

Abstract

The following ethnography provides a deep insight into the life worlds of Jamaican women in Montreal. Historically, Jamaicans primarily migrated to Anglophone cities in Canada, the USA, or the UK. In the mid-1950s, the government of Quebec began recruiting care and domestic workers from the Caribbean through the so-called West Domestic Scheme. The impact of this labour migration –mostly performed by women from Jamaica– has received little attention in the scholarly literature to date. Thus, this study offers a first approach to understand motives, narratives, practices, and perspectives of second and third generation Jamaican migrant women in Montreal. Here, socio-cultural and bodily practices as well as processes of inclusion and exclusion play an important role to examine the diversity of their individual ways of life. Through a deep ‘immersion’ (Ingold 2007) into the daily lives of five female interlocutors, the ethnography provides a discernment of the construction of their ‘beyond transnational’ belongings and identities, and opens up a understanding of the women’s sense of self. Moreover, the ‘multi-sited’ (Marcus 1995) study actively follows the interlocutors on their journeys ‘home’ and analyses strategic forms of migratory return and mobility. The temporary or final return to Jamaica emerges as a life-long, multi-layered process that reveals profound yearnings for childhood memories, traditions, places, culture and people. Here, the ethnography highlights the relevance of the recourse to and the passing on of intergenerational knowledge about Jamaica as a continuously oscillating narrative and physical practice. Utilizing social networks to family, kin and friends across cultural, geographical and national borders unfolds as an important key to endure a life that has a ‘here’ and a ‘there’ (Simmons 2010) at the same time. Hence, Jamaican women’s mobility functions as a dynamic, pragmatic, indeterminate, and irreversible tool of migratory agency and belonging.

The study was developed within the framework of the DFG-funded International Research Training Group “Diversity: Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces” and resulted in a dissertation at the department of Ethnology at the University of Trier, Germany.

