motherhood scholars have already validated the idea that fathers are a part of feminist practice and can "do" mothering. As empirical studies have revealed, there are some fathers who identify as the primary or shared primary caregivers of children (Willey; Doucet). Accordingly, I propose that there are some non-patriarchal fathers (i.e., spouses of my participants) who assist their wives and contribute to how they "do" empowered mothering in the host country, though this is not the main objective of my thesis. As Willey suggests, fathers can, do, and should provide co-mothering in their families, as this helps free everyone from forced gender roles, thereby preventing the reproduction of traditional gender norms (25).

Directions for Future Research

While my research opens up nuanced conversations about gender, power, racial dynamics, and class differences with respect to South East Asian mothering given its focus on first-generation migrant mothers of Myanmar, there is no doubt that further research is needed to explore some of the following questions: How do second-generation diasporic South East Asian mothers understand their motherhood and mothering with respect to the intersections of East and West cultures? To what extent do the mothering ideologies and practices of second-generation South East Asian mothers resemble or differ from the ideologies and practices of their own mothers (i.e., first-generation South East Asian mothers)? It is my aim that my findings and conclusion contribute to the ongoing discussion and debate about South East Asian mothering, culture, and agency with respect to migration and work. In particular, my thesis does not cover the issues of class differences among the migrant mothers of Myanmar diaspora due to the following two reasons. First, my intension is to explore mothering experiences of employed Myanmar diasporic mothers in terms of their cultural and traditional beliefs, and gender renegotiation process between the spouses in the context of heterosexual Myanmar migrant couples regardless of their immigration status in GTA. Second, as I detailed in chapter four, though I belong to the same (Myanmar) diaspora as my research participants, and I have similar migration experiences and cultural commonalities with them, they were concerned about a loss of social status in the community due to participating in my research.

However, this is not to say that focusing on class differences is not a doable research among women of Myanmar in Western countries. It is doable if a researcher looks at the settlement and integration experiences (from displacement in exile/ refugee camps to the resettlement process in third countries), specifically of the ethnic refugee women of Myanmar (Mantel; Marchbank, et al.; Smith). The migration pattern of these women and their very process of mothering and gender renegotiation in a host country could be different with eight participants of my sample in this thesis. In this regard, migration scholars are advised to explore more nuances of overall caregiving narrative that focuses on the specific minority ethnic women (i.e., non- Bamar ethnic groups) of sending countries who were socially dislocated in exile affected by the world's longest ethnic insurgency for more than six decades before journeying to third countries via refugee status.

A secondary finding of my thesis is that most of my participants' husbands practice non-patriarchal fathering (i.e., fathering against patriarchal motherhood), whereas my primary findings reveal that most of the participants (mothers) tend to partially seek feminist mothering via their own perceptions of empowered mothering without challenging normative gender roles. Furthermore, as Joanne Frye notes, practicing feminist parenting is an investment in our children and in the future, because it allows all parents to invest in the well-being of their children (qtd. in Willey 31). To this end, my research supports the ongoing need to explore fatherhood-fathering via the lens of heterosexual parental thinking. This will provide an available space not only for women/mothers, but also for men/fathers with respect to family migration and work. What factors reinforce migrant fathers in wanting to challenge patriarchal motherhood for the benefits of their children and their families? What factors constitute fatherhood-fathering ideologies and to what extent do these factors contribute to feminist motherhood-mothering? How do the cultural beliefs of migrant fathers travel from the Global South to the Global North, and how do fathers contribute to feminist parenting when they are located at the intersectionality of the sending and receiving countries? These questions should be explored in relation to South East Asian diasporas.

The findings of my thesis also highlight the need to focus on the experiences of mothers in a new land with respect to patriarchy and the cultural/religious beliefs of the sending country, which shape subjective aspects of "gender equality" and "feelings of oppression" while also influencing understandings of femininity and feminism. Some of the mothers who self-identify as feminists still follow basic Myanmar cultural traditions, such as offering the first-choice morsel to their husbands when having a meal together and considering their husbands as “Lord of the forefront of the house” or “*Ein Oo Nat*” via notions of “respect” and “love.” Such practices occurred regardless of whether or not these women identified with a religion (i.e., Buddhist/Christian) in the questionnaire. How is it possible to view these Myanmar migrant mothers as being “oppressed" when they self-identify as feminists? Two of my participants do not identify as feminists, though they consistently emphasize the benefits of co-mothering with their husbands and stress how their husbands support them when it comes to their juggling between paid and unpaid work. Given the common assumption that feminist women are able to identify as women and serve their own interests, how is it possible to conclude that these two women’s lives are losing out to the enjoyed advantages of being a feminist woman within the context of married couples?

There have been other interesting findings from Debra Renee Kaufmanh, who explores the attitudes, values, experiences, and concerns of women who have voluntarily entered the patriarchal world of Jewish Orthodoxy. Kaufmanh’s research revolves around in-depth interviews that were conducted during the mid-1980s with 150 newly Orthodox Jewish women (called *ba’alot teshuvah* in Hebrew) in five major urban areas across the U.S. Most of the women in Kaufmanh’s study came from middle-class backgrounds, were well-educated, and were well-assimilated into secular culture (Kaufmanh 2, 7). Similar to some feminists, these newly Orthodox Jewish women were woman-identified and celebrated their femininity and their life-cycle experiences. Nonetheless, they intentionally avoided feminist politics by choosing to enhance their status as women in order to protect themselves as a group within the boundaries of patriarchal religion (3).

These mothers' discussions of the laws of *niddah* or *"family purity law"* (i.e., Jewish law forbids sexual relations with a woman having her regular menstrual period until she immerses in the *mikveh* or ritual bath) differ from what many have chosen to view as the derogation of women via patriarchal orthodoxy. These newly Orthodox women interpret the *niddah* as giving them structure, regulation, and control over their sexuality. Additionally, these women claim that their "return" to the patriarchal setting of orthodoxy put them in touch with their own bodies and allowed them to value the so-called "feminine" virtues of nurturance, mutuality, family, and motherhood (Kaufmanh 8, 9).

Understood in totality, the findings from my thesis and Kaufmanh's project suggest that some theoretical categories and given assumptions may not be able to effectively distinguish between a woman's "authentic" and "alienated" experiences (Kaufmanh 68). In this regard, I suggest that more studies of women's migration and work are urgently needed in order to make invisible nuances visible with respect to the following discursive conflicts: feminists vs. non-feminists, empowered vs. disempowered mothering, patriarchal vs. non-patriarchal mothering/parenting, and subjective feelings of traditional spousal and mothering relationships vs. oppressive motherhood. Who exactly are the patriarchal mothers? How can we measure the qualities and benefits of feminist and non-feminist mothering with regard to heterosexual couples? What major tensions cause the contrast between subjective feelings of mothering and the structural conditions under which mothers "do" mothering?

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APPENDIX A

Interview Survey Questionnaire

Please make tick mark or color the box which best describes your answer/s. Some questions can have more than one answer.

A. Participant's Background Information

1		How long have you been in Canada?
	☐	0-5 years ☐16-20 years
	☐	6-10 years ☐21 or more
	☐	11-15 years
2		What is your age range?
	☐	25-34 ☐45-54
	☐	35-44 ☐55-64
3		What is your religion?
	☐	Buddhist ☐Christian (Baptist/ Protestant)
	☐	Catholic ☐Islam
	☐	Others (Please mention): ____
4		Please indicate how you immigrated to Canada.
	☐	Family (Spouse) Sponsorship ☐Refugee
	☐	Landed Immigrant ☐Work Permit
	☐	Live- in Caregiver Program ☐Student Pass
	☐	Other: (Please mention) ____
5		Please describe your Myanmar ethnic origin (e.g., Kachin, Kayin, Bamar, etc.) ____
6		What was your level of education before migrating to Canada?
	☐	Some high school
	☐	High school graduate or equivalent
	☐	Vocational degree/ some college
	☐	Bachelor's degree
	☐	Masters (MA/ MSc/ MBA)
	☐	Others: (Please mention) ____
7		What was your profession before migrating to Canada? (eg., teacher, accountant, nurse , self-employee, house wife…..etc.,)

8		What is your current occupation? Also, if your work involves "working from home" some days/everyday, then please indicate how so.
9		Did you need to go back to school in Canada to attain your current profession? If the answer is yes, then please provide details.
10		Is your work part-time (i.e., less than 40 hours per week) or full-time (i.e., 40 hours per week or more)?

B. Spouse related questions

11		How long has he been in Canada?
	☐	0-5 years ☐ 16-20 years
	☐	6-10 years ☐ 21 or more
	☐	11-15 years
12		What is his religion?
	☐	Buddhist
	☐	Catholic
	☐	Christian (Baptist/ Protestant)
		Islam
	☐	Others (Please mention): ____
13		Please indicate how he immigrated to Canada.
	☐	Family (Spouse) Sponsorship
	☐	Landed Immigrant
	☐	Live- in Caregiver Program
	☐	Refugee
	☐	Work Permit
	☐	Student Pass
	☐	Other: (Please mention) ____
14		Please describe his Myanmar ethnic origin (e.g., Kachin, Kayin, Bamar, etc.) ____
15		Is he employed? ☐ Yes ☐No ☐Fulltime ☐Part-Time ☐Self-Employed ☐Other (please indicate)________________________

16		Please respond to the following statement using the scale provided. My husband offers to provide me with childcare when he is home. ☐Always ☐Occasionally ☐Rarely ☐Never
17		In what ways does your husband contribute to providing childcare? Please provide some examples.
18		Please respond to the following statement using the scale provided: My husband shares **some domestic work** at home. ☐Strongly agree ☐Agree somewhat ☐Disagree somewhat ☐Strongly disagree
19		In what ways does your husband contribute to domestic work? Please provide some examples.

C. Children/ Family/ Gender Roles

20		How many children do you have, and how old are they?
21		Are you staying with any extended family members (e.g., parents, in-laws, relatives, etc.)? If yes, please specify your relation to them.
22		(a) How did you manage childcare before you migrate to Canada? (b) How do you manage childcare when you are working in Canada?
23		Who is the primary caregiver of the child(ren)? Why do you say this?
24		Aside from your status as a mother and wife, how would you describe your role in the family (e.g., decision maker, financial manager/controller, etc.)? Why do you say this?

25		Which of the following categories describes the role/s of your husband in the family? **(Note: You can have more than one answer)** ☐Breadwinner ☐ Lord of the forefront of the house “Ein Oo Nat” ☐Family leader/ Decision maker ☐ Financial controller ☐50% care giver to children ☐ Helper in parenting ☐Other (Please mention)______________________________________
26		Are there any specific tasks that your husband perceives himself as having to do because of his gender role as the “man of the house” (e.g., strenuous physical work, outside work, snowplowing, lawn mowing, etc.). If so, then please provide specific examples.
27		Are there any specific tasks that you perceive yourself as having to do because of your gender role as the “woman of the house”? If so, then please provide specific examples.
28		Can you describe some gendered Burmese cultural traditions that you are still following in Canada with respect to your relationship with your husband (e.g., the first choice morsel (of curry/ food) goes to the husband … etc.)?
29		How do you understand the concept of gender equality in your home with respect to your relationship with your husband? Also, do you feel that you enjoy gender equality in your home (please answer why or why not)?
30		What does the term “feminism” mean to you? Also, do you self-identify as a feminist (please answer why or why not)?

D. Motherhood- Mothering

Please answer below questions in your own words.

31. In what ways are you similar to your mother with respect to Myanmar cultural context when it comes to raising your child(ren) in Canada?

32. In what ways are you different from your mother when it comes to raising your child(ren) in Canada?

33. Do you believe that the “practice of mothering can be equally shared by both the mother and father”? Why or why not?

34. What qualities/characteristics come to your mind when thinking of being a “good” mother for your child(ren) as a first generation immigrant mother?

35. How did you come to reach your own definition of being a “good” mother in relation to the characteristics you listed in question 34?

36. How do you experience satisfaction with your child’s/children’s performance at school, home, and in the community, and what is your expectation for them when it comes to their future in Canada?

37. Please indicate if you would like to share your child’s/children’s achievements in Canada (e.g., academic, social, cultural, etc.). How did you and/or your husband support your child(ren) when it came to these achievements?

38. What factors made you feel satisfied with your child’s/children’s performance at school? **Please provide a tick mark or colour in any boxes (more than one box) that describe your answers**.

☐Getting good grades (A, A+) in every subject

☐Getting positive feedback from school regarding disciplinary matters

☐Being interested in at least one sport

☐Going to music school/lesson

☐ Maintaining Myanmar cultural and religious aspects

☐ Others: (please mention)____

39. Please indicate the most important one or two factors in your above answers.

____

____

40. Which sentence best describes your concept of mothering with respect to raising your child(ren) in Canada?

☐ I first listen to and then facilitate my child's/children's interests
☐ I always explain to my children what I expect them to do
☐ I try to find a balance between maintaining my parental expectations and being responsive to my child's/children's interests

41. What is your own definition of being a "successful mother" in Canada with respect to your child(ren)?

42 How did you prioritize your mothering duties, domestic work (family responsibilities), and paid work/career? Which one is most important to you?

43. Please numerically rank the factors below from **least challenging (1) to most challenging (5)** with regard to **your mothering experiences in Canada**.
- My personal language barrier in participating in school activities as a parent ( )
- Learning the new education system ( )
- Raising my child(ren) in a new culture and environment ( )
- Coping with financial stressors ( )
- Balancing employment and paid work with family commitments ( )

E. Employment/ Work force participation

44. Please list three to five reasons that explain why you decided to work and sort them from most important (1) to least important.
(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

45. Did you go back to work after maternity leave or when your child reached one year of age? If your answer is yes, then how did you manage childcare before your child was school-aged?

46. Do you believe that your employment makes you a better mother? Why or why not?

49. Did you face any disagreement from your husband for entering the mainstream labour market? If yes, how did you overcome it? If no, how did he support your career development?

50. Does your employment positively contribute to maintaining a happy married life? Why or why not?