



The Intersectional Perspective on Kinship and Mothering: Implications for Marginalized Groups

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersectional perspective on kinship and mothering, emphasizing how multiple forms of social stratification—such as race, gender, legal status, and socioeconomic class—interact to shape the lived experiences of marginalized groups, particularly racialized migrant women, unaccompanied refugee mothers, and racialized mothers. Utilizing an intersectional lens, the paper examines the complex dynamics of transnational parenting, the impact of legal precarity on mothering practices, and the challenges faced by mothers in accessing resources and support systems. The analysis highlights the critical role of social anthropologists in addressing these complexities and advocating for more inclusive policies that recognize and support diverse family structures and caregiving roles. By incorporating insights from numerous studies, the paper underscores the need for an inclusive approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of kinship and mothering in contemporary society. This intersectional framework is essential for developing effective policies and practices that support the well-being of marginalized mothers and their families, contributing to a more equitable and supportive societal environment.

Keywords: Intersectionality; Kinship; Mothering; Transnational Parenting; Legal Precarity; Marginalized Groups; Social Anthropologists; Racialized Migrant Women

Introduction

In contemporary social anthropology, the intersectional perspective on kinship and mothering offers a nuanced understanding of how various forms of social stratification—such as race, gender, legal status, and socioeconomic class—interact to shape the lived experiences of marginalized groups [1,2]. This paper explores how intersectionality informs the practices and dynamics of mothering and kinship, with a specific focus on racialized migrant women, unaccompanied refugee mothers, and racialized mothers [3-5].

Intersectionality and Mothering

Intersectionality, a concept coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, elucidates the interconnectedness of social categorizations and their cumulative impact on marginalized individuals [6]. This theoretical framework is particularly useful in the context of mothering, as it reveals how multiple axes of identity, such as race, gender, legal status, and socioeconomic class, intersect to shape the experiences of mothers from marginalized backgrounds [7,8]. Intersectionality uncovers the compounded effects of legal



precarity, gendered racialization, and systemic inequities, offering a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges these mothers face.

Legal precarity significantly influences the experiences of marginalized mothers. For instance, undocumented migrant mothers often navigate a precarious legal landscape that exacerbates their vulnerability. The fear of deportation, limited access to social services, and the constant threat of family separation create an environment of chronic stress and insecurity [9]. These legal challenges intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as gendered racialization, which further marginalizes these women. Gendered racialization refers to the ways in which race and gender intersect to produce unique forms of discrimination and oppression [10]. For example, migrant mothers may face racial profiling and gender-based violence, compounding their struggles.

In the context of transnational parenting, intersectionality highlights the complexities migrant mothers encounter in maintaining relationships with their children across borders. Transnational parenting involves a range of practices, including informal kinship care, remittances, and reliance on social networks. Migrant mothers often depend on extended family members or friends to care for their children in their home country while they work abroad to provide financial support [11]. This arrangement necessitates a constant negotiation of caregiving responsibilities and the maintenance of emotional bonds with their children through long-distance communication and periodic visits [12].

Moreover, the intersectional perspective underscores how systemic inequities, such as limited access to healthcare, education, and social services, disproportionately affect marginalized mothers. For instance, mothers of color often face significant barriers to accessing adequate maternal healthcare, resulting in higher rates of maternal and infant mortality [13]. These disparities are rooted in a history of institutional racism and sexism that continues to shape the healthcare system. An intersectional approach to mothering not only acknowledges these systemic barriers but also calls for structural changes to address the root causes of these inequities.

The intersectional lens is essential for understanding the multifaceted experiences of mothering in a globalized world. It reveals how various forms of social stratification interact to create unique challenges for marginalized mothers, particularly those engaged in transnational parenting. By highlighting the interconnectedness of legal precarity, gendered racialization, and systemic inequities, intersectionality provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing and addressing the complexities of mothering in

contemporary society.

The intersectional analysis also extends to breastfeeding practices among mothers of color, revealing how race and gender intersect to create distinct challenges. Research by Carter, Stone, and Cox [14] emphasizes that societal disparities significantly influence access to breastfeeding resources and support systems, further marginalizing mothers who already face systemic inequities. This intersectional perspective is crucial for developing inclusive policies that address the specific needs of diverse mothering experiences and kinship structures.

Legal Precarity, Mothering, and Transnational Parenting

Legal precarity is a significant factor affecting marginalized mothers, particularly refugee and migrant women. This condition of legal uncertainty exacerbates their vulnerabilities and profoundly shapes their daily lives and mothering practices. Suerbaum and Lijnders [15] discuss how activism, care, and resistance become integral to mothering practices in times of displacement and legal uncertainty. Mothers in these situations often develop creative and resilient strategies to provide for their children and ensure their safety and well-being despite significant obstacles.

Unaccompanied refugee mothers are a particularly vulnerable group within this context. These women frequently face profound challenges that include loneliness, financial instability, racism, and the pursuit of education [16]. The isolation they experience is often compounded by the physical separation from extended family and support networks, which are crucial for emotional and practical support. This isolation can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, further complicating their ability to care for their children effectively [17].

Financial instability is another critical challenge for refugee and migrant mothers. Many of these women are unable to secure stable employment due to their legal status, language barriers, or lack of recognition of their qualifications and skills. This economic precarity limits their access to essential resources such as adequate housing, nutritious food, and healthcare, which are vital for their children's development and well-being [18]. Consequently, these mothers often rely on informal economies or precarious work conditions, which can be exploitative and further perpetuate their marginalization [19].

Racism and discrimination are pervasive issues that refugee and migrant mothers encounter regularly. These mothers often face xenophobic attitudes and institutional

racism, which can manifest in various forms, such as unequal access to social services, biased treatment in healthcare settings, and discriminatory practices in the labor market [20]. This systemic racism not only affects their ability to integrate into the host society but also impacts their children's experiences and opportunities, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage [21].

The pursuit of education is another significant challenge for unaccompanied refugee mothers. Balancing educational aspirations with the demands of single motherhood and survival can be extraordinarily difficult. These women often have limited access to educational opportunities due to their legal status, financial constraints, and responsibilities as primary caregivers [22]. Despite these barriers, many refugee mothers are determined to pursue education to improve their circumstances and provide better futures for their children.

In navigating these challenges, refugee and migrant mothers often develop strategies of resistance and resilience. They engage in forms of activism, both formal and informal, to advocate for their rights and improve their living conditions. This can include participating in community organizations, forming support networks with other migrant and refugee women, and advocating for policy changes that address their specific needs [23]. These acts of resistance are crucial for challenging the systemic barriers they face and fostering a sense of empowerment and agency.

Additionally, the care practices of these mothers are deeply influenced by their experiences of legal precarity. They often adopt flexible and adaptive caregiving strategies to navigate the uncertainties of their lives. This can involve relying on transnational networks for support, sharing childcare responsibilities within their communities, and utilizing informal resources to meet their children's needs [24]. These practices highlight the resilience and resourcefulness of refugee and migrant mothers in the face of significant challenges.

Transnational parenting introduces additional layers of complexity to kinship dynamics. Best illustrates how migrant mothers and kinship caretakers confront cultural and logistical challenges, balancing their cultural values and practices with the demands of living in a foreign country. This often involves relying on extended family networks and informal caregiving arrangements, which can lead to non-shared environments and contradictory practices within transnational families, as noted by Phoenix and Bauer. These dynamics underscore the importance of understanding kinship beyond traditional biological ties, encompassing a wide range of social connections and support networks.

Social anthropology plays a critical role in addressing the complex dynamics of kinship and mothering, particularly for marginalized groups. Social anthropologists provide essential support and advocacy, helping to navigate the intricate challenges posed by intersectional identities. This includes supporting parents in kinship care arrangements, as discussed by Kiraly and Humphreys, who highlight the disempowerment felt by parents in navigating contact arrangements with children in kinship care.

Conclusion

The intersectional perspective on kinship and mothering is vital for understanding the diverse and multifaceted experiences of marginalized mothers. By recognizing the interplay of legal, racial, gender, and socioeconomic factors, researchers and practitioners can develop more inclusive and effective policies and practices. This approach not only supports the well-being of marginalized mothers and their children but also enriches the broader understanding of kinship and mothering in contemporary society. As social anthropologists, it is imperative to continue exploring these intersections to advocate for more equitable and supportive environments for all families.

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