HELPING THE INDIVIDUAL, HELPING THE COMMUNITY: OTHERMOTHERING IN CARIBBEAN FILM

by

Michelle Ramos Rodríguez

A final research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of:

Master of Arts

May 13, 2020

Department of English
College of Humanities
University of Puerto Rico

Approved by:

Dr. Loretta Collins-Klobah
Reader

Dr. Dorian Lugo-Bertrán
Reader

Dr. Dannabang Kuwabong
Final Research Paper Director

© 2020
Michelle Ramos Rodríguez

Helping the Individual, Helping the Community: Othermothering in Caribbean Film

Caribbean filmmakers recurrently focus on Caribbean folklore, children's stories and young adolescents' narratives to embody the influence of Caribbean social, cultural and historical worldviews in the identity formation of newer generations. Among these stories, we can find Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983), Maria Govan's *Rain* (2008) and *Play the Devil* (2016), Ernesto Daranas' *Conducta* (2014), Ari Maniel Cruz's *Antes que cante el gallo* (2016), Vashti Anderson's *Moko Jumbie* (2017) and Sharon Lewis' *Brown Girl Begins* (2018). In the process of exploring different narratives and identities, these filmmakers interject a new consciousness of what family means in Caribbean spaces. These representations serve to expose and critique how the Americanized definition of the family presented in Hollywood films as nuclear and made up solely of a father, mother and child(ren) has been introjected into Caribbean social consciousness as the archetype. Thus, Caribbean films that project the Caribbean family focus on more complex structural relationships such as the concept and practice of the extended family or community involvement in parenting practices.

To begin a deeper exploration of the Caribbean family in current Caribbean cinema, I analyze Ernesto Daranas' *Conducta* (2014) and Sharon Lewis' *Brown Girl Begins* (2018). I argue that the various geophysical, cultural and socio-spiritual backgrounds and spaces portrayed in these two films—Cuba and the Caribbean diaspora in Canada—offer diverse experiences that reveal the complexities of familial and inter-generational relationships of Caribbean family structures. This is accomplished by using the concept of othermothering as the basis for the analysis because it provides an avenue to discuss family, childhood, generational relations and societal expectations and problems in accordance with the individual and collective realities represented in these films. I also use theories on motherhood and family as found in the cultural studies and

sociological and anthropological works of authors such as Patricia Hill Collins, Charmaine Crawford, Olive Senior, Nancy Kang, Amanda Putnam, among others, to establish a general view of familiar relationships in the Caribbean. Film theory is used to discuss the effects of the technical aspects of the films and how the Caribbean is subverting from what is commonly seen in the genre of science fiction through the adoption of Afrofuturism. Lastly, trauma theory on separation anxiety disorder and prolonged grief disorder will inform some of the analysis to explain the psychological mindset of the characters and how it affects their actions and motivations throughout the films.

Film has proven to be a significant instrument to accurately represent Caribbean realities. The symbiotic relationship between visuals and sounds produces a dynamic and fluid depiction of Caribbean spaces, peoples and cultures. The use of ambient sounds and Caribbean musical beats, the rhythmic movement of the bodies, spaces that do not completely rely on violent or romanticized images of island living, the vibrant colors of the landscape and the people, among other elements make these films exude the lives of the people in the Caribbean. But, Caribbean films have yet to attract the generalized type of attention in academic study as that given to written texts. Mbye Cham, Jean Antoine-Dunne, Bruce Paddington and Luis Alberto Notario are among the scholars who focus on this field, however, most of their investigations focuses on older films, and accessible research on current Caribbean cinema is needed. This study is my contribution to stimulate academic conversation to new Caribbean cinema emerging from different places and treating contemporary themes that reflect Caribbean worldviews and cultures.

OTHERMOTHERING

To understand the relevance of the representation of othermothering in Caribbean cinema, it is important to briefly note the common portrayals of the family in Hollywood films. Their depictions concern this study because the American market frequently dominates the distribution and exhibition of films in the Caribbean. Keith Q. Warner explains that in the Anglophone Caribbean, American films ruled the market before and after they obtained independence (7). Even though other types of cinema were shown, such as *kung-fu* films, the audience preferred American films, specifically Westerns (Warner 17). At the beginning of the 21st century, the *Direction régionale des affaires culturelle* in Guadeloupe noted that eighty-nine films were distributed on the island in 2000, and seventy-five of these films were American, an eighty-four percent of the market (Robinson 53). Even today, Hollywood films continue to control most of the showings in Caribbean movie theaters.

The family in Hollywood productions has changed in accordance to the sociopolitical atmosphere of the nation. Emanuel Levy studied the nuclear family structure in popular Hollywood films from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. He notes that from the 1960s to the 1970s there was a decline in the positive portrayals of the nuclear family and a search for alternative structures. For example, he explains that *The Graduate* (1967) portrays "bourgeois marriage and the nuclear family as a prison, a corruptive and degenerative force" through the protagonist's affair with a married woman and his rejection of the conformist and materialistic values of his parents (191). Additionally, Levy uses *Alice's Restaurant* (1969) as an example of a film that represents communal life in the form of a surrogate family. However, during the 1980s, American films returned to the importance of the nuclear family by emphasizing group structures, such as marriage and the family, and traditional values in domestic settings, most likely prompted by the victory of conservative presidential candidate Ronald Reagan (198). He

mentions *Fatal Attraction* (1987) as a film that highlights this by presenting tragedy as the direct result of succumbing to temptation and deviating from the expected family ideals. Levy explains that although these films deal with dysfunctional families who struggle with internal and external conflicts and hint to the instability of the structure, they do not question its validity as a whole. Levy writes "According to Hollywood, there was nothing basically wrong with the nuclear family as a structure and that no institution could replace its function as a regulative force of social control" (200). Claire Jenkins does something similar with contemporary Hollywood films, specifically from the 1990s to the early 2010s. She explores films from the dominating genres to explore the archetypes of contemporary American families, including the nuclear family and other alternative forms. Jenkins explains that these films are mostly characterized by the changing nature of their portrayal of the family. For example, she mentions that women have more active roles as other than mothers in superhero family films such as *Spy Kids* (2004)*, The Incredibles* (2004) and *Sky High* (2005), and there are representations of lesbian mothers in the case of *The Kids Are Alright* (2010). Nevertheless, she notes that these films have the nuclear model at their core, regardless of the progressive nature of their representations (5).

The frequent exposure to these films can impact Caribbean communities. Franz Fanon notes in *Black Skin, White Masks* the damaging effects of European colonial policies to eradicate cultures, establish social, religious, phenotypic and linguistic hierarchization and create nervous and mimetic conditions among the colonized. He explains that this is reflected in Caribbean children who blindly consume cultural products created specifically for white children. They include negative representations of off-white populations such as those found in Tarzan of the Apes, Mickey Mouse, stories of explorers and old westerns. As a result, they put themselves in the positions of the white male hero and root for the defeat and humiliation of the non-white

native adversary who has been transformed in fiction into an evil, savage and brutish beast for trying to protect his/her land and culture from the white menace. The colonized fail to see their support for these white heroes as a rejection of themselves. In the end, Fanon describes that they are faced with the crude reality that other people do not see them as the champion but the criminal and the fool, and their identities begin to fracture until they start a process of properly defining it outside the stereotypical images of European and Euro-American racist colonial discourse. In the case of Hollywood productions, Warner mentions how they influenced various artists in the English-speaking Caribbean including calypso singers, carnival masqueraders, steel band players and writers of fiction, and it was common to hear people on the streets reenacting scenes and reciting dialogues from their favorite films (5, 7). Nevertheless, in the case of the representation of the family in Caribbean cinema, filmmakers seem to generally move away from the Hollywood nuclear family structure to portray community-based nurturing practices, specifically the practice of othermothering.

Othermothering refers to any circumstance in which a mother is unable or requires assistance in the caring of her children. There are two types of othermothering: collective or communal mothering, which involves the family or the community in the nurturing of motherless children, and self-mothering, which occurs when a community is absent and the children create strategies to properly care for themselves and construct their own understanding of the world that surrounds them (Putnam 118). Paula Morgan and Valerie Youssef trace the origins and practices of this and other alternative family structures in the Caribbean to the forced separation of African families from the middle passage from Africa to the Americas as chattel, and on the plantations where they were enslaved. Under these conditions, they contend that African fathers were stripped of their roles in the family and were unable to provide for them or even defend their

wives from the sexual and physical abuses of the white slave masters. On the other hand, the African female had to oblige and be independent and strong apart from male support, which could include exchanging sexual favors to provide for her kin (Morgan and Youssef 11). Morgan and Youssef explain that there was a pattern of female headed households after slavery, and it continues to be present among lower classes of African Caribbean households and beyond. Even though it is true that families were forcedly separated during slavery, their comments seem to be based on African families having a nuclear family structure at their core. This idea echoes M. G. Smith's comments on how "the persistence of high illegitimacy rates, unstable unions, and anomalous forms of domestic groups in the West Indies… had their historical origin in slavery" (260). He uses Carriacou and some settlements in Jamaica as a way of demonstrating that, given the right circumstances, slaves would have formed nuclear families. Nevertheless, he does not give much thought to how they were "encouraged to marry" or in settlements "under missionary leadership" (Smith 260-261) which speak to the external influence that led them to practice this structure in the first place.

Contrastingly, Patricia Hill Collins sees the matrifocal family structure as a practice inherited from African societies. She explains that during slavery they emphasized the importance of motherhood and cooperative and collective approaches to childcare as they did and continue to do in Africa. Specifically, older women served as nurses and midwives while also providing care to the children whose parents had to work in the plantations (Collins 181). Collins underscores how in West African societies, children may have the same father but different mothers, who refer to each other as brother and sister, and all mothers are allowed to watch out for the children regardless of the blood relation between them (180). As a result, many African Caribbean and African American communities continue to practice community-based childcaring with

biological mothers and grandmothers, aunts and female family friends acting as othermothers at the center (Collins 181-182).

Unfortunately, to rationalize changes in caretaker roles, Priscilla Gibson resorts to the same discourse of pathologizing African American women by only enlisting socially and economically engineered problems in African American communities such as drug abuse, incarceration, divorce, and domestic violence. In contrast, Collins defends that the extended family practiced in African American communities is a reflection of both "African-derived cultural sensibilities and functional adaptations to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and nation" (178). Additionally, it has been proven that immigration practices by Caribbean mothers to metropolitan European and North American centers for better economic opportunities creates spaces for othermothering practices. Consequently, they become transnational mothers who may offer material and social support to the families while they live abroad (Crawford 9). The ease of immigration often depends on the matrifocal household structure within the extended family network. This facilitates child-shifting practices which may entail giving their dependent children to others, usually friends or family members, so they can migrate for either economic or personal reasons.

Although othermothering may be caused by financial and social situations, the cultural disposition is towards childcare as a family or neighborhood responsibility (Chamberlain 64). Othermothers can be older women relatives—grandmothers, aunts, or sisters— that care for the younger children in the inter-generational household or friends of the family (Crawford 13). Othermothering transpires when needed and can take the form of a temporary child-care arrangement or turn into a long-term care or informal adoption (Collins 178). Collins explains that the centrality of women in this type of practice does not necessarily mean the absence of

husbands and fathers but more on how the kin unit tends to be woman-centered (178). Men are also able to perform caretaking tasks, since many are taught from a young age to take care of their siblings, but the difference among Black men and women may be a result of male labor force patterns (Collins 180), possibly a result of gender expectations.

Although American popular medias usually affirm the importance of having a traditional nuclear family, foster parenting is generally supported by the state to help children who cannot depend on their parents for their care. A child who enters the foster care system may be placed in a group home, in the private residence of a state-certified caregiver or with a family member approved by the state. This process can cause an extreme toll for the child and the caregivers. Delores V. Mullings uses her personal experience to denounce the difficulties she faced with the system as an African Canadian single women and foster mother. She explains that the foster care system does not properly prepare foster parents for the toll and grief they may face after a child is taken from their custody (171). She adds that the system does not have proper procedures in place to inform the foster parents about the well-being of the child and does not help them maintain contact after moving away to another foster home or with the family (171). Furthermore, studies have shown that:

> Black children received fewer services, even when in foster care, including fewer visits with families, fewer mental health services, and less contact with workers. White et al. (1998) found that child welfare workers supported Caucasian families more because they feared legal repercussions if they did not do so. On the other hand, they did not hesitate to remove Latino or African American children from their families. (Clarke 277)

In this case, grandmothers or other members of the family or community may prefer to engage in othermothering practices to protect children from the discrimination and untrustworthiness of the foster care system and social services and ensure proper care for the children (Gibson 32).

Within the general framework of othermothering, Putnam adds that when othermothering and self-mothering are represented in literature there is an emphasis in reconnecting to the natural world to gain the insight and knowledge that young women are unable to obtain via the physical presence of their mothers (119). Her essay mostly focuses on female characters and does not consider a similar approach with male characters. This is most likely a result of the lack of Caribbean texts that tackle it from this perspective and her emphasis on the feminine qualities often assigned to the natural environment. Nevertheless, it is important to note because her analysis proves how representations of othermothering follow the large quantity of Caribbean works that connect the personal experiences of Caribbean peoples with the natural landscape.

Based on this brief discussion, the household compositions of African American and Caribbean families do not necessarily fit Hollywood family ideals. As scholar Olive Senior asserts, one half of the Caribbean households have women as the principal breadwinner and head of the household. Oftentimes there is no adult male father figure. Therefore, she stresses that when thinking of a Caribbean family, people mostly imagine a household composition that excludes a man as the dominant figurehead and centers around a female centered figure (8). This contrasts with how Hollywood films have a tendency of presenting men as the head of the households and protectors of the family while women must adhere to marital and familiar roles (Levy 199). Even when women are portrayed in more active roles within this structure and there is an opportunity to explore their experiences, they seem to be shadowed by the anxieties of the male characters, making men the focus of the narrative again (Jenkins 12). This does not mean

that the nuclear family model is not present in the Caribbean since some families aspire to follow or meet its conditions as a result of the still present ideological beliefs of former colonial systems and the continuous exposure to American mainstream media. Additionally, class becomes a factor in following the model. For example, in the case of African American communities, middle-class family life is based on privatization, having a home for the family and no cooperation between neighbors (Collins 182). This means that middle-class African Americans may encounter different value systems, and the inability to maintain networks of bloodmothers and othermothers within class-stratified residential spaces and their work environment forces or influences them to adopt the neutral family model (Collins 182).

Because African Caribbean families sometimes fall outside the defined parameters of the family established by capitalist and patriarchal ideals, they struggle against discriminatory practices in a society dominated by sociopolitical systems that usually police and enforce the nuclear family ideal. Collins explains that the mothering experiences of African American women, which are historically and culturally similar to African Caribbean women, are described as vilified and abetting the deterioration of male-centered family structure (174). Their struggles embolden them against the established sociopolitical systems that want to force them to maintain a structure that does not work for their specific conditions. Thus, they mold their family structures in accordance to their individual and collective needs and experiences, and filmmakers are currently portraying it in Caribbean cinema.

Although this study focuses on representations of othermothering in recent productions, it has been portrayed in older foundational Caribbean films. For example, *The Harder They Come* (1972), the Jamaican film directed by Perry Henzell and co-written by Trevor D. Rhone, centers on the story of a young Jamaican man, Ivanhoe "Ivan" Martin. Ivan desires to be a famous and

successful Reggae singer but falls because of the corrupt and exploitative practices of the music industry. As a result, he becomes a drug dealer to earn a living. At the beginning of the film, it is stated that Ivan moves to the city to live with his mother after his grandmother dies. Evidently, he had spent most of his life being raised by his grandmother in a rural setting while his mother worked in the city. Likewise, *Rue Cases-Nègres* (*Sugar Cane Alley*, 1983) is a critically acclaimed film directed and written by Martinican filmmaker Euzhan Palcy. The film was adapted from the semi-autobiographical novel of the same name by Martinican author Joseph Zobel. It follows the story of Jose, a young boy living in a rural community of Martinique in the 1930s. Jose is under the care of his grandmother Ma'Tine; impliedly, both his parents have died. An elderly man from the community, Medouze, becomes a father figure for Jose. He imparts African roots culture to Jose through stories about Africa and enlightens him on topics related to their identity as Martinicans and workers of the cane. These two figures are an important part of Jose's life. His way of seeing the world is deeply influenced by both their ideals and nurture. In both of these films, the relationship between grandparent, community and child takes place in mostly rural settings with some transition to urban spaces. In contrast, most current film sets, including *Conducta* and *Brown Girl Begins,* focus on city environments, although there is the occasional presence of rural settings. Ultimately, these current Caribbean productions tell stories of othermothering as an enduring cultural practice in the Caribbean.

CONDUCTA

Conducta (*Behavior*) is a 2014 Cuban feature film written and directed by Ernesto Daranas. The film was an immediate success with Cuban audiences. Weeks after its release, it continued to be part of Cubans' daily conversations (Zielina 383). The story follows the bond between sixth grader Chala, portrayed by Armando Valdés Freire, and his teacher, Carmela, portrayed by Alina

Rodríguez, as they navigate their intertwined identities and ideals in modern day Cuba. Their stories touch upon different aspects of their daily lives including poverty, addiction, the educational system, migration, various forms of violence, among others, based on real input from members of the community, including children, teachers, and film students (Flores Durón, Lépine). According to Tania Carrasquillo Hernández, the Cuba illustrated in the film is one that lives in an alternate present with the same streets and schools from decades ago (65). This Cuba suffers from lack of material resources to satisfy the basic needs of the population. However, this lack instils group solidarity and hope among people at its core (Carrasquillo Hernández 66). This aspect is reflected in how Chala unintentionally creates a dependence on others, in particular Carmela and his neighbor, Ignacio, portrayed by Armando Miguel Gómez. Chala's trickster survival techniques is underscored by his love for his mother, Sonia. Sonia who is played by Yuliet Cruz, suffers from the stereotypical bane of the poor in Cuba: alcohol and drug addiction. Chala is hence able to tap into the community's empathy and child raising practices to benefit from the nurturing provided by an othermother and an otherfather in the persons of Carmela and Ignacio, and in turn, he offers any help he can give to them.

The film begins with Chala doing his morning routine. He takes care of his pigeons and Sultán, Ignacio's dog, and leaves coffee ready for his mother before going to school. As he leaves the apartment, he sees his mother coming up the stairs and looking hungover. The low angle shot puts Chala in the upper position of the frame while Sonia is on the lower side. This specific framing hints at the role reversal between Chala and his mother, where he is the who provides the nourishment and monetary means of the family while she continues to feed her addiction, thus placing him in a complex position as a provider within their family structure. At the same time, her lower position seems to reflect her shame at her state, especially when she

tries to show him affection but is unable to reach him because she is still under the influence. Throughout the film, the audience sees this repeating image of the mother characterized by her dependency on drugs and alcohol through images of her hungover or in withdrawal. Additionally, her physical appearance contrasts with the other female characters in the film. While these women sit and speak properly, comb their hairs and use professional clothing, Sonia is usually presented with bad posture, unruly hair and revealing clothing. Whether or not she is physically present in the scene, she is ultimately unable to provide the type of care Chala needs, and it creates distance between them. María del Mar López Cabrales connects the image of the absent mother represented through Sonia with women at the beginning of the 1990s Cuba. In this period, the struggles of women to provide for their families create different forms of trauma based on their inability to cater to their children's needs, and occasionally leading to child abandonment or neglect. Although the time period she references does not reflect the historical context in which the film's narrative develops, it seems as if Sonia to some extent fits well in this category. She wants what is best for Chala when she attends meetings at the school and scolds him when he misbehaves, but when she tries to show him some type of physical love, she is unable to keep herself upright. Her addiction does not allow her to properly care for Chala, and it makes her physical and emotional absences more noticeable than the times she is actually present.

Sonia's care of Chala would normally create a discussion of what it means to be a good or bad mother. Charmaine Crawford admits that this binary exists "to control, police and sanction the actions and activities of mothers who are expected to meet or conform to dominant standards of motherhood" (11). The good mother is defined as the mother who puts her child above herself, and her identity is solely marked by her role as a mother (Crawford 11-12). The bad mother is

the mother who is unable to properly nurture her child or meet his or her emotional, psychological and physical needs, regardless of whether the reasons are due to work, career progress or personal circumstances (Crawford 12). In the film, Sonia's actions are judged by various characters, including the teachers and social workers evaluating Chala's school conduct and living conditions. However, the film's focalization gives her a sympathetic look. In film, the term of focalization is used to identify how a character's perspectives and orientations influence the audience's understanding of a scene (Stam, et al. 90). Focalization has various facets: the perceptual facet, which means "the sensory range of the character;" the psychological facet, which refers to how "the cognitive and emotional focus of the text resides with a particular character;" and the ideological facet, which symbolizes "the character whose perspective could be said to express the general system of values, or the 'norms of the text'" (Stam et al. 90). Therefore, the audiences enter the story through a very specific worldview.

In the case of *Conducta,* there is a variable focalization because it shifts from Chala and Carmela's perspectives. The audience's perception of Sonia is thus marked by how Chala and Carmela see her. Chala sometimes looks at her with hurt and disappointment, but his love for his mother is undeniable, and that is why he constantly works to give her and himself enough to survive. His mostly favorable perception of her is expected considering that she is his mother, and it is not surprising he is represented as caring towards her. As Carrasquillo Hernández states, Chala's actions exemplify the importance of unconditional love with how he is unable to judge his mother but decides to take care of her and protect her. His feelings permeate each scene they are in, and the audience adopts his viewpoint. Carmela, on the other hand, does not judge Sonia. She may present some frustration towards her behavior, but her understanding of Sonia's situation is enough to help her by providing assistance in her failed attempts to raise Chala. Her

compassion towards Sonia's complex circumstances is surprising. She is not Sonia's relative but what is sufficient is that they are both members of the same community. She refuses to react as the other teachers. Maybe because she was also a teacher of Sonia, she has better psychoemotional and social understanding of Sonia. Her attitude toward Sonia is not an isolated trait. Carmela goes to great lengths to help her students regardless of the consequences it may bring her. She believes that sometimes direct impact in her students' lives may better prepare them for the future or at least provide some much-needed solace in their everyday.

Carmela's influence is evident in every scene of the film. Her previous and current students appreciate and admire her. In the case of her colleagues, they may not always agree with her methods, but they recognize the worth in her genuine care for her students. Her status in the community is an important aspect as to why she is able to provide othermothering to Chala. Mary Chamberlain explains that when Caribbean parents decide to trust a person outside of their family with the care of their children they do not do so impulsively, on the contrary, their decision comes from a "reputation transmitted through networks of contact and support and through an acceptance that children could be as adequately reared by another as by their own kin or mother" (67). In the film, Carmela's position in the community gains Sonia's trust. When she is confronted by Raquel, one of the teachers that wants to separate Chala from her, who criticizes her life and the ways she earns her money, she says that she will not respond back because of the respect she has for Carmela and the school principal.

Furthermore, although parental approval is important for othermothering, the child's perceptions of the new caretaker may affect their relationship either positively or negatively. In the film, the relation between Carmela and Chala is mostly positive. Carmela has earned Chala's trust and deep admiration with her care. This is important to note because Chala has difficulty

being respectful or obedient with other adults or authority figures. Carrasquillo Hernández explains that Chala's unruly behavior is a result of his dysfunctional upbringing. His mother's inability to properly take care of them forces him to abandon his childhood and look for ways to provide for them. As a result, Chala is extremely masculinized; he has to become an adult male to help his mother. In the process, his anxieties to find ways to protect his mother and the possible trauma he experiences from being unable to properly help her turn into masquerade performances of toxic masculinity, violence and rebellion which threaten his education (Carrasquillo Hernández 62). Additionally, the toughness and strong character Chala exhibits can also be an imitation of Ignacio's character, the only constant adult male presence he has. He may see this performance as the only way he has to survive because it is in Ignacio's frequented spaces that he has been able to find income for his family.

Most of the teachers want to send Chala to a school that deals with at-risk children with difficult and unrespectful behaviors. They claim that they want to keep him away from his mother so that she can deal with her addiction. The problem is that the teachers fail to consider how factors, such as their specific context and socioeconomic position, affect Sonia and Chala's lives and have left them in such a terrifying condition to begin with. To implement their plan for Chala would be pointless and punitive; sending the boy away without offering real support to neither him nor his mother will not solve any of their problems.

Carmela's opinions contrast significantly with her colleagues' decisions. Instead of ostracizing Chala, she believes students like him are not delinquents and deserve a chance to improve (López-Cabrales 17). She does not think that a new school will change anything for Chala's current living conditions and would further displace him from the community. For this reason, Carmela constantly defends Chala regardless of the professional consequences it may

have. In a letter she writes the school after her position as a teacher is disputed, she explains that there are four things necessary to raise a child: a home, a school, rigor and affection. She understands that outside the school they will find the streets, and it is their role as teachers to recognize what awaits them. She sees her role as a teacher as more than just teaching classes, but as a necessary support system for students where the teacher's aim should be to prevent them from becoming what the streets expect from them. In a medium close-up, Carmela is at the center of the frame which focuses on her sincere and tearful eyes and the veracity and heart in every word she utters. Through the use of montage, the scenes where she reads the letter are placed in different moments throughout the story, and while her reading takes place in a medium close-up, it also appears in the form of a voice-over with images of Chala and her other students as the visual focus of the shot. This editing choice helps the audience gradually comprehend Carmela's acts of defiance and the reasoning behind her unconditional support and love for her students. In the words of Carrasquillo Hernández, Carmela resents the unnecessary rigors from bureaucrats that limit a revolution characterized by love, equality, solidarity and humanity (68). Therefore, she decides to ignore her colleagues' restrictive standards for Chala and his mother and instead opens the space for them to be able to rely on her.

Throughout the film, Carmela is a positive influence in Chala's life inside and outside the school. Carmela's first appearance happens when Chala sees her from the roof of the apartment building he lives in and asks her to wait for him so they can walk together to school. When he approaches her, he tells her "Vamos profe" ("Let's go, teach"), and she stops him to say "Buenos días" ("Good Morning") and looks him straight in the eyes until he responds back. He immediately obeys without complaints. It is a simple moment between them, but it does speak

about the type of relationship they both have. He could have protested or responded annoyingly, yet he looks at her and gladly complies.

Additionally, when in the first act of the film Carmela suffers from a heart attack which makes her unable to go to school until she has properly recuperated and rested, Chala offers to accompany her to any place she needs to go and help her carry anything she buys up the flight of stairs in her building. Yet as everything in their outside encounters is fine, during Carmela's absence, Chala's behavior at school worsens until he is eventually transferred to another school. Carmela only finds out after she returns to teach and immediately goes to request his return. Her discussion with Carlos, the new school's principal and Carmela's old student, highlights her care for Chala because she unapologetically undermines the previous decision made by her colleagues and boss and takes responsibility for Chala's future behavior.

Regardless of her thoughts on his transfer, Carmela does not condone Chala's behavior. In the taxi drive back home, Carmela gives him various school assignments and house chores as corrective measures for his lack of good behavior while she was away on sick leave. He audibly complains to Carmela by saying "Explotación de menores es cómo se llama eso" ("Child exploitation is the name for it, right?"), to which the taxi driver rebukes him by telling him that he needs to listen to his grandmother. Chala responds "¡Ella no es mi abuela!" ("She isn't my grandmother!"). Carmela's expression shows hurt when she turns to him after he says this, and she immediately redirects her eyesight forward. A close-up shows Chala's hands trying to reach her arms, and Carmela pulling them away. The shot returns the image to Chala who says "Pero ojalá lo fuera" ("But I wish she was") while he looks at his teacher. The camera moves to the left to show a close-up of Carmela as a smile creeps on her face at Chala's words. This is not the first time their relationship has been identified as that of a grandparent and grandchild. Chala once

tells Carmela that he will carry her school things now that her grandson is moving away, hinting at him adopting her grandson's role.

In the beginning of the film, Carmela says goodbye to her daughter and grandson, Orlandito, before they go to the airport, and immediately after, she collapses in the middle of the street from a heart attack. It is not difficult to associate the attack with the sorrow she feels after her family leaves, further emphasizing the emotional and physical strain it has taken on her. Additionally, Carmela's loneliness during this event is compared to Chala's loneliness through the use of montage. It begins with Carmela hugging her family one last time before their departure. The next image shows Chala alone in the roof of the apartment building while a subsequent shot shows his mother smoking and drinking in her room. The image returns to Carmela walking in the streets alone before moving to Chala playing with a bird. This change continues until Carmela collapses and the image fades to black. The sound of the scene begins with a melancholic instrumental score, and the noises of the city—passing cars, train noises, the cooing of a pigeon, and the rustling of leaves—permeate as on and offscreen passive sounds. The sequences of images reflect the different types of abandonment these characters have experienced, and the sound reveals their deepest shared internal emotions while placing them and their experience in the same physical space.

After her family leaves, Chala provides Carmela with emotional balance and enables her to cope with the loss of her biological grandson. Her actions towards Chala and the rest of her classroom remind of some of the symptoms of Separation Anxiety Disorder, which occurs when one fears separation or is separated from a loved one (Manicavasagar & Silove ix). According to Vijaya Manicavasagar and Derrick Silove, when an adult suffers from this disorder, they tend to want to maintain specific structures. They write that the person has "a distinct preference for

order and routines, especially if it involves reliable and scheduled contact with key attachment figure(s). . .” (22). In a short period of time, Carmela confronts a significant change in her day-to-day. Her grandchild and daughter leave Cuba, and one of her students dies from an unnamed illness. This may create in her a desire to maintain the rest of her life unchanged. In this case, Chala’s presence is important for her to cope with these changes. Even though she does not exhibit many of the symptoms associated with Separation Anxiety Disorder, it does provide another layer of analysis to the reasoning behind her protective nature over Chala and her desire to keep her life from continuing to change, regardless of the consequences.

Not only is Chala a part of her classroom, but he becomes an outlet for her nurturing skills. A specific scene shows Carmela sitting down in the bed in her grandson’s bedroom, and her expression reflects contemplation and grief. The mise-en-scène in this moment includes the bed and toys such as a basketball, toy cars and some small figurines. This mise-en-scène contrasts with the ones that present Chala’s sleeping area at home. Instead of a room, he sleeps in a bed placed in the corner of the kitchen and dining area of the apartment, and no objects are present to suggest that a child lives there. The children’s sleeping areas show their different upbringings, particularly one where Orlandito is able to act as a child all the time whereas Chala has to grow-up to properly care for her mother and himself.

Later on, Orlandito’s bed is occupied by Chala for a night. When his mother is hospitalized after she overdoses, Chala’s first instinct is to go to Carmela’s home. She receives him with open arms, and their hug emanates the understanding and support they both desperately need. The next morning, Carmela slowly looks at him sleeping and smiles before waking him up to go to school. Chala looks comfortable and at peace when he starts to wake up. The event probably seems like a pleasant and warm moment for Chala in comparison to his mornings at home. Previously in the

film, an overhead shot shows Chala and his mother sleeping in their beds, separated by a wall. Chala eventually wakes up to the sound of the alarm while his mother stirs in her bed before returning to sleep. In this case, Chala's independence at home continues to be highlighted when put in opposition to Carmela's treatment and home. In any case, having Chala reside, even if just for a night, in the space her grandson once occupied, is reflective of the growing relationship between Chala and Carmela. Ultimately, Chala is not the only one receiving solace from Carmela; she also receives comfort from him.

Besides Carmela, Chala also has another significant relationship with his neighbor Ignacio. He pays Chala to take care of his fight dogs by doing basic chores such as taking them for walks and cleaning them, but he is not allowed near the fights which happen in the same building. His body language towards Chala reflects him as an authority figure, but there is always a hint of care and worry towards Chala in some of the scenes. For example, when Chala watches the dog fights while hidden in the stairs and Ignacio notices, he scolds Chala for not listening to him. Chala mostly respects him, but their relationship also suffers from them not knowing if Chala is Ignacio's biological son. Ignacio has always had a sexual relationship with Sonia, but her sleeping with different men leaves them without answers. As a result, Chala and he do not know how to approach each other in that respect.

Carmela influences greatly their relationship in this aspect. In a scene where Carmela visits Sonia and she is not there, Ignacio enters the apartment to give Chala the dog. Carmela tells Ignacio that she needs him to help her with Chala. He responds that he is not his problem regardless of whether others believe he is, but he asserts that he helps by paying Chala the money that allows his mother and him to have a proper meal and pay for their living expenses. In a later scene, after Sonia is hospitalized, Carmela asks Ignacio once again to help with Chala, and he

responds defensively against it. Chala listens to the conversation this time and tells him he does not want anything to do with him because he knows he is not his father. Valdés Freire uses trembling speech and watery eyes to properly convey the hurt Chala feels towards Ignacio's comments. After they fight, Ignacio concedes and asks Carmela how they will do it, and she tells him that they have to figure it out on their own.

This last comment is important because throughout the film various characters criticize Chala's involvement in dog fights. Dog fighting is one of many illicit games in Cuba, and each fight can generate wages of thousands of Cuban pesos. The canines are violently trained for the fights, and there are no laws against animal abuse in Cuba. Exposure to this type of environment can make the participants indifferent towards the violence they perform and/or endorse with just their presence. In an article exploring the practice in La Habana, Orlando González explains that when África, the dog of the men he was interviewing, died, the owners only cared about losing a bet of fifteen thousand pesos (González). Chala's presence and performance in this practice is initially worrying because the normality with which he approaches it can result in his eventual permanence in the world of dog fights or any other illegal activity he could adopt in the future.

Carmela openly admonishes both Chala and Ignacio about their work on various occasions. In a scene, Carmela asks him if he believes that it is appropriate for a child to work in dog fights, to which he responds that at least he is earning a living. Carmela says that they both know he deserves something better, and he says that that is why they are both giving it to him. The difference is that they are giving it their own way. Ignacio recognizes that the way they take care of Chala is different, but they are both giving him what they can. In this case, Ignacio's resolve may not be appropriate for a child, but it is what he has at hand, and he rather the boy live a hard life than no life at all. He eventually admits that he needs to help Chala without the income of the

dog fights and tells him they will look for other and more appropriate alternatives together. Finally, the film never confirms whether or not he is Chala's father. When Chala asks him towards the end of the film, he sincerely tells him that he does not know. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that under the circumstances he decides to assert the role because he deeply cares for Chala and recognizes that he needs someone to support him. Carmela's words saying he will thank her one day probably echo in his mind as he assumes the role of Chala's surrogate father.

One last point needs to be made in regard to othermothering in the film. Chala's actions embody self-mothering practices. Throughout the film, he cares for his pigeons and Ignacio's dogs. He feeds and checks them in the morning before going to school, and he takes them out for strolls or out of the cages to exercise and give them a bit of freedom. Learning how to nurture these animals encourages his nurturing instinct and helps develop his ability to support his mother. Chala cooks for her and gives her money for the electric bill. He courageously throws away her pills to force her to discontinue her addiction. In the end, Chala seems to rely on the skills he has learned to survive in spaces where he is unable to depend on either Carmela and/or Ignacio, and this helps him mature in ways other boys his age normally would not.

Conducta portrays the struggle of a young boy trying to navigate through his complicated everyday life. He has to look for ways to support both himself and his mother while struggling with his own demons at school and the possibility of being separated from his home. Because his mother is unable to properly care for him, Chala depends on otherparents to provide him with additional support. Carmela, his teacher, becomes his de facto grandmother; defends him from others who disregard the complexity behind Chala's challenging living conditions; gives him comfort when he needs it; disciplines him when he misbehaves; and most of all, gives him emotional nurture. Ignacio, his neighbor, becomes his de facto father. He takes care of Chala's

needs; teaches him about masculinity performance, both negative and positive behaviors in the public sphere; recognizes how he is mistaken by giving Chala income from profits made from a violent sport, dog fights; and changes and teaches Chala that there are other appropriate methods of income that do not involve violence. Lastly, Chala depends on his own self-mothering techniques to survive from the lack of mothering he gets from his mother, and he is able to become a proper nurturer through the caring of his mother and nature.

BROWN GIRL BEGINS

Brown Girl Begins (2017) is an Afrofuturist feature film written and directed by Sharon Lewis, a Caribbean Canadian American filmmaker. The film has received warm reception in Canada and internationally. In her webpage, Lewis states that the film is also being developed into a television series. The film is a prequel and adaptation of the novel *Brown Girl in the Ring* by Jamaican-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson. The film falls under the category of Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, folklore, magic realism, Afrocentricity, technology and liberation to represent the future through a “black cultural lens” (Womack 21). By using these elements, black minorities are also able to represent their perceptions of the past and present to speculate on the future while offering cultural critiques of the oppression and discrimination they have faced (Womack 21).

Following these general idea, in a dystopian Toronto in the year 2049, *Brown Girl Begins* follows 19-year-old young woman Ti-Jeanne, portrayed by Haitian, Malian and Canadian actress Mouna Traore, who is unable to overcome her childhood trauma and accept her assigned role as the priestess who will save her African diaspora community confined to the ghetto of the Burn. Ti-Jeanne struggles with the repressed memories of personal traumas caused by witnessing her mother’s death at the hands of Legba, the Yoruba trickster and God of crossroads, after the

mother failed to rise up to fulfill her calling as his vessel. The same calling is now made to Ti-Jeanne, and her fear of suffering the same fate as her mother clashes with the teachings and othermothering practices of her grandmother Mami, who also happens to be a spiritual grandmother, referred to as Mistress Hunter and portrayed by Canadian blues and jazz singer Shakura S'Aida.

The Burn is found on an island outside of Toronto. In the year Ti-Jeanne is born, her people are exiled to the island after the rich took control of the center of the city, also referred to as the Burbs. In their isolation, a man named Rudy wants to take control of the space through the use of Buff, a drug that maintains the people in the Burn under his control. Under his guidance, Crack experiments on the community because she wants to create smart slaves that Rudy can sell for profit to the people living in the Burbs. In response, Mami does everything in her power to protect the people in the Burn, which includes invoking Yoruba inspired Caribbean deities to assist them.

Initially, she calls the spirit Mama Ache, portrayed by Canadian soprano opera singer Measha Brueggergosman. In Santería, the term ashe is used to refer to the cosmic or divine energy that animates the universe (Edmonds & González 94). With this energy, the gods "endow and empower humans," and priests and priestess believe that with this energy problems can be solved, such as those related to medical illness, love or war (Murrell 114). In *Brown Girl Begins*, this force is transformed into a spirit known as Mama Ache. Reflecting some of the initial meaning, Mami calls Mama Ache to provide nourishment and safety to her people. She is portrayed as a black woman in a gray and white dress with white eyelashes, white eyeshadow and silver jewels on her lips. With her singing, she calls the priestess. Having her reflected as a physical entity in the film makes it easier for the audience to understand where the power Ti-

Jeanne needs will come from. Additionally, Brueggergosman's portrayal of Mama Ache gives a sense of trust and genuine care, especially when considering the positive reactions Ti-Jeanne has when she sees or hears the spirit in comparison to the other important deity present in the film.

When Crack takes control of Mama Ache and leaves them helpless, Mami has to rely on the power of Papa Legba, portrayed by actor Nigel Shawn Williams. In Vodou, Legba is the guard of all crossroads and the spirit of transition (Edmonds & González 109). He guards and opens gates and doors, creates opportunities, directs destinies and helps when making difficult decisions (Murrell 78). Legba is also a trickster, which outsiders may mistake for Satan (Murrell 78). In the film, Papa Legba is there to help rid the community from Crack and free Mama Ache. For this to happen, Papa Legba demands the spirit of a young person to become his vessel. This is where the tribulations for Ti-Jeanne begin. Her mother was chosen as Papa Legba's first conduit, but she was afraid of opening herself to him and dies in the process. This is probably a consequence of her living in Toronto for too long, cut off from her cultural and spiritual roots and exposed to a different culture and worldview. As a consequence, she probably sees him as a reflection of the devil like outsiders do. Her failure is reflective of other African and African Caribbean diaspora peoples whose connection to their ancestral cultures and beliefs die, and they turn into frightened zombies easily manipulated and controlled by people like Rudy and those in the Burbs.

The ritual that kills Ti-Jeanne's mother is the only scene that shows her. There are no images that illustrates who she was before she died. This artistic choice emphasizes how the event deeply affects Ti-Jeanne. She is not able to remember or recall the image of her mother in other instances. The images of that eventful night repeat throughout the film. The scene has different people from the community dressed in dark attires with colorful accessories, such as mardi gras

masks and feathers. The use of montage via the fragmentation of the scene and the rapidly changing images and the high-pitched sound that sometimes opens the scene reflect both the confusion and fear Ti-Jeanne felt and continues to feel in the present since she cannot completely comprehend what happened beyond the general event. As a result, Ti-Jeanne does not initially care about the reasons behind the ritual. It only reinstalls the horror of witnessing her mother's agonizing death. This intensifies her own fears that her mother's fate also awaits her. Her mindset is theorized by Nicole Willey who asserts that mothers have a strong influence in how their daughters constitute their identity and beliefs. Thus, Ti-Jeanne experiences the same fear her mother felt and envisions herself going through the same hell as her.

Ti-Jeanne's response is also a consequence of how Mami isolates her from the rest of her peers. She wants Ti-Jeanne to only focus on the studies that are supposed to prepare her to become a priestess and does not allow her to experience the community outside of the boundaries of their home. Mami feels a deep responsibility to give better opportunities to her people. Her dedication resembles "maternal politics," a term often used to reference Black women who engage in political activism. North American and European influenced feminist use it to connect the practice to community othermothering traditions and view it as an immature form of political activism because it supposedly focuses on their rights as mother instead of their other personal rights (Collins 194). Collins criticizes these scholars because they do not acknowledge Black women's perceptions of motherhood as a symbol of power and "the activist mothering it might engender as an enduring theme that politicizes Black women. Viewing motherhood as a symbol of power can catalyze Black women to take actions that they otherwise might not have considered" (194). She uses examples from Black women whose children have been murdered or held at gun point, and how those women decide to continue in those spaces to

show the injustices and violence their children have suffered and create change. Following Collins, Mami's understanding of motherhood affects how she approaches her relationship with Ti-Jeanne and the community. She sees how the Burn has affected the lives of her people, specifically how its decaying conditions and abuse of others caused the end of her daughter's life. Mami wants to instill something different in Ti-Jeanne by teaching her not to fear the spirits. By doing this, she simultaneously helps the community since Ti-Jeanne's final acceptance of Papa Legba to possess her means freedom from Crack and a disruption to Rudy's control.

Mami also adds to the discussion of how grandparents are commonly represented in American mainstream media. They are often viewed in relation to their children and grandchildren, and their other roles are either nonexistent or unacknowledged. Nancy Kang criticizes how motherhood is often represented within the parameters of life-givers, nurturers and providers (702). She believes that these constraints limit the complexity of women as other than mothers, mentioning healers as an example of the different direction their representations can take. In *Brown Girl Begins,* Mami's actions seem more tied to her role as a leader of the community than her role as a mother and grandmother for her ultimate goal is to liberate all from Crack and Rudy's influence.

Additionally, she is a healer, and others count on her to help with their pain and sickness. Chamberlain's thoughts on the importance of reputation in caring for others in the community works in this film. Mami is known for her reliability and attention, and thus others respect her deeply and go to her when they are in need. To some extent, her role as a healer and guide falls under traditional conceptions of Black women in traditional science fiction. Carol Duncan examines the representation of Black women in the science fiction films *X-men* (2000)*, Strange Days* (1999)*, Star Trek: First Contact* (1996)*,* and *The Matrix* (1999). She states that in these

films they are often portrayed as a heroic self-sacrificing mother figure to a white male protagonist. Duncan uses the term "heroic mothers" to categorize these various representations because the characters have the common features of heroes since they go into the world usually reluctantly, face either a physical or ideological foe and transform the heroes and the people near them through their actions, but they also have characteristics of mothers when they are assigned the role of sage, confidant or rescuer to nurture the male hero in his quest.

In the film, Mami contains some of these characteristics. Her role is that of the healer and sage, and her patience and actions eventually cause Ti-Jeanne to change and accept her role. Nevertheless, the representation of motherhood is mostly portrayed through othermothering her granddaughter. In this case, the person she nurtures is a derelict African diaspora female relative instead of the traditional white male figure. Additionally, contrary to the films Duncan analyzes, the protagonist of *Brown Girl Begins* is a black woman. Lewis explains that she preferred a dark-skin woman as the lead. This is to challenge Canadian and American audiences who are often presented with light-skin women as the heroines on-screen (Hernández et al.), in many dystopic films. These heroines almost always tend to be young white women as seen in films like *The Hunger Games* (2012) and *Divergent* (2014). Following Duncan's description, Ti-Jeanne portrays all the characteristics of a traditional hero, but she is also a healer that does not protect a white male protagonist but her people, a mostly Black community. This divergence from traditional representations of Black women in science fiction is not surprising considering the Afrofuturistic influence the film has, and "Afrofuturism, like post blackness, destabilizes previous analysis of blackness" (Anderson cited in Womack 31).

As a healer, Ti-Jeanne accepts the most important aspect of her grandmother's teachings and openly practices this role. Her reasoning seems connected to how she is able to control and

perform it as she likes in comparison to the uncertainty of having the spirits use her body as a vessel. She understands that the latter pertains more to the state of mind of the host and an immaterial world she cannot regulate, and thus she is not able to embrace it. Under these circumstances, her attraction to Tony seems logical for he represents a tangible world she can be a part of in comparison to Mami's world.

Throughout the film, various elements are placed to represent the duality between Mami and Tony. For example, Lewis describes that they use plastic, leather and wool as the main materials for the lead characters' costumes because they wanted to take into consideration what type of materials would be available in a dystopic setting, yet, they wanted to add bright colors to represent Caribbean fashion, and thus, they use feathers to mark a presence and connection to the spirits (Hernández et al.). For Mami's wardrobe, the feathers are present whereas for Tony they are not. This distinction highlights how both of them belong to the same space but not the same beliefs. Furthermore, how they address the situation and state of the Burn is highly different. When Mami talks about it, she has a sense of urgency in her voice, emphasizing how she believes that the future of the Burn will be decided in the near future. Contrastingly, Tony, whose vision is limited by hopelessness, addresses the current situation of the place as an inescapable reality. He lives and speaks as if the Burn will forever be as it is at that moment. Lastly, while Mami distances Crack and Buff from her home, Tony does not fear getting involved with either of them if they represent a means to survive and live comfortably in the Burn, perhaps because this is the world he has known for most of his life.

Tony and Mami are accurate reflections of their characters in *Brown Girl in the Ring*; how they influence Ti-Jeanne echoes events in the novel. In her analysis of the text, Sarah Wood explains that Gros-Jeanne, the original name for Mami, represents a medium to remember the

Caribbean by reconfiguring the "space as a life-sustaining and protective presence for herself and her family" (318). She represents "the syncretic communal religions of African[s] who, transported to the Caribbean [enslaved], used religion as a means of resistance to the white slavers and as a method through which their transported and transcribed cultures could be articulated" (Wood 318). Gros-Jeanne maintains this same depiction when she is transformed to Mami in the film because she uses Caribbean spirituality in the same way. She keeps a connection to these spirits to protect her people against those in the Burbs, who have segregated them to a barren land, and Rudy and Crack, who enable their control from the inside of the Burn. In the case of Tony, Wood conceptualizes him as an alignment with Western ideologies and perceptions, particularly how he is connected with Western consumer capitalism through his immediate association with Rudy's posse (320). This translates to the film with how Tony easily dismisses the veracity of the spirits, and how he slowly becomes another dealer and drug user for Crack because he is unable to trust in something beyond the material goods he can see and have.

The clash between the world as imagined by their Caribbean ancestors and their current situation in Toronto as represented through Mami and Tony prove to be a complication in Ti-Jeanne's understanding of her identity. The forceful nature of Mami's teaching do not allow Ti-Jeanne to fully appreciate what it means to be in tune with the spirits and to properly cope and gradually heal from the trauma of her mother's death. Mami and Ti-Jeanne's individual understanding and actions seem to be rooted in the trauma caused by the loss of a daughter and a mother. In Ti-Jeanne's case, she seems to suffer from Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD). Sussane Schaal, Anne Richter and Thomas Elbert explain that people understandably experience great distress after a loved one dies. This is usually temporary, but a person suffering from PGD feels

their grief for a prolonged period of time and does not experience the gradual decrease in grief that usually occurs over time. The symptoms of PGD can be

> . . . reactions involving separation distress (e.g., yearning, intrusive thoughts, intense pangs) and cognitive, emotional and behavioral symptoms (feeling emotionally numb, stunned, or that life is meaningless; confusion about one's role in life or a diminished sense of self; mistrust of others; difficulty accepting or avoiding the reality or bitterness over the loss; and difficulty moving on with life). (Schaal et al. 476)

Years after her mother's death, Ti-Jeanne continues to experience its effects, and just like with PGD, she is confused by her role, avoids reality and suffers from lack of self-esteem to help her belief in herself and her abilities. On the other hand, Mami seems to suffer from Separation Anxiety Disorder since she insists that Ti-Jeanne must follow specific and strict routines as a desperate response to prevent Ti-Jeanne from suffering the same fate of her mother.

On the other hand, her relationship with Tony solely focuses on them alone. If she is with him, she would not have to think about saving her people on her grandmother's terms which constantly reminds her of her loss. This is clear when she decides to leave with Tony on the day she is supposed to perform the ritual to become Papa Legba's conduit. Tony assumes that their life together means she will stay away from everything that pertains to Mami's teachings. In a moment where Ti-Jeanne says that she sees Mama Ache, Tony tells her "Don't bring any of that spirit business here. New start." With this expectation, Tony threatens to derail her mission. His actions and thoughts are very individualistic in nature, whereas Mami teaches to think and consider the present and future of their entire community. Tony seems to expect them to form a nuclear family, a cultural belief that has been described as normal, ideal and civilized, but in

reality, it is a consequence of the exposure to capitalistic worldviews that focuses mostly on individual living and survival.

Furthermore, when she starts living in Tony's shack, he tells her not to leave the space to keep her away from the dangers that roam outside. Tony's restrictions seem to imply that he does not believe she is capable of surviving alone in the Burn, or he may want Ti-Jeanne to be completely dependent on him. This is possible considering how he got angry with her anytime she wants to use her skills to fix something or provide for them. Even though his actions may be a result of him being overprotective and frustrated at his inability to properly provide for both of them, he seems rooted in established gender roles of men as the provider and women as responsible for the home. His overprotectiveness contrast with Mami's previous actions. Although she does overprotect Ti-Jeanne by keeping her within the boundaries of their home, she does it to enable her to learn and protect her until she is ready to accept Legba's power and confront Crack. Mami teaches her to be strong and ready for the world while Tony instills fear and dependency. Confronted with both situations of confinement, Ti-Jeanne chooses to leave both times. Nevertheless, Mami's teachings exude from her choices and desire to know more about her community.

While Ti-Jeanne explores the new area, she meets and sees the people that form the Burn and slowly begins to care about their well-being in a small period of time. First, she meets Melba. Portrayed by actress Sonia Dhillon Tully, Melba is a woman addicted to Buff who is used by Crack to test the limits of the drug. By this point, Ti-Jeanne has met other Buff users and creates a natural antidote to combat the dependency on the drug. She starts giving Melba the remedy, even though Crack commands her to stop producing and interfering with Rudy's plans. If a person takes Buff and the antidote at the same time, it would be deadly for the body and cause

the immediate death of the user. This is what happens to Melba. She continues to use Buff under Rudy's influence, and when she takes the antidote, she dies. Getting to know Melba proves to be a turning point for Ti-Jeanne because, even though she wants to use her healing abilities to help the community, she starts to recognize that to go against Crack will require more than a cure. She will have to rely on the power of the spirits.

In this process, Bruk Foot Sam becomes her guide. He has a bike repair shop, and he is described as always building something. Ti-Jeanne met Bruk Foot Sam when she was younger because her grandmother makes him remedies to try to alleviate the pain he has in his leg and provides him with the necessary materials to make the crutches that aid him when he walks. When Ti-Jeanne sees him again, she learns that he uses Buff to reduce the pain because none of Mami's remedies work. He is one of the reasons she develops the antidote, and when he complies and starts taking it, they realize that the anti-buff is also lessening the pain in his leg.

Although Ti-Jeanne does help him with her healing, he also helps her heal in a different way. One of the most fascinating aspects of this newly introduced character is that he shares the same face as Papa Legba and the Jab Jab that guards the Gateways. According to Lewis, using the same actor to portray the three roles was a deliberate choice because she wanted to represent all the aspects that constitute Papa Legba. She explains

> Papa Legba had to appear as otherworldly and powerful, and to make him embody three characters was a visual way to do that. Papa Legba is a spirit, neither good nor bad. He must use Ti-Jeanne's power to stay alive. It's impossible for gods to be alive unless they are connected to human power. Secondly, Papa Legba "possesses" Bruk Foot Sam to manipulate Ti-Jeanne. Lastly, Papa Legba can also appear as Jab Jab, that part of us that is animalistic, goes by instinct, and should go by instinct. (Hernández et al.)

By doing this, Lewis emphasizes the complexity of Caribbean spirits and the inability to characterize them under the duality of good and evil. Her interpretation is important because Western thought has easily deemed Caribbean and African religions as wrong or something that must be eradicated for their own belief systems.

Even though Lewis' original intention was to use Papa Legba's possession of Bruk Foot Sam as a manipulation technique, her representation of it in the film feels less forceful. Papa Legba's actions do exude the trickster quality of the deity, but Ti-Jeanne's interactions with Bruk Foot Sam often elicits understanding and guidance instead of intense pressure. He is both Sam and Papa Legba, and in the different roles, he is able to gradually breakdown Ti-Jeanne's doubts and fears. Seeing Papa Legba represented by Sam makes the deity more compassionate because he understands that she will not open up to him if he continues to only approach her in a position of power. It is through the mundane life of Bruk Foot Sam that he is able to reach Ti-Jeanne and help her open her eyes to what is holding her back. Opening eyes is an important aspect of the film. Ti-Jeanne's mother was unable to open hers when she was in the middle of the ritual. Mami repeated again and again for her to open them, and thus open herself to Papa Legba, but she could not do it. Similarly, Ti-Jeanne does the same when Papa Legba gives her visions since she constantly rejects them no matter how strong they are. Once she completely recalls how and why her mother dies, she is able to conquer the fear it causes her and open her eyes to the spirit. At the same time, through Bruk Foot Sam, Papa Legba also provides her with an alternative to feel more in control when taking the spirit. He develops a suit to help her decide how much power she can use, and she is able to stop it as well because as he says, "The old ways need changing," and meeting each other half-way facilitates their subsequent union.

The last character that helps Ti-Jeanne come to terms with her identity is Gracie, portrayed by actress Hannah Chantée. She is the audience's first encounter with Crack's violence and ruthlessness because she is a young victim of her abuse. Ti-Jeanne develops a positive relationship with the child, and she genuinely cares for her well-being. Towards the end of the film, Crack kidnaps Gracie and physically abuses her with her whip, an image that echoes the abuses of slavery. Ti-Jeanne does not know how to find her, and the urgency to save Gracie prompts Ti-Jeanne to fully accept Papa Legba's powers. After she defeats Crack and saves the child, she further uses her powers to take Gracie's pain and remove the scars from her body. To some extent, Ti-Jeanne becomes a surrogate mother for Gracie for she protects and saves her without even thinking about the cost of her life which was all she could think about before.

Through her interaction with the people from the Burn and the spirit of Papa Legba, Ti-Jeanne is able to conceptualize the world through her eyes instead of through her grandmother's worldview. This does not mean that her teachings were unimportant in Ti-Jeanne's journey. On the contrary, they formed the base of her identity and who she becomes in the end. Her journey echoes an analysis Putnam makes of Edwidge Danticat's "Nineteen Thirty-Seven." It tells the story of a young woman, Josephine, who begins to reconstruct her mother's life and identity after the mother is imprisoned and loses herself to the abuse of the police. Josephine does this alongside other women who want to the same for theirs, and they find support and unity in each other and in the natural environment that surrounds them. Putnam explains that Danticat combines communal mothering and self-mothering to show how "women [gain] wisdom by understanding the importance of their own empowerment" (121). Lewis does something similar in the film because Ti-Jeanne combines Mami's othermothering and her self-mothering through her personal interactions with the community and the Caribbean spirits to embolden herself and

assume the role of priestess. She stops seeing the spirits' powers as force and death but as a way to protect and heal her people.

Brown Girl Begins portrays a side of othermothering that expose the tensions and clashes between the people involved. Ti-Jeanne suffers from Mami's insistence to accept Papa Legba's spirit and become the priestess even when she is unprepared emotionally and psychologically. Mami's zeal for the immediate salvation of her community, makes her overbearing, whereas Ti-Jeanne, who is suffering from prolonged grief disorder, is trying to cope with the death of her mother at the hands of the same spirit. Gradually, as Ti-Jeanne interacts with other members of the community—Tony, Melba, Bruk Foot Sam and Gracie—, she begins to comprehend what she must do beyond giving palliatives to the suffering. She needs to defeat Rudy and eradicate the violence with the help of Legba. Once she reaches this understanding on her time, with the help of Sam/Legba, she opens her eyes and heart to and takes on the role of healer, protector, and restorer. Her role as priestess is sealed. It is a role that traces through matrilineal lines.

HELPING THE INDIVIDUAL, HELPING THE COMMUNITY

Daranas and Lewis present different plots and backgrounds in their films, but their representations of the relationships that form these Caribbean families intersect in various aspects. The young protagonists of both films have to deal with the deteriorating conditions of a world they did not create and see others like them suffer from the uncertainties of the present, including the adult figures in their lives such as their mothers. The representations of mothers are part of the reason why a comparison between these two films is essential. As stated at the beginning, sociological and anthropological studies tend to only list specific social problems as the principal reasons why a change in caregiver may occur for both African American and African Caribbean families, drug addiction among them. While *Conducta* does portray drug

addiction as a possible cause for othermothering, *Brown Girl Begins* uses the deteriorating mental health and exacerbating anxiety of a mother as the source for this same outcome. By doing this, the film highlights another possible situation that may lead to the same practice. Both films do not focus only on the lack of mothering but on how the state and the dominating systems are in part culpable for these women's personal struggles.

Even though the protagonists are young, Daranas and Lewis represent characters who have the agency to act and evoke change. Chala supports his mother financially, even though he is in sixth grade, while he also finds the strength to call her out on her addiction in the hopes of helping her recover. Ti-Jeanne accepts her role as a priestess to properly defend her community from the capitalist, racist and abusive powers that are trying to subdue her community. Yet, they understand their limitations and look for guidance and help in adults and old deities who comprehend their situations and encourage them to be the best people they can be.

Daranas and Lewis also critique the situations occurring beyond the Caribbean spaces portrayed in their films. In the case of *Conducta,* Lizette Mora explains that the Cuban government has lost the capability to satisfy the demands of the population to better their living conditions (222). She affirms that the film accurately portrays how people in these circumstances have no choice but to focus on their survival regardless of the laws of the state (239). To some extent, Chala and Sonia embody Cuba and its people; the island represents a mother who is not capable of helping her children, and Chala represents the community who is suffering and trying to survive, regardless of the love they may feel for their country. For *Brown Girl Begins,* Lewis clarifies that she wanted to represent a world that did not feel too far from the future so that the audience could connect it to the events of the world today. She asserts that communities around the world are segregated whether through real walls or "invisi-walls" (Hernández et al.). The use

of the glimmer in the film is her way of representing how people from the Caribbean see the West as "a mirage or a tease, all that luxury, but we aren't part of it" (Hernández et al.).

Despite the social conditions represented in these films, the filmmakers assert that the solution can be found through the union of the communities. Chala can survive thanks to the generosity of Carmela and Ignacio, and in turn, he inspires them to search and fight for something better. Ti-Jeanne represents a generation that is losing their Caribbean roots, cultures and identities and misunderstands and fears the power and truth they may find if they embrace it. It teaches this new generation to learn from the old generation about the past and understand it through their present, while teaching the old to trust the younger ones, regardless of their divergent experiences. These Caribbean filmmakers declare through their productions that in unity Caribbean communities will be able to find solutions to their present overbearing conditions.

Lastly, Daranas and Lewis represent othermothering by employing different genres in their films. Daranas uses drama and follows a realist approach, while Lewis tackles Afrofuturism and the unknown spaces that await. These distinctive styles affirm the permanence of othermothering as an essential sociocultural tradition in Caribbean communities. *Conducta* shows it as a contemporary practice. *Brown Girl Begins* asserts its continuation in the future. This African tradition has become essential for the everyday of Caribbean peoples and representing it in present and future landscapes sustains that children like Chala and Ti-Jeanne exist and will most likely continue to exist in the future. What is essential is that systems like othermothering are in place to ensure that they are nurtured and taken care of while also providing adequate support to mothers instead of simply imposing them with unmeetable expectations of mothering. It is through the effort of the community that these children will be able to grow and effect change.

Exploring Caribbean films through the perspective of othermothering opens the discussion to how Caribbean peoples experience family away from Hollywood conceptions of the ideal family structure. Contemporary filmmakers represent the Caribbean family while also adding other complex topics such as education, addiction, death, religion, community relations, diaspora, among others, to note how it is formed and transformed by an individual's specific circumstances. Both Daranas and Lewis present young protagonists with agency to navigate their complex realities, while also opening themselves to receive the help of their communities and family, whether consanguineal or not. We grow with these young protagonists, suffer their doubts and fears and rejoice at their victories. We admire the way the adults engage other parenting strategies to help mold and guide these young characters toward their future with commitment, firmness, and open-mindedness. As more Caribbean films continue to be released, this type of study could be expanded further to identify and include discussions on other areas pertinent to how Caribbean peoples reconceptualize and recuperate their identities, voices, and places in global cinema and cinema studies.

Works Cited

Carrasquillo Hernández, Tania. "Infancia (In)Visible: La Subjetividad de la Niñez como Transgresión a la Marginalidad en las Películas *Conducta* y *Pelo Malo*." *Faculty Publications*, 2017, pp. 58-87, https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/glcsfac_pubs/7.

Chamberlain, Mary. "Rethinking Caribbean Families: Extending the Links." *Community, Work & Family,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2003, DOI: 1080/1366880032000063905.

Clarke, Jennifer. "The Challenges of Child Welfare Involvement for Afro-Caribbean families in Toronto." *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 33, 2011, pp. 274-283, DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.010.

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black Women and Motherhood." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment,* Routledge, 2002, pp. 173-199.

Crawford, Charmaine. "The Continuity of Global Crossings: African-Caribbean Women and Transnational Motherhood." *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative,* vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, pp. 9-25, https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/34533/31394.

Daranas, Ernesto, dir. *Conducta.* RTV Comercial & Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficas, 2014.

Duncan, Carol B. "Black Women and Motherhood in Contemporary Cinematic Science Fiction." *Mother Matters: Motherhood as Discourse and Practice,* edited by Andrea O'Reilly, Association for Research on Mothering, 2004, pp. 79-86.

Edmonds, Ennis B. & Michelle A. Gonzalez. *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction.* New York University Press, 2010.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. 1986. Pluto Press, 2008.

Flores-Durón, Alfonso. “Ernesto Daranas, director cubano: `La película Conducta refleja el retroceso de la educación debido a casi un cuarto de siglo de crisis económica en Cuba.'” *Cubainformación,* 12 Sept. 2014, *http://historico.cubainformacion.tv/index.php/cultura/58439-ernesto-daranas-director-cubano-la-pelicula-conducta-refleja-el-retroceso-de-la-educacion-debido-a-casi-un-cuarto-de-siglo-de-crisis-economica-en-cuba*.

Gibson, Priscilla. “Developmental Mothering in an African American Community: From Grandmothers to New Mothers Again.” *Mothering in the African Diaspora,* 2000, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 32-41.

González, Orlando. “Peleas de perros: muerte en las vallas clandestinas.” *Cubanet,* 16 September 2015, https://www.cubanet.org/actualidad-destacados/peleas-de-perros-muerte-en-las-vallas-clandestinas-video-2/.

Hernández, Ari, et al. “Caribbean Woman Superhero! Coming of Age in Dystopian Canada: An Interview with Sharon Lewis.” *Moko: Caribbean Arts and Letters,* http://mokomagazine.org/wordpress/caribbean-woman-superhero-coming-of-age-in-dystopian-canada-an-interview-with-sharon-lewis/.

Jenkins, Claire. *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood.* Bloomberg, 2015.

Kang, Nancy. “‘Revolutionary Viragoes:' Othered Mothering in Afro-Caribbean Diaspora Literature.” *Women's Studies,* vol. 42, 2013, pp.696-719, DOI: 10.1080/00497878.2013.802634.

Lépine, Cédric. "Entrevista con Ernesto Daranas por su película 'Conducta.'" *Mediapart,* 21 Mar. 2016. https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/mediapart-en-espanol/article/210316/entrevista-con-ernesto-daranas-por-su-pelicula-conducta.

Levy, Emanuel. "The American Dream of Family in Film: From Decline to Comeback." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* vol. XXII, no. 2, 1991, DOI: 10.3138/jcfs.22.2.187.

Lewis, Sharon, dir. *Brown Girl Begins.* Urbansoul, 2017.

López-Cabrales, María del Mar. "Una Luz al Final del Tunel. Maestras, Abuelas y Niñ@s en Tres Películas Cubanas: *Conducta, Habanastation y Viva Cuba."* Interdisciplinar, vol. 28, 2017, pp. 11-22, https://conci.revistas.ufs.br/index.php/interdisciplinar/article/view/6833.

Manicavasagar, Vijaya & Derrick Silove. *Separation Anxiety Disorder in Adults: Clinical Features, Diagnostic Dilemmas and Treatment Guidelines.* Academic Press, 2020.

Morgan, Paul and Valerie Youssef. "Introduction." *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence Through Caribbean Discourse*. University of West Indies Press, 2006, pp. 1-20.

Mullings, Delores V. "Temporary Mothering: Grieving the Loss of Foster Children When They Leave." *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative,* vol. 1, no. 2, 2010, pp. 165-176, https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/download/31219/28656.

Murrell, Nathaniel Samuel. *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions.* Temple University Press, 2010.

Palcy, Euzhan, dir. *Rue Cases-Nègres.* NEF Diffusion, Orca Productions & SU.MA.FA., 1983.

Perry Henzell, dir. *The Harder They Come.* International Films, 1972.

Putnam, Amanda. "Mothering the Motherless: Portrayals of Alternative Mothering." *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme,* vol. 23, no. 2, 2004, pp. 118-124, https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/6317/5505

Robinson, Meredith N. "*Ciné woulé, ciné en progrès*: An Investigation of the Francophone Caribbean Film Circuit, 1968-2010." *Small Axe,* vol. 14, no. 3, 2010, pp. 45-68, DOI: 10.1215/07990537-2010-021.

Senior, Olive. "The Household Setting." *Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, James Curry, and Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 8-24.

Schaal, Susanne, Anne Richter and Thomas Elbert. "Prolonged Grief Disorder and Depression in a German Community Sample." *Death Studies*, vol.38, no.7, 2014, pp. 476-481, https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2013.809032.

Smith, M. G. *West Indian Family Structure.* University of Washington Press, 1982.

Stam, Robert, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis. "Film-narratology." *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics,* Routledge, 2005, pp. 70-124.

Warner, Keith Q. "Cinema and Caribbean Consciousness: Believing the Make-Believe." *On Location: Cinema and Film in the Anglophone Caribbean.* Macmillan Education, 2000, pp. 5-38.

Willey, Nicole. "Colonialism's Impact on Mothering: Jamaica Kincaid's Rendering of Mother-Daughter Split in Annie John." *Textual Mothers / Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures,* edited by Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010, pp. 271-286.

Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture,* Lawrence Hill Books, 2013, ebook.

Wood, Sarah. "'Serving the Spirits:' Emergent Identities in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring.*" *Extrapolation,* vol. 46, no. 3, 2005, pp. 315-326,

https://biblioteca.uprrp.edu:2053/apps/doc/A141726998/AONE?u=uprpiedras&sid=AONE&xid=dee46e4c.

Zielina, María. "El Film Cubano 'Conducta': ¿Es Posible Mirarse en el Espejo?" *Revista del CESLA,* no. 17, 2015, pp. 383-389, http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243333483016.