CARIBBEAN WOMEN NOVELISTS: COURTING FEMINISM, CONSTRUCTING NATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Barbara McCaskill)

ABSTRACT

My dissertation, Caribbean Women Novelists: Courting Feminism, Constructing Nation examines how the female protagonists in the select novels of contemporary Anglophone writers Merle Hodge, Lakshmi Persaud, Paule Marshall, and Erna Brodber continually move “towards wholeness” by fashioning a self-consciousness that is grounded in the cultural values of their native island. Joyce Pettis’s use of the phrase “towards wholeness” denotes a spiritual wholeness, or completeness. I contend that as the protagonists mature and discover the agency in their self-awareness through the respective narratives, a hybrid feminism begins to emerge. At the core of my research, I build upon Patricia Mohammed’s discussion that a distinct regional feminism is key to understanding the particulars of home, identity and community in the Caribbean. She stresses that feminism must defined in context to the culture from which it is developed. The wider implication of my research is that Caribbean women writers are architects of a growing transnational feminism. Caribbean women also create paths shaped by their own thoughts and actions, and not exclusively by the cultures that produced them.

INDEX WORDS: Caribbean Literature; black women; Merle Hodge; Lakshmi Persaud; Paule Marshall; Erna Brodber; Feminism; Nationalism; Postcolonialism
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my daughter, Naima Simone Adams, my grandmothers, Anna Dukes Kennedy and Lola Bell Scott Boyd, and my mother, Ruth Kennedy Boyd. I also dedicate this dissertation to other mothers who desire to write and to transform the world.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for all of the blessings he has bestowed upon me. In Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) He declares, "For I know the plans I have for you,… plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This scripture is the driving force of my academic journey. I want to thank Dr. Barbara McCaskill, Dr. Lesley Feracho, and Dr. Sujata Iyengar for their invaluable criticism, support, and patience. I thank my husband, Kendrick Adams, for being the selfless partner and father he is supposed to be. His patience and generosity are superior examples of manhood. To my daughter, my love, Naima Simone Adams, you are a bright-eyed cherub who is my greatest inspiration and, at times, my biggest distraction. I love you in spite of the interruptions. I thank my mother and in-laws (Marie Barber Adams and James Adams) for sacrificing your free weekends to babysit and entertain Naima. Finally, my research would not have been possible without the libraries at The University of Georgia, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the University of South Carolina at Columbia, Emory University, and the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LIBERATION THROUGH LITERATURE

“In the crucible of their own history, they came seeking to transcend that history of marginality, to devise and give utterance to their own presence. The seeding of the self, the souling of the being, the affirmation of their ethos, spiritualizing, indeed the ritualizing of a new mythos.”—Wilfred Cartey

The Caribbean literary critic and poet Wilfred Cartey calls attention to a “new mythos” that the Caribbean female writer presents. Her presence and voice have had to rely on an undocumented history of oral culture, and therefore to risk obscurity at the hands of a male-centered, documented history. In order for Caribbean women to “give utterance to their own presence,” they have to liberate themselves through writing, the act of documentation, the creation of literature. According to Ashcroft’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), a fundamental text of postcolonial theory, Caribbean women epitomize the colonial subjects who are able to “write out of the condition of otherness,” transcend marginality, and subsequently achieve literary and cultural redefinition”(23).

I became interested in the literature of Caribbean women because they represented to me the exotic and/or mysterious other women in my cadre of British and American literature courses. As I navigated a sea of canonical coursework, I found

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myself accumulating questions about “silenced women”\(^3\) and their origins. So, for example, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1623) inspired me to want to know more about Caliban’s people. Where was this island where Prospero took his only daughter, and what was it named? My first class about slave narratives included the autobiography entitled *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831). Upon further study, I immediately tried to understand “West Indian” within the context of American Indians and Indians from South Asia. Later, an American Literature class would introduce me to William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936); I wondered how the white Colonel Sutpen’s black lover and their mixed race son Charles Bon were able to have a fairly decent existence down south in New Orleans. What aspects of the history and culture of New Orleans, Louisiana, made it customary and acceptable for biracial couples to mingle and marry?

My comments and concerns about silenced women and their origins are shared by Caribbean scholars Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido. As editors of the first book of critical essays on Caribbean women’s writing, *Out of the Kumbla* (1990), they make “a deliberate attempt to inscribe or reinsert women into Caribbean literary history, or at least to identify their overlooked presence within the various, primary, literary/language traditions”\(^4\). Davies and Fido note that Caribbean men and European women have cruelly overlooked these women in literary criticism, thereby continuing the


vices of colonialism. Just as Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (1982) announced a new flowering of African-American women’s literature in the late twentieth century, the production of *Out of the Kumbla* solidified a Caribbean women writers’ literary renaissance-of-sort that began in the late 1980s at the Caribbean Women Writers First International Conference at Wellesley College. It would be the first time that distinguished Caribbean women writers such as Sylvia Wynter, author of *The Hills of Hebron* (1965), and Merle Hodge, author of *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970), would all convene at one place with Caribbean critics such as Darryl Cumber Dance and Elaine Savory Fido. The literary contributions of Caribbean women continue and have strengthened with its newest members being Edwidge Danticat of Haiti, Marie-Elena John of Antigua, and Nalo Hopkinson of Canada.

It is through the voices of Caribbean women’s novels such as Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone To Heaven* (1987), Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (1985), and Maryse Condé’s *Tree of Life* (1992) that I am able to see an even greater complexity of the black experience and recognize a body of scholarship where black women interrogate and create literature and criticism from the interstices of the dominant colonial power and intervene between the discourses of Caribbean men and European women. My work, *Caribbean Women Novelists: Courting Feminism, Constructing Nation* examines how the female protagonists in the select novels of contemporary Anglophone writers Merle Hodge, Lakshmi Persaud, Paule Marshall, and Erna Brodber continually move “towards wholeness” by fashioning a self-consciousness that is grounded in the cultural values of

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5 European men are certainly not excluded from this kind of neglect because history has shown us that they have always wielded the most power in being neglectful. However, when black men and white women exclude these women, the erasure seems more damaging and vindictive to the Caribbean women writers.  
their native island. Pettis’s use of the phrase “towards wholeness” denotes a spiritual wholeness, or completeness. I interpret her discussion of spirituality to indicate ritualized religious practices or the more informal or personal state of “being in tune with nature.”

Pettis relates both types of spirituality to the works of Paule Marshall. I contend that as the protagonists mature and discover the agency in their self-awareness through the respective narratives an “indigenous feminism” begins to emerge.

My criterion for selecting Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970), Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990), Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), and Brodber’s *Louisiana* (1994) is based upon my desire to discuss feminist growth and influence in twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean women’s novels. The first three novels are culturally significant and present a clear, chronological development of feminist identity. *Crick Crack, Monkey* was the first Afro-Caribbean bildungsroman; *Butterfly in the Wind* is the first Indo-Caribbean bildungsroman, and *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is the first Afro-Caribbean American bildungsroman. *Louisiana* balances my discussions of the Caribbean American experience while simultaneously presenting a non-linear development of a young woman’s feminist identity. These authors represent the two largest racial groups (East Indians and blacks) in the Caribbean region and the two of the largest countries (Jamaica and Trinidad) in the region. Leah Rosenberg’s *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007) addresses the importance of this grouping of literature from Trinidad and Jamaica:

Thus, I make no pretense of providing a comprehensive history of the region’s literature. Rather, I focus on two

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7 I have paraphrased this information from Joyce Pettis’s, *Towards Wholeness in Paule Marshall’s Fiction* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995). I have used quotation marks around the phrase “being in tune with nature” because it is a colloquial phrase.
of the larger countries in the region that had strong literary
and political movements in the early twentieth century.…
In both countries, writers established the folk as the basis
of national culture while attempting to claim a modernity
that stood in conflict with that folk. In both countries,
writers addressed that dilemma in large part through
representations of women and their sexuality. (Rosenberg 9)
I too complicate the literary continuity of my research by discussing island-specific issues
of history and gender. As Patricia Mohammed states, “The region’s earliest literature
almost always focused on the Bildungs of creole men.” My discussion counteracts this
history by focusing on the Bildungs of Caribbean women (8).

According to critical Caribbean theorist Patricia Mohammed’s “Toward
Indigenous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean,” indigenous feminism points directly
“to both a conscious and unconscious understanding of the Caribbean regions traditions”
(7). She states that “the interrogation of the past with the present creates continuity and
tradition. This continuity and tradition—of families, buildings, institutions, art, music,
song, dance, cuisine,…of language, and of cultural beliefs--all mark identity and
difference. An indigenous feminism has to grow from and intersect with the politics of
identity of the region” (6). I challenge Mohammed’s parameters of indigenous feminism
to include the larger diasporic influences of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean women because
migratory cultures such as the Caribbean are just as influenced by their homes as they are
by their destinations.

8 Patricia Mohammed, “Towards Indigeneous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean,” Feminist Review 59
(1998): 6-9
The Caribbean female moves towards wholeness by understanding how the role of her womanhood can make an indelible mark in any community which she inhabits. I employ womanhood to indicate physical and/or intellectual growth with the expectation of that woman pursuing roles that symbolize maturity. Marriage, motherhood, financial independence, and pursuit of higher education all constitute some level of maturity for females. These roles can be exclusive or inclusive of each other. The history and legacy of a culture are fractured and incomplete without the female perspective. I have adopted “towards wholeness” to describe not only the protagonists of the novels I study but also the authors of them, who use their narratives to articulate their cultural past, present, and future. They are literary mavericks who have created paths shaped by their own thoughts and actions, and not exclusively by the cultures that produced them. Their contributions act as cultural agents that preserve traditions and emphasize the central role women have played in those traditions.

I have chosen to write about narratives because narratives assert power, especially when written by recently colonized people. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) proposes that the “[n]arrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, and consciousness to the unitary web of vision” of the Western, and/or European male (25). His statement also means that American and British readers should acknowledge that the historical and cultural background of the Caribbean dictate that “Caribbean literature must be approached on its own terms and not merely read as if it were a subset of British and American Literature” (Booker 3). My study pursues the objective of further dismantling the idea of a “unitary” Caribbean and analyzing and reading

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Caribbean literature as its own, not as a subset of another culture and nation. To distinguish Caribbean literature from British and American literature means to decolonize it, or free it from factors which do not consider the region with its own culturally intact, multifaceted identity.

Shirley Toland-Dix’s dissertation *To Tell Their Own Stories: Transformation of Narrative Forms by Caribbean Women Novelists* (2001) continues the discussion about the power and purpose of narrative by concluding that the “feminist narrative challenges male notions of the fixed, eternal, …[T]he movement of Caribbean women’s narrative challenges Western women’s too frequent impositions of stasis upon women of color” (Dix 3). 11 Three of the protagonists in my select novels are actively in their pre-migratory stages—signifying the characters have not left their parents’ home yet. My fourth protagonist in *Louisiana* has migrated, but has not fully accepted the responsibilities of womanhood that will lead her to a feminist self-consciousness. The female protagonists strategically resist stagnation by constantly challenging limitations on their freedom. For example, it is easy for the young women to fall into a submissive and/or restrictive pattern of womanhood set forth by their mothers and peers. Instead, two of the four young women decide to divert from and challenge the trajectory imposed by others.

By underscoring the discussions in bell hooks’s “Feminist Politicization: A Comment,” and Carole Boyce Davies’s “Negotiating Theories,” I am able to develop a working distinction between my use of the terms “feminist self-consciousness” and “feminist sensibility.” hooks’s “Feminist Politicization” asserts that feminists should not “radically change [their] relationship to self and identity,…but [should instead] explore

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11 S. Toland-Dix, “To Tell Their Own Stories: Transformations of Narrative Forms by Caribbean Women Novelists” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001), 3.
one’s identity, [in order] to affirm and assert the primacy of the self as it already existed” (hooks 106). hooks writes that the problem with this mode of thought is that it can promote a narcissistic attitude already present in dominant cultures, but that self-affirmation is the first step to resisting a process of domination—whether it be sexist, racist, or imperialist. She cites as an example the slogan “black is beautiful.” At one level it was a narcissistic concept, but it also was a resistance to white aesthetics and sign of blacks’ determination not to be degraded or exploited. I define feminist self-consciousness to mean a full acceptance of self that acknowledges a mature role in the “collective reality” of Caribbean women. Feminist self-consciousness is achieved when Caribbean women understand and pursue education to further develop a critical voice and “link personal narratives of survival” (111). In comparison, feminist sensibility is a term denoting a budding or emergence of self-consciousness. Mohammed’s earlier assessment promotes that one can be in the stages of developing a feminist self-consciousness while not being completely aware of the process. For example, Butterfly in the Wind’s Kamla and Brown Girl, Brownstones’s Selina gain their self-consciousness before they migrate, but Davies’s “Negotiating Theories” implies that individuals such as Crick Crack, Monkey’s Tee and Louisiana’s Ella must “cross borders and undertake a journey” first before they understand the full agency of their feminist identity.

By “constructing and marking differences” among the novelists in my study, I appear to be complicit in their commodification for the literary marketplace, the very commodification and exoticization that the writers themselves would deplore. Kwame

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13 My research remarks on the differences between the Anglophone cultures discussed in the select novels. I am aware that these differences may be overemphasized by the authors and publishers so that the novels
Anthony Appiah discusses the challenges of distinctiveness and commodity in his article “Is the Post in Postmodernism the Post in Postcolonial?” (2000):

To sell oneself and one’s products as art in the marketplace, one must, above all, clear a space in which one is distinguished from other producers and products—and one does this by the construction and the marking of differences. To create a market for bottled waters, for example, it was necessary, first, to establish that subtle (even untastable) differences in mineral content and source of carbonation were essential modes of distinctions. (Appiah 886) 

I would contend that the emphasis on difference and distinction is important to Caribbean women novelists writing and publishing now, and even perhaps a necessary phase in this literature’s development. As their unofficial renaissance began in the 1980s, Caribbean women writers were concerned primarily with showcasing similarities to other canonical literatures of the world. Now they have entered a second phase of creative production that parallels the development of twentieth-century African American literature. Blacks a few generations outside of slavery during the 1920s and 1930s wanted to showcase their greatest literary productions to prove that they were as refined, intelligent, creative and cultured as whites. The key was to be distinct from white writers, but not entirely divergent from those writers’ themes, forms, movements, and influences. Thus many major Harlem Renaissance writers--Langston Hughes, Dorothy West, James Baldwin, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Jean Toomer-- created literature that catalogued the 

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American black experience without offending the sensibilities of other writers, particularly white ones. In contrast, the American Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s would unapologetically highlight the hypocrisies of whites and mark key differences between blacks and other races. Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968) and Nikki Giovanni’s *Black Feeling, Black Talk* (1967) are but two of the many influential works of this time period that explored racial, ethnic, and national differences as primary themes.

Another imperative of my project on Caribbean women writers is to correct their absence or diminishment in the literary canon. Alice Walker’s essay entitled “Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist’s Life” (1976) alludes to the dire consequences of neglecting such a body of writers: “The absence of models,” she states, “in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect—even if rejected—enrich and enlarge one’s view of existence” (4).\(^\text{15}\) Walker recognizes models, whether complimentary or not, as an important factor in the literary evolution of a culture. Unfortunately, Caribbean women writers who could serve as models or influences to subsequent generations have historically been obscured by male critics. And yes, I can acknowledge that Caribbean critics like Aimé Cesaire, C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris, and George Lamming are fundamental to understanding Caribbean aesthetics. However, in 1980 James said, “[W]e haven’t produced the women writers as yet. George Lamming tells me that he is waiting for the woman in the Caribbean to write a novel which will state the position of the Caribbean. Well, he is waiting for her. I am waiting

for her too” (Dance 125).\(^{16}\) James’s observation fully ignores the literary productions of Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in 1953, Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, and Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* in 1970, to name a few.

Inspired by both literary and non-literary sources, the Caribbean women writers I study emerge from a long and very traceable history of literary influences that refutes the pronouncements of James, Lamming, and others in the twentieth century. The novels I examine are influenced by pioneers who were bold and defiant. The first literary work about the English-speaking Caribbean was written by Mary Prince. *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831) fought against psychological and physical bondage: “Prince’s narrative…represents one of the earliest attempts to give voice to the sufferings of black women” (Reddock 60).\(^{17}\) The slave narrative is an integral part of Caribbean literature and history because it proves that slaves in general and slave women in particular did not universally and passively fall into the roles of laborers and property. They created, thought, and fought in the midst of bondage. Furthermore, early women’s writing about and/or from the Caribbean proposed how being a free woman also could be a kind of slavery. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda who published her Cuban masterpiece *Sab* in 1841, preached against slavery, and also advocated for women’s right to travel and to earn money. The next literary contributor to the English-speaking Caribbean was Jamaican Mary Seacole. Like Avellaneda’s *Sab*, Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventure’s of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) also revealed unconventional patterns of a free woman of color. Mary Seacole was well-to-do, like

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Avellaneda, but traveled alone extensively and even served as a nurse in the Crimean War beside Florence Nightingale.

In addition to published works, Caribbean women’s literature has been greatly influenced by the oral histories of small groups of women organizing against local conditions of subordination and exploitation in the workplace and at home. According to the Caribbean sociologist Rhoda Rheddock, “feminist consciousness and action preceded the actual coining of the word” (62). In 1865, for example, women laborers created the Lady Musgrave Self-Help Society of Jamaica. The purpose of this organization was to help women secure jobs such as embroidering, cooking, and cleaning in order to support themselves and their families. Organizations such as this were often founded by middle to upper class women wanting to help or demonstrate some sort of social responsibility to the poorer, working-class women. Similar organizations were Trinidad’s Home Industries and Women’s Self-Help Society established in 1901 and the Coterie of Social Workers (CSW) founded by Audrey Layne Jeffers in 1921. The CSW stands out because its founder is “described politically as a feminist and as a nationalist” who sought to instill good values of social behavior into women of African descent (Reddock 70). Some feminist activities of CSW included founding St. Mary’s Home for Blind Girls and the Maud Reeves Hostel for Working Girls.

Trinidad, Jamaica, and Guyana (formerly known as British Guiana) are paramount in Anglophone Caribbean feminist history because they have the earliest documented cases of women organizing groups for self-improvement. There are three events that would occur during the 1920s through 1930s that would set the stage for the feminist movement preceding the publication of my selected novels: the availability of
seats for women on The City Council in Port of Spain, Trinidad would have eligible seats for women; a divorce bill would pass in the Caribbean; and there would be the West Indian and British Guiana Conference of Women Social Workers. According to Reddock, “by the late nineteenth century, Afro-Caribbean nationalism and the struggle for women’s emancipation had become linked” (74). The organization that would foster this union and continue as the blueprint organization for Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) was the Pan African Association (PAA). Established in the late nineteenth century, the PAA, invested in having women’s political participation and formal education. Because its efforts were small and very localized, though, it encountered difficulty communicating with poor black women throughout the Caribbean. The U.N.I.A would soon replace the PAA because its message could more easily be spread through the region and eventually abroad.

In *Caribbean Women Novelists: Courting Feminism, Constructing Nation*, I decipher key examples of nationalism through a feminist lens. While examining the social and political structures of the nation-states of the Caribbean, I will center on the role of women in their maintenance, formation, and transmission of the contemporary nation-state. Because Caribbean women often express a sentimental consciousness and/or a devotion to their national image, I contend that they can be physically mobile, yet still rooted in their culture. The discussion of nationalism is often seen to be problematic and pretentious, according to the scholar Benedict Anderson in his seminal text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Yet much of the daily life (political, social, familial, etc.) of the Caribbean is centered on individual island identities, so to ignore the reality of nationalism and women’s role in society
would be to risk assuming one essential Caribbean experience. The concept of nation came from the Germans who were successful at imposing dynasties and a military aristocracy over its conquered lands; this forced acquisition would eventually lead to nation-building (Renan 9). The Caribbean would not become a group of independent nations until the mid and late nineteenth century when their conquerors left the islands once the resources were exploited. “The imagined communities of nations did not simply grow out of displacing religious communities and dynastic realms. Beneath the decline of linguistically and lineage intact communities, a fundamental change was taking place in apprehending the world which made it possible to think about the nation.”

The idea of a nation rose out of disorder. Though nation takes on different meanings for developed and undeveloped countries, the overall concept of “nation” acts as an adhesive, and therefore tries to keep the promise of order or unity—even when neither is achieved.

My study will not understand “nation” in terms of the history I have explained. I am not conceiving of the British Caribbean as a unified whole. Nor do I mean to imply that there is one British Caribbean Nation. The Anglophone islands share a common language and racial composition; blacks compose the majority of the Caribbean islands. Nonetheless, there is a larger spectrum of island identity that needs to be addressed before one can assume a blind cohesiveness. An island’s distinct identity is apparent when it is viewed as the independent nation it is. What makes Trinidad and Barbados exceptional? How does St. Lucia separate its identity from its English-speaking neighbor, St. Vincent? Are the same traits that make a Jamaican proud the same traits that make a Grenadian proud? Therefore, when I refer to “nation,” I mean it to represent the

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individual traits of an island—I am interested in the moment in the novel where the
culture of the island is distinguished. In his *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha
says that “the nation” is a part of culture itself. It is a part of everyday life that sustains
the people and the community. I concur with Bhabha that nation and culture are
inseparable concepts, and often Caribbean women writers speak of their nation’s
attributes through discussions about their culture and the roles in which women play in it.

In her critical text *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*
(1994), Carole Boyce Davies believes “[a]ny articulation of a critique of home for B
[b]lack women has to begin with an examination of the totalizing nature of
nationalist (Africa -diaspora) discourse” (81). For black feminist critics, an engagement
with nationalism involves interrogating a number of theorists of nationalism to locate
their specific positions on gender. Studies of postcolonialism and literature have begun to
address this intersection of—or abyss between—feminism and nationalism. For example,
Trinh Minh-ha’s *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989)
poses the possibility of living in the west without becoming western” and offers the
possibility of rewriting the feminist binary opposition of the ‘Other’. The role of women
in nationalist discourses is an important issue, for historically women have expressed
nationalist zeal and patriotism, although often, they have been dispossessed in the
documenting of nationalist struggles and/or in the shaping and reconstruction of new
societies.

Sometimes nationalistic ideals can seem supremacist, and disrupt the political
strength that a unified Caribbean can bring. However, in literary discussions involving

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19 Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge
history, culture, and gender concerns, the differences between the nation-states of Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica become important and necessary to distinguish. The novels Caribbean women write are like miniature social spheres that license woman authors to supreme creative agency. Because women are often excluded from social and political institution building, I envision these novels as a new landscape or environment of inclusion. The woman writer becomes a master of her own fictive domain—she creates her own imagined community. Benedict Anderson proclaims nationality, or nation-ness as a “cultural artefact” of some kind; the texts the women create are cultural artifacts or cultural material. These women live in, are born into, and or die in the Caribbean, and, therefore are the most qualified and empowered constituency to create cultural artifacts and to create a concept of nationhood.

Chapter One, “Between a Rock and Hard Place: Examining Cultural and Social Values in Merle Hodge’s Crick Crack, Monkey” and Chapter Two, “A Precocious Deconstruction: Questioning Her Place and Moving Beyond Her Space in Lakshmi Persaud’s Butterfly in the Wind” examine the domestic novels of Merle Hodge’s Crick Crack, Monkey (1970) and Lakshmi Persaud’s Butterfly in the Wind (1990). The novels’ plots are set entirely in Trinidad; therefore, they are “local” or domestic novels. I begin my study with discussions about the novels of two Trinidadian authors because I want my chapters to progress from the interior-most part of the Caribbean outward. I have chosen the two novels because they are almost entirely set in the characters’ and authors’ homeland of Trinidad. By following this sequence, I can symbolically de-center the United States, Canada and Great Britain (as territories with high Caribbean migration and

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high cultural influence) and focus on local Trinadian discourses of patriotism and gender politics. My engagement with Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* is aimed at exploring an extended Caribbean family unit and the black community within Trinidad. By separating my discussions about Trinidad into that of Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian families, I am able to mirror the social and cultural climate in which these two groups exist. Each chapter encompasses literary firsts: the first Afro-Trinidadian female bildungsroman, *Crick Crack, Monkey* and the first Indo-Caribbean female bildungsroman, *Butterfly in the Wind*. Both chapters examine the particulars of two racially distinct Caribbean families, and respectively address the function of non-nuclear families within black communities and non-Christian families within East Indian communities. By the end of each chapter, I trace how characteristics of the Caribbean culture have served as a trajectory for the development and independence of the two female protagonists.

In Chapter Three, “Her Cross to Bear: Developing Identity through Conflict and Conquest in Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones,*” (1959) I leave the Caribbean and migrate to the United States with Barbadian writer Paule Marshall. This novel is set during a time of pre-independence when many Caribbean nationals were migrating to developed countries; it offers a complicated and holistic view of the problems that new Caribbean families encountered in large urban centers. In the absence of the original Barbadian community and family support system, the family members of this novel encounter several challenges to their individual identities. In this chapter I examine how the American Dream enhances or exhausts Barbadian values. With my focus on the
female characters of the novel, particularly the young protagonist Selina, I am able to see how and if the gender and national politics of the Caribbean transcribe to America.

Chapter Four is entitled “And Then There Was One: Uncovering the Narrative of a Nation in Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana*.” Brodber is a Jamaican sociologist and writer, and the “Louisiana of her title represents two places sharing the same name—the American state and her native parish in Jamaica. Through this blending of localities, Brodber shows how elements from the African diaspora are kept alive in the Creole culture of the Americas.” This novel’s story compliments the traditional Caribbean migration plot by showing how the American South entices and adopts Ella, the young, Jamaican-born female protagonist. Ella becomes the physical embodiment of two merging nations. I point out that Louisiana is a state with a culture that is historically more diverse and layered beyond the country that houses it; this is important because its regional distinctions give it an international flavor which expands the dimensions of national identity.

At the core of my research, I build upon Patricia Mohammed’s discussion that a distinct regional feminism is key to understanding the particulars of home, identity and community in the Caribbean. Therefore, I begin each chapter with a distinct anecdote or novel excerpt that introduces my analysis of the chapter and anticipates a particular understanding of that island’s culture. By starting each chapter with a small piece of a story, I encourage a greater appreciation of the purpose of each novel. My goal is to begin with a small …”folktale [or] poem so that they may function as an alternate register of consciousness, one that at its most profound seems to connect to ancestral knowledge in both conscious and unconscious ways” (John 2).
CHAPTER 2
BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE:
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL VALUES IN
MERLE HODGE’S CRICK, CRACK MONKEY

“Sharing the Spoils”

Due to hard times, Candlefly sets a torch by the river and catches a lot of crabs. In the morning Goat sends his child to Candlefly to get a piece of fire. The child tells his father Candlefly has a lot of crabs. Goat goes and asks where he got them. Goat comes at seven o’clock to go fishing. Candlefly says, “Too early.”—“Ah, I have so many children, that’s why I come early.” They fish at ten o’clock. Candlefly finds he can not fill Goat’s sack, a hundred thousand yards long. “Too big! If we take them all tonight, another time we won’t find any.” Goat begins to divide, all the big ones for himself, the smaller for Candlefly. Candlefly gets mad. “Let everybody provide his own light!” He leaves Goat in the dark.

Trinidadian folk tale, *Folk-lore of the Antilles, French and English* (Parsons 11)\(^{21}\)

Creative writers have the tools to craft literature that allow people to view themselves through fictional characters. The folktale above illustrates how two friends can both lose their bounty when they do not work together or compromise their efforts. Both Goat and Candlefly have families and need the produce of the river, yet only one benefits when they do not reach a compromise. This tale can act as a metaphor for the relationship between the two majority ethnic groups (blacks and East Indians) in Trinidad. Because Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians\(^{22}\) share a past that involves

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22 I use these terms to describe blacks living in Trinidad (Afro-Trinidadian) and East Indians living in Trinidad (Indo-Trinidadian).
periods of slavery and indentured servitude, there is a constant, yet subtle competition between the two groups.

Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970) and Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990) dive into the domestic matrix of Trinidad’s island nation-state. But just as Joel Chandler Harris’s South is different from Charles Chesnutt’s South, each author’s work reflects a different perspective of the same region. The opening anecdote to this chapter not only characterizes the struggle between East Indians and blacks; it also previews the constant tug-of-war amongst the protagonist Tee’s family for her and her brother’s custody. Tee’s family will not fully achieve their goals in grooming her for the future.

I begin my dissertation with *Crick Crack, Monkey* because it is a seminal novella of black Caribbean women’s writing. Jean Rhys’s novels *Postures* (1928), *After Leaving Mr. MacKenzie* (1930), and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) were the very first Caribbean women’s novels. Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* (1962) also stands out as important “first” Caribbean text. Merle Hodge differs from these women in that she is black; therefore, her work is a first for black Caribbean women. Rhys is white Creole and Sylvia Wynter is Cuban by birth and raised in Jamaica. *Crick Crack, Monkey* also represents one of the earliest novels written by a Caribbean woman and it is heavily autobiographical, according to Liz Herschel’s “Merle Hodge: *Crick Crack, Monkey*” (1988) and according to Hodge herself in “Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World Versus Writing Stories” (1990).

*Crick Crack, Monkey* reflects some of the roles and expectations of Caribbean women. Though it is far removed from the political and sociological discussions found in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), the protagonist Tee’s process of
maturation parallels growth and transition periods in Trinidad’s history. Tee, also known as Cynthia, advances academically and physically, yet she remains an objectified figure in her community and in her home. Tee’s personal journey helps to illustrate the social and cultural values of the Caribbean. Her aunts’ final decision to send her to study abroad releases her from the constant scrutiny of her family, but reminds her that home is volatile. Tee’s childhood and formative teen years involve several unexpected changes or transitions. Trinidad, like Tee, also experiences periods of growth, struggle and change before and immediately following its independence in 1962. In similar vein, Trinidad and Tee are trying to distinguish themselves as independent entities from their former oppressors, respectively Great Britain and Aunt Beatrice’s home.

*Crick Crack, Monkey* catalogs the maturation of the young woman from adolescence to young adulthood in the form of the bildungsroman. Both in form and content the novel offers a space for the development of a strong feminine perspective enclosed within a rigid colonial environment. Because of the Caribbean region’s unwavering domination by countries such as Spain, France, and Great Britain, its literature often is patterned after popular European styles like the German-inspired bildungsroman. A Caribbean novel like *Crick Crack* differs from European styles in that “it attempts to construct new cultural identities that escape the domination of a colonial past” (Booker 4).

*Crick Crack* is the first of its genre to be written by a Caribbean woman. The female bildungsroman, according to Beverly Voloshin, “gives evidence of the tension between the values of domesticity and the opposing values of independence and equality,

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24 V.S. Naipaul’s *A House For Mr. Biswas* (1961) and George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) were two of the first Anglophone bildungsromans.
even for those authors and readers who ostensibly accepted the domestic ideal” (284).25

By showing the unbridled freedoms of girlhood and/or the period before a woman has to make a choice about her domestic future, the female bildungsroman presents the ideology that marriage and motherhood are meant to tame her dreams and ensure her husband’s dreams. Voloshin’s research examines such works by nineteenth century American women authors as Catharine Sedgwick’s *A New-England Tale* (1822) and Augusta Jane Evans’ *Beulah* (1859). These works clearly do not capture the issues of race and migratory culture of *Crick Crack*; however, Voloshin’s article proves that issues of women’s independence in bildungs written by women usually have two universal factors: The women prefer to be educated rather than married and they have hostility towards male power. I would agree that there are universal factors of the female bildungsroman, but that the “hostility towards male power” is interpreted as a clear rejection of a postcolonial society in the Caribbean female bildungsroman.

Merle Hodge captures the essence of a society dominated by British influences to show how Tee becomes jaded. The child’s feelings, thoughts and actions, as she responds to the social and cultural environment in which the novel is set, reflect a familiar Caribbean experience paralleled by Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (1985) and Beryl Gilroy’s *Frangipani House* (1986). *Crick Crack* is an important voice in Caribbean literature that helped to lay the groundwork for writers like Erna Brodber and Michelle Cliff. Simon Gikandi’s *Writing in Limbo* (1992) says that Caribbean women’s literature “not only recenters them in history as custodians of an oral tradition, but also functions as an indicator of sources of domination that might have been lost or repressed in both the

colonial text and male-dominated nationalist discourse” (201). The women’s literature that comes out of this stifled discourse represents a break from the previous Victorian literary writing themes and perspectives. Generally speaking, Caribbean women’s writing is a departure from Victorian realist writing which espoused conservative family values and “euphemistically danced around controversial subjects (notably sex [and race])….” (Murfin 496). Modernism’s potential for growth into “alternative histories and communities” makes it a prime mode of theory for postcolonial writers.

*Crick Crack* is an “accidental modernist” text because of its characteristics of fragmentation and loss, yet with an underlying hope for positive change. Leah Rosenberg’s *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007) defines the term “accidental modernist” as a work created by someone who is not aware of writing, or does not write with the intention of creating a modernist text, but does create literature that conforms to the definition of modernism. *Crick Crack* is “accidentally” of the modernist tradition because “its aim was to be the fictional autobiographical shell [that] uses its textual space to explore the effects of colonialism on the budding Caribbean national culture” (Gikandi 203). Hodge creates a story close to her lived experience to share with her readers the experience of the Afro-Trinidadian female shortly after independence. Gikandi says “women embrace modernity and modernization as a way out of the dominant patriarchal structures often defined as tradition” (198).

Concurring with Gikandi’s assessment, I would add that once Afro-Caribbean women’s

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28 I summarize the definition of modernism in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* pg. 268.
writing is included in discussions about modernism its presence can open up meaningful debates about race, gender, nationality, and ethnicity which canonical modernists such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot cannot duplicate.

*Crick Crack* is best described within the modernist tradition, yet it is not bound by the definition that promotes using experimental literary conventions with forms and styles. Instead, this novel focuses on the restorative power of writing and the ability for characters to see their way in an uncertain modern world. Gikandi says that “Hodge’s strategy in this book was not to concentrate on the evolution of a public consciousness in her main subject, Tee, but to foreground questions of difference and the quest for a voice in a social context that denied expression to the colonized subject…” (203). Though modernism does include room for more diverse works, it is important to keep the idea of a transnational and transcultural scope when discussing Caribbean works. I am careful when applying modernist theory to such a solidly Caribbean rooted work as *Crick Crack*; I do not want to misname realities. This is why theorists such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Patricia Mohammed each call for more indigenous or culture specific theory.

According to Mohammed, “interrogation of the past with the present is the process of creating continuity and freedom (6).” Taking Mohammed’s cue, I parallel aspects of Trinidad’s past with Tee’s current condition in order to reveal her continuity as a migrating subject. I apply the concept of freedom to mean freedom from colonial rule, freedom from slavery, and Tee’s freedom from her scrutinizing family. Within this novel, Hodge illustrates how black Trinidadian families, though physically free, have not shed the weight of colonial conditioning. Afro-Caribbean families’ journeys should be about

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restoring the familial and cultural values that were stripped away during colonialism. The psychological damages of colonialism include the “deprivation of ethnic customs, and loss of the ethnic pride and dignity” (Mohammed 8). It is ironic that Tee will experience this same list of deprivations as she grows and learns in postcolonial Trinidad. Not only does Tee learn about her social role as a woman in Trinidad, but she shows signs of unhappiness in fully accepting it.

It is not merely the narrative of *Crick Crack* that makes it a feminist text; instead, it is the very production and existence of the work that are feminist. There are feminist underpinnings within the work simply because it is about a young woman who becomes enlightened about her placement within society. Feminist theorists Barbara Christian and Patricia Hill Collins agree that “black women represent various experiences, sensuality, and emotion” (Collins 21). One component of feminism is to be able to open and equalize opportunities for women. Because this novel breaks ground and equalizes the childhood experiences of Caribbean men and women, it is feminist. It breaks from tradition yet is included as a part of the Caribbean literary canon. It is also a feminist text because it prefaces the lives and habits of the female characters, giving them a stage in which to be vocal and authoritative. Given that two-thirds of the Caribbean population claims African ancestry, Hodge’s novel contributes a meaningful and necessary depiction of Afro-Trinidadian life.

In order to define feminism accurately, there must be an understanding of that culture’s definition of masculinity and femininity. Feminism also must be historically located to appreciate its full impact. I do not suggest that feminism is produced in

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isolation from race and class, but defend my idea that the gender differences amongst the
inhabitants of the Anglophone islands, however slight, can punctuate their experiences
like those distinctions of race and class. Male and female identity in Trinidad will differ
slightly from the gender identities of Barbadians and Jamaicans. I concur with
Mohammed when she says that identity is a personal struggle that is wrought with
changes and challenges between individuals and groups. Personal struggle can include
subtle and coded messages that shape one’s identity. Because feminism and nationalism
are identities, then the importance of the subtle and coded messages become clear as one
tries to write about, interpret, and interrogate the nuances of those identities within the
novel.

As in most cultures, the parameters of masculinity and femininity are set by the
ruling class. Victoria Pasley’s essay, “Black Power, Gender Ideology, Cultural Change
and the Beginnings of Feminist Discourse in Urban Trinidad in the 1970s,” offers an
enlightening summary of such gender politics. During the postcolonial 1970s when
_Crick Crack_ was published, the ideal Trinidadian man was a breadwinner, clean-shaven,
attired in suit and tie, and strong and in control of his emotions. This ideal Trinidadian
man was embodied by famous historian and former long-standing Prime Minister (or
President) Eric Williams. Although there was no equivalent Trinidadian female political
leader or socialite of the 1970s who compared to Williams--excluding his wife Sulian,
who would have been granted privileged status because of her affiliation with him--the
ideal Trinidadian femininity was expressed through fragility, glamour, and vulnerability.

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32 Victoria Pasley. “Black Power, Gender Ideology, Cultural Change and the Beginnings of Feminist
essay was not included in a journal, but was sold as an individual scholarly paper at the UWI-St. Augustine
bookstore.
Amy Ashwood Garvey, who was the wife of Jamaican nationalist Marcus Garvey, would have come very close to representing a post-civil rights era ideal of black Caribbean femininity and power, had it not been for her untimely death in 1969. The images of strength and protectiveness and fragility and vulnerability are false ideals of masculinity and femininity that Afro-Trinidadian men and women could never adhere to under the claw of slavery. Unfortunately, men were unable to protect their women and women needed to be as resilient as their men.

For the most part, the hegemonic masculinity and femininity in postcolonial Trinidad remained little changed from the stereotype of womanhood and manhood that was incorporated into the colonial discourse. Men held power over women in the public sphere, while the domestic sphere was seen as women’s natural environment. In the multi-ethnic society of Trinidad there were clear differences between the Indian and African communities’ social realities. Yet even where selected African and Asian ideals contributed to the construction of the hegemonic gender order, they did not seriously challenge the Western model.

Merle Hodge has always admired women who were not governed by limitations in their culture—“women who did not seem to pattern their lives after the rules laid down by nice Trinidadian society, by the church, or by storybooks” (“Challenges” 208). In turn, she has set out to write books that capture an authentic and diverse Caribbean lifestyle. Twentieth- and twenty-first century Trinidad has a rich folk culture that stems from slavery. Its music, food, and family structures were all greatly influenced by the presence of Africans in the West Indies. Tee’s biological parents do not raise her; she is

reared by her aunts and their families. She does not have the nuclear family dynamic but she does have a functional, loving family. Hodge believes that literature can be a necessary tool in helping to understand and establish cultural normatives such as this non-traditional family. Her article, “Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World versus Writing Stories,” questions how people can still promote the superiority of the traditional or nuclear family, or what Hodge calls the “real” family, when other alternative family arrangements function effectively. In speaking about the habits of her culture, Hodge states:

We do not acknowledge or give value to our own most deeply rooted behavior patterns, our most intimate psychology…. [W]e are not fully aware of what constitutes our specificity. We recognize our culture only in a negative, rejecting way: we see in our people tendencies and characteristics which we regard as “aberrations”… because they do not fit the norms suggested by storybook and television (“Challenges” 204).

Hodge establishes that fiction is a good way to teach anyone how to cope with personal challenges, and address questions about identity. She goes on to encourage Caribbean people to produce their own literature and to be careful when seeking identity normatives in Western manifestations of media. Despite the fact that there are families in the Caribbean that include two unmarried adults not led by a man, and/or have extended family members living in a shared household, these family units can still provide a productive and nurturing home for the children involved. Tee and her brother Toddan’s

34 I define the traditional Western and European type of family as consisting of a husband, and wife with their biological children. The husband is the head of household, financially and otherwise, and this family is typically Christian, white, and not poor.
quality of life are evidence of this. These unconventional groupings have existed for generations, regardless of the pressure to conform to a more traditional mold.

Based on her study of Caribbean family structures, Joceylin Massiah reveals that “one-third of all Caribbean households are female-headed” (6). The origins of this type of family structure began during slavery. Under the institution of slavery, the configuration of a traditional Christian family was unavailable to blacks. With the threat of each partner and his or her children being sold at any moment, and men being forced to reproduce with several women, the number of female-headed households accelerated. Well after the abolition of slavery, between the 1920s and 1950s, large amounts of Caribbean males in their active reproductive years began to emigrate to the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, thereby leaving Caribbean women to manage households independently during long and short intervals when the male was absent. Massiah calls this type of relationship a “visiting union” or “non-residential sexual union.” Ironically, this provides the woman with a great amount of freedom and typically is a “socially acceptable option rather than a deviant alternative” (11). When the male partner is absent, women find help with extra sources of income and childcare from extended family members. Therefore, ties with extended family are very important if a female-headed household is to survive. Hodge’s Crick Crack is motivated by these social realities of the Caribbean and takes a microscopic view of two Trinidadian families that help to rear the central character Tee.

The two worlds of childhood which Tee inhabits — Aunt Tantie’s house and Aunt Beatrice’s house — result from the nature of her domestic circumstances. Her father, who

has emigrated to England, is the brother of Tantie, and her deceased mother is sister to Aunt Beatrice.\textsuperscript{36} Tee oscillates between these two spheres of existence and emerges as a deeply disturbed being—mostly caused by the conflict of lifestyles in her extended family homes between Beatrice’s Creole, middle-class home and Tantie’s lower-class, rural one. Tee internalizes these conflicts and feels ambivalence about herself as a young woman and as member of this family.

\textit{Crick Crack} begins in the midst of a crossroads and illustrates a few particulars of Trinidadian culture in the first few pages of the novel. The subtle omission of Tee’s parents’ names signals an awkwardness that causes the reader to carefully re-scan the pages for key missed names. After all, it is her mother’s funeral and shouldn’t her name be spoken or revealed during this ceremony? Yet, Tee’s biological parents are never assigned names in \textit{Crick Crack}. This omission is testimony to how often some Caribbean parents must be absent from their biological children’s lives in order to secure suitable financial resources. Their absence is a condition of a migratory culture. The omission of their names represents every Caribbean parent who has to migrate away from his or her native island in search of greater opportunity. Also, their names are not entirely important because the story is told from their daughter’s point-of-view, and (out of cultural respect) she would not have called her mother and father by their first names; Tee innocently tries to make sense of the day’s events… “After the funeral, [t]hen Papa went to sea. I concluded that what he had gone to see was whether he could find Mammy…” (Hodge 3). Her parents are only Papa and Mammy to her. She and her brother’s survival are dependent upon their relatives. Hodge takes great effort to provide the names of all

extended family members in the novel even uncles and minor character neighbors are named. By giving them names and a unique identity as compared to the biological parents’ namelessness and flat characterization, Hodge further signifies the importance of extended family and community in taking care of children in Trinidadian culture.

*Crick Crack* exposes the reader to young Tee’s interpretation of the events as well as to versions that seem to elude her. Hodge incorporates this gradual shift in viewpoint to parallel Tee’s growing level of awareness of adult issues. In this way, the narrative matures as well as Tee. The first images in *Crick Crack* show that Tee and her brother Toddan’s life are filled with loving aunts and uncles and family friends. Hence, their family is made up of nurture, support, and unconditional love. It is hard for the siblings to notice the maternal loss in the midst of the crowd of family and friends. However, there is strong foreshadowing of displacement as Auntie Beatrice wants to claim her right to take her deceased sister’s children back to her family. Aunt Beatrice is a member of the upper class and wants to rescue her niece and nephew from the less privileged paternal relatives.

Her plot to remove them makes Tee insecure about her and her brother’s future:

I fell asleep again with [Uncle] Mikey sitting on the bed. Papa came on evenings and there was much talk of ‘that woman/the Bitch’ …who wanted to get us. This filled me with alarm. Who wanted to ‘get’ us and how could they get us when Papa was there, and Tantie and Mikey, or were they too going to disappear? I fell asleep at night tightly clutching a bit of Toddan’s night clothes and with one toe touching Tantie. (Hodge 3)
Tantie and Uncle Mikey provide Tee and her brother authenticity, structure, and safety. Tantie’s home is communal, unrestricted, and lively, and though Tantie’s home is described as a happy home, it is also poor:

Tee’s home was full of colorful staples of the lower class. Foods such as roti, polorie, and shark fry bake filled the air with oil, seasonings, and the clink of pots. Tantie’s friends were loud and hilarious and … let out intermittent sqawks…(Hodge 4)

Their raucousness and greasy comfort food make Tee’s home serene. According to Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido in their Out of the Kumbla (1990), Caribbean writers paint childhood as idyllic, yet often difficult. Though a seemingly contradictory description, it summarizes the way in which immigrants often describe their homeland—the island home can generally be described as a beautiful, lush place, but usually without enough resources to support the economic pursuits of its people.

The depiction of childhood and the idyllic home are features of what Davies and Fido call “writing home.” “Writing home” defines the writer’s ability to re-create nostalgic images that “are a critical link in the articulation of the character’s identity” (Davies and Fido 67). The term “writing” is also a play on the word “right” and indicates a correcting of or reinterpretation of the challenges of home. As Tee’s narrative continues, she goes through a series of involuntary displacements which include leaving her parents’ home and being sent to school abroad. Tee’s history aligns her with the history of blacks’ kidnapping from the African continent. Blacks endured an involuntary migration to Trinidad that parallels her involuntary movement between family members’

homes. Though she survives the circumstances of each of her locations, Tee’s maturity is marked by her unhappiness.

Migration creates this desire to re-write home. Migration is a kind of displacement, and Crick Crack examines these areas of displacement as Tee migrates between homes. In short, Tee’s sources of comfort and identity unravel as each chapter progresses. Hodge establishes an ideal home in the beginning of the novel in order to set up the transformation and deterioration in Tee’s later perception of home.

Unfortunately, Tee and Toddan do not understand that the reality of their comfortable home has begun to fade. Their father is a consistent, but external breadwinner and cannot enter the equation of their daily, fulltime care. Although he is absent, he aligns with the image of the ideal Trinidadian man who works hard to support his family financially. His family assumes the care of his children while he works and sends money from England. Unfortunately, the deceased mother’s middle-class relative (Aunt Beatrice) also wants to vie for a position of authority over the children. Aunt Beatrice represents artificiality and discrimination; so, this side of the family demonizes her and instructs Tee and Toddan to avoid her. “The threat that we had come to designate compendiously as ‘The Bitch’ hovered over every day of our lives. …We had clear instructions what to do if The Bitch turned up…half the street was involved in the barricade against “The Bitch”” (Hodge 3). Unfortunately, all the barricades and warnings do not prevent an inquisitive Tee and Toddan from partaking of Aunt Beatrice’s seductive gifts of candy and a ride in a big shiny new car. When Tantie and Uncle Mike hear of the children’s brief kidnapping, they immediately “[are] …hustled off to Ma [Tee’s paternal grandmother], away away up in Pointe d’Espoir” (13). The whereabouts of Ma’s home are unknown to
Aunt Beatrice, so this allows Tantie and Mike time to contemplate the next stage of Tee’s care.

Though loved and protected, Tee is put in the midst of complicated adult quarrels very early and consequently becomes very sensitive to the gradations in her families’ class and social status. However, Ma’s home is organic and therapeutic for Tee because it is not entrenched in the problems or complications of her former homes. This chapter represents the metaphorical “calm before the storm” (13).

Hodge weaves in traditional elements of the Caribbean culture by referencing the beaches, West Indian storytelling, and trips to the open-air market that help to anchor the novel in the region. Anancy stories are folktales originating from Africa that tell of a half man, half-spider trickster figure—who, though perennially in tight situations, is adept at turning the tables on his oppressor or predator and emerging unscathed. His ability to continually free himself lies in his gift with words, and his talent for spinning yarns, i.e. web-making. In African mythology, Anancy is a god who is responsible for creation. Because Anancy constantly indulges man, this angers the supreme god, and now Anancy occupies the space between heaven and earth. At Ma Josephine’s they “walked along the sand” between ventures to the market and to visit neighbors. At nighttime when there was a full moon and while the “black-sage fire” kept the mosquitoes away, they would listen to Anancy stories. Tee’s subsequent environments will be far more judgmental, competitive, and egregious.

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38 This summary is adapted from Joyce Jonas’s Anancy in the Great House: Ways of Reading West Indian Fiction (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).
Although her presence is essential to Tee’s emotional stability, Ma only appears once in the novel. This chapter where she appears is also important because it reveals the meaning of the novel’s title. Ma Josephine is a staple part of the Caribbean culture. Her character represents the elder, foster mother, and market woman who is still virile enough to work the land and take care of children. This chapter describes the peasant culture in which Ma lives. Tee loves this culture as much as she loves Ma. Tee’s spirit is fueled and nourished in her grandmother’s home. Chapter Four ends with the comparison that “Tee was showing signs of her great grandmother…” (19). Ma looks at Tee affectionately and dreams “if only she could live to see Tee grow into her tall proud straight grandmother” (19). Ma believes that Tee could possibly embody some of her great grandmother’s agency.

In order to capture the full spectrum of a Caribbean childhood it is only natural that there would be some sort of storytelling infused within the work. Hodge places this illustration of Caribbean culture in Ma’s hands. Storytelling and songs have been the foundation of the black vernacular tradition. West Indian blacks have developed a storytelling tradition that features their creation of several trickster stories which may include ghosts or duppies, witches, spiders, and female warriors.39 Ma is the perfect storyteller or griot. She entertains her grandchildren with Anancy the Spider stories and in return they give her the traditional Caribbean storyteller’s accolade of “crick, crack.” “Crick crack” can signify one of two points in storytelling: the call that encourages the orator to start a story, or the call that congratulates her for a story well done. Ma asks her grandchildren to recite a little rhyme with their congratulatory chant: “’Crick

39 My list of storytelling characters refers to the famous Caribbean folktales of the woman of the forest, Anancy the spider, and Jamaica’s Nanny the maroon.
crack?...Monkey break 'e back/ On a rotten pommerac!’” (13). Hodge uses the lines from this chorus as the title of her novel in order to preface her own Caribbean storytelling or narrative.

Storytelling has always been a form of entertainment; furthermore, storytelling acts as oral historical document. In *Crick Crack* there is an oscillation between two storytellers. Sometimes there is an omniscient narrator and other times it is Tee who narrates. Tee’s intermittent narration forecasts her ability to judge and to understand the adult world. Tee is the Caribbean female given access to the power of storytelling—perhaps given power by her resemblance to her great-grandmother. Storytelling holds power in its ability to preserve the life and actions of someone, and in the act of the telling. For example, Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) shows the black woman as both the story and as the one who tells it. Ironically, Hurston’s protagonist Janie finds more power in being the story than being the storyteller. Janie’s comment to her friend Phoeby at the end of *Their Eyes* confirms this:

‘Course talkin’ don’t amount tuh uh hill beans when yuh can’t do nothin’ else…Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo papa and yo mama and nobody else can’t tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves. (Hurston 183)

In the “Foreword” to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Mary Helen Washington cites experience as a catalyst for growth. Advice and tales cannot replace engaging in life.

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Tee’s brief narration shows her readiness to learn and to experience life. Her transition through multiple homes and eventual study abroad catapult her into maturity.

Hodge laces the first part of the novel with rising actions that develop Tee’s experiences as an analog to Trinidad’s impending independence in 1962 and the United States’s Black Power Movement of 1970. Though the novel is set in the 1950s and takes place in Santa Clara, Trinidad, it signals Hodge’s awareness of these two events. The rural family’s feud with the urban middle-class family is similar to Trinidad’s urgency to become a sovereign nation. Tee is used as a bargaining tool; one of two households wants to influence her growth. In comparison, two unions vied to influence Trinidad’s growth: the island’s inhabitants and Great Britain, their colonizer. The latter half of the twentieth century would also bring forth a collective organization of Caribbean islands called the Federation of the British West Indies (1958-1962). The Federation was designed to function as “recognized force of collective bargaining,” a similar but smaller version of the United Nations. Ideally the grouping would allow the islands to vie for a better economic and political position in the world and within the Caribbean, and most importantly begin to distinguish themselves from their current colonizer. The now defunct West Indian Federation is evidence that colonies cannot be pacified by their colonizers with a few superficial liberties in government. Because the members of the Federation wanted to be equal and sovereign like their ruling colonizers, they decided to fight for their own independence. The strides in Caribbean nationalism parallel strides in

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42 At the time the Federation was composed in 1958, all of the member islands were still colonies. This Federation grouping was originally suggested by the British Government in 1932 in order to pacify the restless countries that had threatened secession. This group would be short-lived because Jamaica and Trinidad would constantly fight as each tried to establish an upper-hand within the organization. Jamaica and Trinidad were the first to secede in August 1962, and shortly afterwards the Federation would collapse.
Caribbean feminism. Feminism and nationalism are both identities that can only be acquired once a break or sever occurs from the former governing body or group. Literally, Trinidad broke from the yoke of Britain’s rule in 1962. Figuratively, this could also mean a woman becomes liberated when she leaves a marriage or leaves her guardians’ home. Tee leaves her home three times: first, when her mother dies, and she moves from her parents’ home into aunt Tantie’s house; second, when the quality of and opportunities at school prove inferior, she is transferred to her aunt Beatrice’s house and finally, when she leaves Beatrice’s home and goes to Great Britain for college. Her feminist struggle occurs as she fights to control her body inside and outside of the home. Tee will begin this struggle in Aunt Beatrice’s home. Nationalism is achieved when a country develops an identity that is distinct and unified along cultural and political lines.

Hodge’s 1970 publication of *Crick Crack* the first Afro-Caribbean female bildungsroman, would be produced on the cusp of the Black Power Movement. Caribbean works during this time were concerned with what it meant to be black, British, and islander. The Black Power Movement inspired blackness to be celebrated beyond the shores of America. Not long after Trinidad gained its independence, the predominately black island would eagerly attach itself to the American Black Power Movement because the affiliation would signify a severance from their white, European oppressors who had left a strong cultural identity intact. Trinidadians would embrace blackness by wearing Afros and African print clothing, and funerals and weddings of the time would regularly include African drumming and chanting. Caribbean authors writing in exile such as V.S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid, and Jean Rhys were also encouraged by this ethnic pride and their islands’ respective independence movements to pen narratives that dealt with the
reconceptualization of self, and moving within or migrating away from the island. Though *Crick Crack* was published in the midst of national celebratory events, Hodge does not ignore the bitter remnants of postcolonialism that are present within the Anglophone islands' educational system and ingrained in family values that preface European aesthetics when nurturing children of African descent. In chapter five, Hodge sketches the influences of postcolonialism in Tee’s school. However, she is careful not initially to give too much power to the British system of rituals and ideas. Instead of beginning her descriptive images of the Caribbean education system with postcolonial ties, Hodge begins with Tee’s perception of school and her genuine interest in learning.

During summer break, Tee fondly misses the rituals of school:

> I looked forward to school. I looked forward to the day
when I could pass my hand swiftly from side to side on a
blank piece of paper leaving meaningful marks in its wake;
to staring nonchalantly into a book until I turned over
the page, a gesture pregnant with importance for it indicated
that one had not merely been staring, but that that most
esoteric of processes had been taking place whereby the paper
had yielded up something or other as a result of having been
stared at. (Hodge 20)

This scene of Tee’s desire to read and to write is not overshadowed by her encounter with andocentric texts or books or titles. Hodge practices her technique of omission again and does not place any importance on British texts’ names; instead, she leaves room for the reader and Tee to imagine the Caribbean text in its place. Hodge has no interest in
providing references to British works in this novel because she does not want to follow
the pattern of popular Caribbean texts such as Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (1985) that
have intertextual references to British literature. The Caribbean text is not an extension or
by-product of the British novel, and Hodge’s lack of references asserts the position that
*Crick Crack* can exist on its own merit. So, the novel too becomes de-colonized.

Education in a post-colonial system can stifle the learning processes and promote
conformity if not perpetuated accurately. The descriptions of experiences in the colonial
schools link *Crick Crack* with Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind*, Kincaid’s *Annie John*
(1985), and other novels of Caribbean childhood. Initially, Tee of *Crick Crack* is excited
about school and her potential in it. But soon she sees her teacher, Mr. Hinds, as an
accomplice in promoting British supremacy:

High on the wall behind Mr. Hinds hung a large framed
portrait of Churchill. It was Mr. Hinds’ daily endeavor to bring
the boys to a state of reverence towards this portrait;…[A]ll his
resounding ales of the war and the glorious victories for some
reason never did infect us with the required awe—for us the
personage on the wall was and remained simply
Crapaud Face (Frog Face). (Hodge 24)

Through Tee’s eyes we get sarcastic comments about schooling and the heroes she is
supposed to worship. Tee’s school is a rigid image-maker that is not vested in showing
children like her (or any female children of color, be they Indian, black, or Chinese)
heroes who resemble her; instead, by positioning the white, British elite as the civilized
“mothers and fathers” of the West Indies it becomes justifiable to teach the mannerisms of the English as being superior and necessary.

While in school Tee begins to awaken from her naïve notions of cultural acceptance and notice how the children’s nursery rhymes she learns are focused on unfamiliar circumstances and people. She contemplates how she and the other children “recited nursery rhymes about Little Boy Blue (what in all creation, was a ‘haystack’?) and about Little Miss Muffet who for some unaccountable reason sat eating her curls away” (25). Her innocent misunderstanding of “eating her curds and whey” and ignorance of a haystack highlight how she and her Caribbean culture are continuously excluded from her learning process. She is being taught that her very own body and location should be discarded:

Till I cross the wide, wide water, Lord
My black sin washed from me,
Till I come to Glory Glory, Lord
And cleansed stand beside Thee
White and shining stand beside Thee, Lord
Among Thy blessed children…(Hodge 30)

This spiritual implies that blackness and whiteness are two extreme poles analogous in religious conversations to sinfulness and holiness. There is also this underlying concept that blacks’ salvation must be found only after death. This stanza forecasts a different kind of utopia for Afro-Caribbeans. One has “to cross the wide water” in order leave the Caribbean and go to developed countries such as Canada and the United States in order to achieve the most academic and financial success. The “black sin washed away from me”
can also be interpreted as abandoning or leaving the predominately dark-colored people behind for the fairer, whiter cultures of Great Britain and the United States of America. Standing by or amongst “thy blessed children” captures the ability of a Caribbean immigrant to replace peers and citizens with the privilege of being in the midst of the blessed (developed, first world) countries. I understand how often elsewhere and other are meant to mean something better than one’s present condition. Add to that being from outside one of the major cosmopolitan countries and speaking another language, and it is easy to see how the Caribbean female can, like Tee, desire another place, body, and family. Tee thus concludes that “books transported you into Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad” (62). Hodge’s placement of capital letters on the words “reality,” “rightness,” and “abroad” indicate that books provided a roadmap to a better, richer experience away from the original home.

At this stage, Tee is too young to understand that “books do not necessarily spell salvation for women.” Patrocinio Schweickart’s “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading” believes that “a literary education may very well cause her mental decline.” She describes this education as inducing schizophrenia-of-sort where “literature structures the reading experience differently depending on the gender of the reader…. [The male reader] is invited to validate the equation of maleness with humanity” (616). Women readers can only translate the experiences or take on another personality in order to understand an andocentric text. Men merely have to be who they are. Male experiences thus typically pass for the “universal” experience. Judith Fetterley concludes that:

‘[T]he cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women, but the immasculation of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny.’ (Fetterley xx)\textsuperscript{44}

Fetterley and Schweickart allude to the importance of an indigenous feminism that Patricia Mohammed promotes. Feminism encourages and strengthens male texts by embracing the concept that there should be a movement which encourages the complete celebration of difference. Mohammed says feminism “should engage in shifting human consciousness towards a greater acceptance of equality” (9). Feminism does not sabotage andocentric texts, but instead it holds them to a higher standard. Characters like Tee represent several subjectivities and bring the reader one step closer to experiencing her world enriched by her gender, color, nationality.

In preparation for entering the postcolonial reality of her school, Tee invents Helen, a better more British version of herself. She occupies the schizophrenic state that Schweickart considers: “Helen wasn’t even my double. No, she couldn’t be called my double. She was the Proper Me. And me, I was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness” (Hodge 63). In order to counteract this incompleteness, Tee must move towards wholeness. She must accept who she is and define her own role. Hodge shows that it will not be easy to acquire freedom and wholeness.

Tee’s loud, colorful, and “spicy” lifestyle at Tantie’s home does not realistically support her aspiration of being like her alter ego Helen or preparing to study abroad. In

\textsuperscript{44} Judith Fetterley, \textit{The Resisting Reader} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), xx.
Clear Word and Third Sight (2003), Catharine John investigates the relationship of a colonial legacy to identity in Black women’s writing. John says the mother (or maternal figure) is invested in launching the child from subculture to “image-making cultural context.” The “image-making culture” refers to the norms originally shaped by European colonial values” (John 52).45 Women’s journeys from childhood to adulthood are filled with episodes that reflect and affect their culture, gender, and class. Hodge distinguishes between representations of women that also affect Tee’s perceptions. She argues that:

…the split between the ‘Ideal and Real Woman’ is just one aspect of tension that ‘is a permanent feature of Caribbean culture’—one that is constantly treated in literature. This is the discrepancy between official culture and the counter-or subcultures, ‘between school and home, between the culture of books, newspapers and religious instruction and the culture practiced by adults’ as is often seen through the eyes of the children in their care.(John 53)

Tee already recognizes that Helen is her ideal self. John’s statement is important because young women must quickly and accurately absorb the public and private rules of their gender in their specific culture if they are to navigate through life successfully and/or teach their children its value in the future. In contrast, men just have to “be.” There is no stipulation put on them for having flawed or promiscuous lives. Actually, their infidelity further defines them as men; their imperfections make them human:

Hodge argues that dichotomies are a permanent fixture of Caribbean culture, which then produce the female subject in

very different ways in literary representations of generations
of Caribbean writers. This is a departure from a more prevalent
and utopian emphasis on Caribbean women writers as both
self-inventing and controlling their image divorced from the
historical realities influencing their actions...(John 54).

Ultimately, Caribbean women can use history in literature to increase understanding
about their behavior and to upset the binaries that confine and define them. For example,
women have always been objectified but have been successful as local business women,
and have managed households and children with or without the presence of a man.

John says that Crick Crack charts what could be called the colonial production of
young Tee’s sight, the restructuring of how she interprets the knowledge she receives.
This example shows how influential school is in image-making. The colonial influenced
institutions of the school and church figure prominently in identity creation in Crick
Crack. So is it realistic to expect that the Caribbean man or woman would stop looking
outward to Great Britain for examples of literature, culture, and politics? Yet, there is so
much character in this archipelago of islands.

This idea of creating “interior” role models is directly related to Hodge’s article
“Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty.” She purports that the Caribbean people do
not value their own literature, and they should begin to value their own cultural nations;
otherwise, no one else will see the Caribbean as anything but a haven for tourism and
play. Hodge describes the situation in Trinidad after their Independence in 1962 as one
form of colonization replacing another. She says that “today’s image-makers have at their
disposal more powerful instruments of persuasion than did those of the pre-Independence
era” (“Challenges” 205). Television and the internet can allow the Caribbean to continue to look outwards to any culture that he or she chooses to filter through computer and television cables. Hodge says there is great value in marketing and creating positive Caribbean media. It is necessary if the Caribbean is to resist foreign domination and hopes to realistically compete in cultural marketing. However, as evidenced by her novel’s protagonist Tee, no outside media can be as powerful as the messages we receive from family about ourselves and our self-worth.

At the very moment when Tee transitions from middle school to high school and becomes intoxicated with the outer reaches of her island, she wins a coveted scholarship and is then transferred into the cold Creole household of her Aunt Beatrice. The academic scholarship she wins affords her the opportunity to attend a more expensive, college preparatory school. When she moves in with Aunt Beatrice, it is with the assumption that the new household will be more conducive to her academic level and therefore allow her to create friendships with goal-minded peers. Beatrice also wants to establish a new maternal role-model for Tee, but when Tee rejects her callous comments and conditional coddling, Aunt Beatrice cannot help but resort to her true feelings of superiority. Unfortunately, Tee does not bond with other gifted peers at school, and Beatrice’s daughters further ostracize their new housemate and cousin when she is ridiculed or ignored in class. In addition, her cousins unapologetically alienate her due to her socioeconomic status. Sadly, Tee will eventually adopt this behavior and ostracize others in her former family community, such as Tantie and Uncle Mikey. By the end of the novel, Tee is completely absorbed into and/or damaged by the pretensions of the middle class:
At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not having let
Auntie Beatrice get us in the first place and bring us up
properly….I was ashamed and distressed to find myself
thinking of Tantie in this way. (Hodge 97)

Tee has definitely changed since the beginning of the novel, and upon visiting her Tantie
before leaving for England, she is “openly repelled by Tantie’s naturalness, and hates to
be associated with it” (98). Aunt Beatrice has succeeded in trying to convince Tee that
her middle-class image is the one she should adopt, and one that will break Tee out of
what she calls her “ordinariness and niggeriness” (77). It is sad that Tee’s most vicious
attack on her class and race is not made by a racial outsider, but instead by her closely
related middle-class Creole Aunt. Unbeknownst to Tee, her Aunt Beatrice wants her to
erase her initial upbringing and to salvage her from further ghetto-ization.

The only way Tee thinks to escape her circumstances of depression and isolation
in her family is to run away. At no point is Tee convinced that Aunt Beatrice’s home can
and will ever fully welcome her. Yet, she is changed too much to be able to live back
with Tantie. Fortunately before her desired escape happens, her father sends for her and
her brother to come live with him in England. It is ironic how she is elevated to the
“smart, obedient one” by Aunt Beatrice and her daughters when they discover she has
been asked to move to England (81). This transition to the highly regarded “mother-
country”46 is seen by Beatrice’s family as an immediate elevation of class. Tee describes
her announcement as being that of a pariah inheriting a title. Evidently her father’s
residence in England is enough to win her privileged accolades. Hodge does not clearly

46 This is not a quote, but a colloquial term for Great Britain.
position Tee to return to Trinidad or to regret leaving by the end of this novel. Tee just seems happy to have somewhere else to go besides her former homes. According to *Clear Word, Third Sight*, Tee’s departure indicates her acceptance of an ideological world order that privileges social hierarchies over social relations.

Tee experiences a cultural deterioration. Her former home with Tantie is negated by Aunt Beatrice, and the value of her Caribbean home is negated by her colonial education. In a radio interview given to the BBC in 1987, Hodge says that “[t]he problem in a country that is colonized…is that the education system takes you away from your own reality…[and] turns you away from the Caribbean” (Gerschel 78). She continues to cite the absence of books that captured her true Caribbean experience. *Crick Crack, Monkey* was born out of this absence. One of the novel’s goals is to provide some sense of “wholeness” to future generations of Caribbean girls wanting and needing to see their presence and contributions in print in Trinidad.

Hodge purposely leaves Tee on the cusp of transition. Her future education and life with her father in England are uncertain, and once again her migration between homes is initiated by a family member. Her homes are volatile, but plentiful.

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CHAPTER 3

A PRECOCIOUS DECONSTRUCTION:

QUESTIONING HER PLACE AND

MOVING BEYOND HER SPACE IN

LAKSHMI PERSAUD’S BUTTERFLY IN THE WIND  

Miss Mills [our school’s music teacher] taught us the French and the American national anthems. The British national anthem we knew well, for we were British. The government said so. We were also taught seventeenth century English songs...We also learnt deeply moving Negro spirituals and sad, soulful songs from the Black American South...But there were no songs from India. (Persaud 50)

Indians have greatly influenced the language, food, and music of the Anglophone Caribbean, and though their culture has been significantly integrated with black Caribbean culture, they are still seen as the stepchildren of the region. In the constant tourist promotions of the West Indies, East Indians are rarely included in the advertisements that market the area. And though they have been present in the Caribbean since their arrival in 1838, the epigraph above shows an omission of the history of the Indian diaspora. Patricia Mohammed alludes to this omission of Indo-Caribbean culture in her essay, “Midnight’s Children and the Legacy of Nationalism.” She remembers:

On Empire Day, …the entire school, staff, and students

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48 The pronoun “her” in my chapter’s title refers specifically to Kamla, the female protagonist in Butterfly in the Wind.


50 Caribbean people refer to this group as East Indians because their ancestry is typically from Northern India. Most East Indians live in Guyana and Trinidad. North Americans usually refer to this group as South Asians. The term “East Indian” allows a distinction to be made between West Indian, which is a regionally general term for blacks living in the Caribbean, and Native American Indians, and the Caribbean’s indigenous Carib and Arawak Indians. I will use the words “Indo-Caribbean” and “East Indian” interchangeably in all subsequent references.
joined in a cacophonic rendition of “God Save The Queen.”

The empire/s surrounded us in many ways, in the songs we sang, in the flag we bore allegiance to and, most of all, in the idea of ourselves as a colony and colonized….The shift to self-government required a [new]… national anthem,… “Here, every creed and race find an equal place.” It took many years, and my own study [to learn a] social history of Indians in Trinidad society,…(Mohammed 737-738)

Mohammed’s own snapshot of her childhood in Trinidad shows how East Indian culture had to be sought out in her academic years. She even cites the former Trinidadian President, Eric Williams as admitting that “slavery in the Caribbean has been too narrowly identified with the Negro” (739). Recognizing the gap in his debut work Capitalism and Slavery (1944), he then presents a more comprehensive history of Indo-Caribbean culture in his second text Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean (1970). Indo-Caribbean history dovetails with Afro-Caribbean history, thereby contributing to the larger concept of a transnational and multicultural Caribbean.

Despite the ethnic reality of Trinidadian culture which is 40% Indian, 37.5% black, and 20.5% mixed, India’s history is not a priority in most academic textbooks, and in similar vein, the histories of Africa’s countries are also not a priority. However,

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52 According to the United States Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook 2000 Census, Trinidad and Tobago is 40% Indian, 37.5% black, and 20.5% mixed. The textbook Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean (2003) uses the CIA World Factbook as one of its main contributing sources for demographic data. This census’s mixed title is an interesting categorization which leads me to believe that this is mostly people who are of black and East Indian parentage. According to Eva Stoddard and Grant H. Cornwall’s “Cosmopolitan or Mongrel? Créolité, Hybridity and ‘Douglarisation in Trinidad,” being of mixed identity is often invoked as a highly politicized synonym for hybrid or creole. Dougla is a pejorative term that signifies offspring between the union of persons of African and Indian ancestry in Trinidad.
the Africanization of the Caribbean is self-evident in the region’s music, religion, and population demographics. While living in the St. Augustine-Tunapuna area of Trinidad in 2005, I spent several days perusing History grade-school textbooks. I bought two discontinued texts from Charran’s Book Sellers on the Tunapuna Main Road entitled *The Making of the Bahamas: A History for Schools* (1978)⁵³ and the *Caribbean Story, Book Two: The Inheritors* (1981).⁵⁴ Though Bahamian ethnic history is majority black with minimal East Indian influence, *The Making of the Bahamas* begins with, “[over] the years, many different people have come to the Bahamas…for many different reasons….The population is multi-racial, though predominately negroid” (Cash 6). This text will go on to briefly acknowledge that the indigenous Carib and Arawak Indians were only supposed “to be well-treated and *not* enslaved” and consequently, “only organized to work for the Spanish settlers” (6). The *Bahamas* textbook devotes two chapters to “Slavery” and “Emancipation,” respectively.

*Caribbean Story* is a bit more comprehensive and mentions some history of Afro-Caribbeans in two out of twenty chapters, “The First Years of Freedom” and “Black Consciousness.” In this text, the presence of Indo-Caribbean people has been reduced to little more than this paragraph:

> The Dutch planters noted the apparent success of estate owners in British Guiana with indentured Indian labour.

> They petitioned the British government to allow them to recruit labourers in the same way. In all…[about 38,000]

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labourers were recruited before indentured immigration from India was stopped in 1918. About two-thirds of them eventually made Surinam their permanent home (Claypole 58).

The amount of indentured laborers in this excerpt is an extremely low estimate which indicates records at the time of this textbook’s publication were not accurate, or that this text is trying to minimize the demographic impact of this group. According to Eric Williams’s *From Columbus to Castro* (1970)\(^55\), Aisha Khan’s “Mixing Matters”\(^56\) (2007), and Lomarsh Roopnarine’s sociological research in “Indo-Caribbean Social Identity” (2006)\(^57\) there were at least 500,000 East Indians who immigrated to the Caribbean.

Afro- and Indo-Caribbean students should continue to be taught about their ancestors and diasporic identity so that they recognize their history did not begin in servitude. In many respects, this systematic omission of any general or comprehensive histories of India and the Western countries within Africa prepares a fertile ground for postcolonial rhetoric to devalue the home culture and promote the ideology that the Spanish, the French, and the British saved the aforementioned “heathen” groups from their own self-destruction and idleness.

The East Indian presence in Trinidad began post-emancipation in 1838. At the end of slavery the British colonial government decided to begin an apprenticeship program that was much like the sharecropper or tenant farmer work program in the United States that allowed newly freed slaves to work on farms for minimal wages. The British landowners wanted a docile and controllable workforce, but what they got was a

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highly mobile one that refused to be bound by a work contract. Khan’s “Mixing Matters” reminds us that first the British “unsuccessfully attempted to pull labor from China… [and] West Africa” (51). None of these groups was as plentiful as the indentured immigrants from India, the colony “commonly known at the time as Britain’s jewel in the crown” (51):

Beginning in 1838 and lasting until 1918… [Indian] laborers [came] from such places as Uttar Pradesh, … [and] Bihar, and shipped them out of parts in Calcutta and Madras. Over a period of seventy nine years almost a half-million Indians went to the Caribbean. About 55 percent of them ended up in Guyana [South America] and 33.5% of Indians went to Trinidad (Khan 51).

As if to punish the blacks for their misbehavior and demand for more rights, the planters gave the East Indians laborers higher wages and set them apart as being more refined. An Indo-Caribbean scholar, Roopnarine confirms that “the colonial government granted East Indian emigrants pieces of land in lieu of return passages to India. Many East Indians accepted this offer and stayed in the Caribbean in light of deplorable conditions in India” (10). The demographics of the twenty-first century are testament to the strong East Indian presence that continues today and the tensions and tribulations between blacks and Indians in Trinidad have stemmed from this historical injunction.

Today, Caribbean East Indians grapple with defining their own social identity, and by extension question, “What does Indo-Caribbean mean? Is the term Indo-Caribbean only used in the Caribbean Diaspora? Do Indo-Caribbeans consider
themselves to be fully assimilated or culturally retentive?” (Roopnarine 1). My research uses the term “East Indian” to refer to particular Indo-Caribbean groups whose ancestors originate from the country of India. Because both Indo-Caribbean writer Roopnarine uses the term East Indian throughout his explorative essay, and Persaud uses the term throughout *Butterfly in the Wind*, I feel it is necessary to adopt it in this chapter’s literary examination. Roopnarine attests that Caribbean East Indians should not be all compartmentalized into one category: “… [There] is a distinct difference in identity among Indo-Caribbean people themselves [and]…there is a growing distance between India and Caribbean East Indians…” (13). He believes Caribbean East Indian social identity is complex and at odds with the concept of being labeled creole.

At present, the history and interpretations of the term C/creole are problematic and highly politicized. My working definitions of Creole, creolization, and hybrid assure that my reader recognizes that present-day Indo-Caribbean ethnicity (as does Afro-Caribbean ethnicity) does not adhere to a strict biological pairing which says that an Indo-Caribbean person is the product of two racially pure Indian parents. Given the earlier recent statistics of Trinidad that state that twenty percent of the population is mixed, my research acknowledges that Indo-Caribbean could just as easily describe a Trinidadian female who is Chinese and black. Khan’s “Mixing Nations” reveals that “mixed” and “creole” have not necessarily been synonymous images throughout Trinidad’s history: “ideologically, the allegedly ‘exotic’ immigrants who came post-emancipation (East Indians, Chinese, Syrian-Lebanese) could not be mixed—as in absorbed—into the Afro-Euro foundation and were depicted (and treated) as foreign addenda that diversified Trinidadian society” (Khan 55).
In addition, “the post-independence period of party politics, Afro- and Indo-voting blocs were organized according to supposed ‘racial’ formation” (55). This practice of discrimination is similar to the voting restrictions placed on women and blacks during the United States’s Reconstruction period (1865-1877). In the history of the local parliamentary system of Trinidad, with one brief exception, the political parties have always cleaved along a line of “African” and “Indian” positions. Given the tensions in the Trinidian political climate, the biological union of African and Indian, like America’s union of black and white, would inspire the creation of such pejorative terms such as “mulatto” and “miscegenation.” “Dougla” is the pejorative term used to describe the offspring of an Afro-Caribbean and an Indo-Caribbean.

“Cosmopolitan or Mongrel? Creolite, Hybridity, and Douglarisation in Trinidad” addresses these concerns of difference and offers succinct definitions. Authors Stoddard and Cornwell define “hybrid” as a term that exposes racial impurity and highlights the condition of a “globalized people and culture and the condition of formerly colonized people” (333). Yet, a positive feature of hybrid denotes a “negotiation of difference” (333). “Creole” (upper-case) is a proper noun referencing a particular language, subculture or society. It can be exclusive and inclusive at the same time. “Creolization” is a generic, typically lower-case term, describing a state or process common to the Caribbean region (336). Given their regional exclusivity, Indo-Caribbeans are going through or have gone through a process of creolization. Gayatri Spivak’s “World Systems and the Creole” takes an anthropological look at the manifestation of Creole culture while engaging Wai Chee Dimock’s use of the word “literary anthropology.”

Gayatri Spivak’s famous essay on postcolonialism “Can the Subaltern Speak?” helps to establish the importance of Lakshmi Persaud’s novel Butterfly in the Wind (1990). Spivak’s article criticizes postcolonial intellectuals such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who have benefitted from indoctrinated privileges of educated, white, first-world, and maleness. Gilles and Deleuze also acknowledge this unfair construct, and Spivak asks, “Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who act and speak?” (20). 59 She makes the pivotal statement that those who act and struggle can and must speak for their own conditions. The subjective groups need their own voice and representation, or risk a new imperialism. She ends her article by simply stating that “representation is vital,” and that “the female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown…” (Spivak 20).

Helen Pyne-Timothy’s “The Double Vision: Ethnic Identity and the Caribbean Woman Writer” promotes that Butterfly in the Wind is an attempt “to return toward the center of all marginalized women’s voices.” However, she does point out that “the East Indian woman has been slow to engage in the debate so startlingly energized by writings of black women…and to claim her place as protagonist/subject within the diverse, multicultural Caribbean environment” (141) 60. Pyne-Timothy stresses that the Caribbean environment “must be amplified and enriched by the presence of her voice telling the tales of the collective experience of women.” She points out that the relative late exposure of East Indian women to Caribbean education is due in part to a preferred value system of domestic roles for women in Islam and Hinduism (not unlike those values

promoted in Pentecostal Christians and the Amish.) Yet, even within domestic roles Hindu women can have opportunity for uninhibited expression. Brinda Mehta’s discussion of the traditional Hindu Matikor ceremony proves that the ceremony “is an intergenerational ceremony of sexual repossession by Indo-Caribbean women who establish a legacy of feminist cultural resistance to sexual subordination” (220). The Matikor ceremony is like a sexually-charged bachelorette party held the Friday night preceding a bride’s wedding. This ceremony symbolizes a dual role for the women who accept the importance of preserving the values of the Hindu faith, and who are also consciously aware of the need for a feminist outcry before they begin their domestic tenure.

_Butterfly in the Wind_ is the first Indo-Caribbean bildungsroman and has undoubtedly taken the charge to represent the silent voices of these women. Persaud fictionally demonstrates the particulars of her ethnicity and religious group in order to show how the protagonist Kamla will transition into her own whole, independent feminist voice that is born out of her inquiries into the unexpected imbalances of womanhood and family. Ultimately, Kamla begins to understand how she is a diasporic being who grows to respect the footprints of East Indian culture within the everyday culture of Trinidad.

Traditional Hindu families are generally patriarchal. Marriage is usually the result of the parents’ choices, and women are expected to transition into the roles of wives and mothers. Male children are highly prized and at some point are given precedence over their mothers. In nineteenth-century India, the suppression and subordination that women endured was only heightened by their particular caste. Caste placement was hereditary and therefore social mobility was not a reality. Women of lower castes were

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61 Brinda Mehta, _Diasporic (Dis)locations_, (Mona: The University of West Indies Press, 2004), 220.
“compelled to drudgery in the field and home” and “women of high-caste families lived a life a leisure, but of more social-rigidity” (Jayawardena 79). Persaud’s novel is set in the 1940s and is the historical by-product of the Indian feminist reform movement headed by a Bengali man named Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833). As South Asians migrated West to work their former customs and culture would transfer with them. Women and men immigrants would want to keep several of their Hindu practices intact, and women accepting the role of mother and wife assured their families that there was a strong, traditional role model in the home. Indo-Caribbeans of Hindu faith would now abide by a hybrid version of Hindu rules which acknowledged the differences of a new culture while still honoring traditional religious values.

Jeremy Poynting’s article, “‘You Want to be a Coolie Woman?’: Gender and Ethnic Identity in Indo-Caribbean Women’s Writing,” is testament to the absence of East Indian female literary voices in the Caribbean only twenty years ago. In 2009, popular female authors and critics include Bharati Mukherjee, Karen Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Ramabai Espinet, and Inderpal Grewal. Poynting’s article is included in an anthology of Caribbean women writers that was meant to showcase the great female voices from the First International Conference of Caribbean Women at Wellesley College in 1988. He speculates that “the reasons for the delayed emergence of Indo-Caribbean women’s writing must be sought not only in …the marginalization of the Indo-Caribbean culture, and general gender

disadvantage, but, in the past at least, in their attitudes to the education of girls” (99). According to Ponynting, the overwhelming attitude of some Hindu families is that girls are raised to be good wives for husbands, and that an educated female only becomes spoiled and then demands more respect and freedom than she is allowed.

Butterfly in the Wind places Persaud in the role of “novelist as teacher.”

Nigerian-born author and postcolonial critic, Chinua Achebe coined the term “novelist as teacher” in order to address the importance of authors actively creating representative literature:

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front…I would be quite satisfied if my novels did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all of its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. (Achebe 45)

Both Achebe and Spivak have taken the charge to create culturally specific criticism and thereby promote an indigenous development of theory that acknowledges the existence of intellectual productions of the subjects before, during, and after European invasion. The birth of indigenous literatures and theory acts as a method of de-colonization.

My discussion of Butterfly will focus on Kamla’s ability to link and interpret key episodes of her life in a way that matures her into a critical and feminist conscious

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woman. Kamla Maharaj is four or five years old at the beginning of the novel and the youngest member of a tightly-knit Hindu family. *Butterfly* opens with the section called “Simple Joys,” which richly describes the simple observations of a lucky child who is prized by her grandmother because she is born on the night of a full moon. Kamla knows she is spoiled and beams:

> All the women, my mother, my grandmother and Sultan mother squeeze so much of their energy into me that I am sure I will grow. …[My] grandmother coaxes my head…She murmurs she is feeling for bumps and hollows and later says my head is well shaped….She pulls and releases my arms and legs, crosses and uncrosses them in every combination…You would think I was but a piece of dough!…My grandmother reshapes every part of me to her liking. (Persaud 11)

Kamla’s maternal figures, namely her mother Mahadaya, her grandmother, their washer woman Renee, and their cook Daya act as her primary sources of self-image. Consequently, her grandmother is highlighted as a special role model in her life which symbolizes the juxtaposition between young and old traditions. Later in the novel Kamla will find it difficult to depart from the values of home because she has always been raised as her grandmother’s favored child, literally and figuratively shaped by her grandmother’s hands. Because her mother and father are also present in the home, her grandmother and the other women in her life offer an added sense of protection for Kamla.
Because the act of adultery in Hindu culture has such dire consequences for women, Kamla’s mother does not overlook the opportunity to warn her. Imperfections in the daughter’s character and behavior ultimately are the responsibility of the mother:

If [adultery was] committed by a wife, it was her death sentence if not physically, certainly socially. So too was premarital pregnancy—because of the shame it brought to the father of such an uncaring and foolish daughter. Never again could the father, the head of the house, be able to walk the road with his head held high…[A]dultery committed by men had a lot going for it, since it was seen as ‘the way of men,’ one of the crosses wives had to bear with stoic calmness. (Persaud 98-99)

According to Patricia Mohammed’s discussion in Gender Negotiations among Indians in Trinidad, 1917-1947 (2002), a recurrent idea of gender found in most cultures is that the honor of men is vested in women’s virtue. The relationship of men to other men in this struggle to retain ethnic identity is understood by their power to control their women, and guard or protect them from other men (Mohammed 9)\(^65\). Ultimately, women are seen as property that must be taken care of, and they are only powerful over their children. Kamla questions her mother about the rules of women and why they have to bear quietly so much deceit. She learns that several women in her family and community accept the traditional and archaic gender roles that say the women must work hard to be civil to their male mates and maintain chastity despite all odds of temptation and abuse at home. This

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image of womanhood is one that she does not want to subscribe to, but one that she eventually will understand.

Kamla’s home is filled with love and accolades, and then she is introduced to marital conflict through the experiences of her household cook Daya. At this point in the novel, Butterfly transitions between two points of view. Up until this point, the novel has only prefaced Kamla’s interpretation of the events, and now it will introduce a scope that eludes her. She is placed in the middle of relationship drama. Because Kamla is young and inconspicuous, Daya asks Kamla to spy on her adulterous husband:

On Friday I want you to go to the rum shop and see if he there….Kam’, that man go be the death of me. You know how hard I does work to keep him looking good? I does wash for him, clean, everything, everything I tell you…(11)

Kamla is sympathetic to Daya’s situation, and responds with the insight of a much older peer:

Her bad Fridays were when she had to hurry to the rum shop before he spent it all. Because her bad days brought her so much misery I once said to her: ‘Daya, you should leave your husband. He is no good.’ She did not say anything and being only seven I did not understand the meaning of silence, so I continued: ‘He will be the death of you,’ … (Persaud 39)

Of course, Kamla is too young to realize that leaving a husband is never as easy as packing a suitcase and closing the door behind her. Kamla does not understand that unhappy people do not always seek happiness. However, she will soon find out that Daya
is one of many women she knows who endure hard work and difficult marriages. She does not fully understand the urgency of Daya’s request; she will encounter many other examples of women sacrificing unconditionally for men. Witnessing these relationships will eventually make her reluctant to pursue romantic relationships with men. It is important that Kamla witnesses problems in adult relationships within her immediate family circle. These issues enable her to know that she is not immune to these problems and that life continues in spite of relationship controversy. Kamla still loves her respective female elders but begins to see flaws in their images.

Kamla defers to her religious beliefs even though she does not understand or accept the inequalities in behaviors of men and women. In Chapter Three of *Butterfly*, she is distraught over the adultery committed by a long-time family friend named Baboo. Baboo was a respected religious leader and village authority. He was also her family’s friendly, middle-aged milkman. When younger, he always brought a smile to her face, and she adored his wife. Without warning, he leaves his hard-working, diligent wife and impregnates his young housekeeper. Kamla rants, “…you would have thought he would have known better…I was furious! I expected grown-ups to practice what they preached.” As a teenager, Kamla comments that, “I was overcome by a deep sorrow for my sex in bondage, and for the real and terrifying predicament biology and custom had placed them in” (100). Kamla believes women are doomed by virtue of their gender. She wonders if most of the problems a woman will encounter will be in the home. When a woman is first subordinate to her husband, she by extension becomes subordinate within her society.
Kamla has openly disagreed with the conditions of Baboo and Daya and has shown her opinion in spite of her age and gender. By speaking out against their behaviors, Kamla asserts that she will not be inferior in her own home—including her parents’. In lamenting with her mother, Kamla becomes infuriated by the many adulterous stories, and startles even herself when she yells out, “Men who commit adultery should be shot.” My father was much taken aback by the intensity of my wrath and looked at me rather strangely…[H]e quickly walked away” (100). After a subsequent chastisement from her mother about the role of men in the household and how she must not disrespect her father as his daughter, Kamla now is awakened to her mother’s true role—she was there to teach Kamla how to be the subordinate daughter, woman, and wife.

Finally, Kamla’s view of womanhood is further complicated when she chooses interest in an academic life over a domestic one. The section called “Daughters” in Chapter Four addresses the issues of how Indian women’s choices are regarded in a traditional and contemporary way. For some unmarried daughters, their desire to seek higher knowledge is thought to cause a threat to the community and their future household. There is a tension between the old and new customs of Indo-Trinidadian Hinduism. Though marriage is the preferred route for an upper, middle-class girls, if no suitable mate can be approved by the family, then a woman will have to become academically prepared to support herself.

Kamla continues to see that women’s education is not a key priority for their social development. Her parents are eager for her to attend a new, upwardly mobile school called Fatima Girls’ High School. When confronted with a recommendation
request for the elite new high school, her older uncle comments that “[t]here is no need for a woman to be more educated than her husband.” At this stage, Kamla is not totally suppressed by this rejection, but is surprised when her mother comes to her defense and reminds her uncle that women cannot guarantee a long, prosperous marriage and may need to leave their husband’s house and find work one day. Kamla affectionately states, “My mother spoke with strong convictions and my uncle did not know what to make of it. He got up and said wearily, ‘It’s getting late’…” (102). Though education seems to be a secondary plan to a good marriage, we see that Persaud has the mother speak on behalf of Kamla in a way that shows her full range of support. Kamla’s mother is fully engaged in her negative and positive negotiations with men. Whether it be reminding her of respecting her father or coercing an elder uncle, her support will be very important in broadening Kamla’s outlook as a woman and Trinidadian.

Bildungsromans of the Caribbean region make serious efforts to catalog the damaging effects that the colonial education has on the young people of the region. Authors such as Merle Hodge, Grace Nichols, Jamaica Kincaid and George Lamming tell how their Afro-Caribbean boy and girl protagonists are all jaded by the worshipful reverence of English leaders and mannerisms, worn with rote-learning styles, and in constant fear of harsh corporal punishment at school. The Indo-Caribbean educational research of Brinda Mehta shows that:

…a relatively underdeveloped area of literary analysis in Caribbean Studies continues to remain the impact of colonial schools on Indo-Caribbean girls. This discourse of rupture has highlighted the alienating impact of the cultural and historical
erasure of one’s origins, the commodification and subsequent
devalorization of Hindu-Caribbean Culture and the incompatibility
of colonial education with ethnic traditions. (Mehta 114)
Like the epigraph at the beginning of the essay, Kamla will receive subliminal messages
of inferiority through the lack of Indian cultural awareness in her schools. At first Kamla
welcomed the transition between preschool and kindergarten because she wanted to get
away from “the nursery rhymes that sung of witches, wolves, stepmothers and dragons.”
However she would soon learn that the “history in books were tales of far darker
iniquity” than the nursery rhymes” (Persaud 19).

Kamla describes school like a prison and complains of the mechanical rigors of
education that involved reciting a pledge like, “Manners maketh man. Eat meat, milk,
eggs and cheese daily. …Speak quietly for quiet speech is a sign of refinement. Always
respect you elders” (49). Not coincidentally, Kamla’s colorful and “spicy” lifestyle does
not support this aspiration. This pledge does not inspire good manners and good health
from her because her family’s foods differ in taste and texture. Kamla’s grandmother uses
cassava, coconut milk, bodi beans, salt fist, hot pepper and chive to make her dishes. The
pledge contains other inaccuracies like, “Always respect your elders….Drink six glasses
of fresh water daily. Everything comes to him who sits and waits…” (49). Kamla’s young
and practical mind already knows that respecting elder is useless because adults lie and
are deceitful; Daya’s husband is a drunk and prefers alcohol over water, and Baboo’s
wife has been patient and loyal, and still is abandoned by her husband. Though these

66 “Spicy” refers to the food that most Indians eat which is the polar opposite of the bland milk and cheese
that the pledge promotes.
examples are not strong indicators of the destructive nature of a colonial education, they
do set the stage for Kamla’s level of distrust of school and its information.

As Kamla ages her inquiries grow more intense. She comments that, “I began to
think there was something contrary in the way my mind worked.” Even with a simple
saying like, “An early bird catches the worm’, one had to determine who was the bird
and who was the worm,” and then her contrary mind would ask “what should the proverb
be for the worm?” (52). Her ability to rationalize and think about the conditions of her
recitations shows her ability to be the “intellectual” that Spivak refers to. She represents
Indian womanhood as thinking and acting. Kamla’s concern about the conditions of
others in her classroom and in her community sets her apart from Crick Crack, Monkey’s
Afro-Trinidadian protagonist Tee. Tee seemed to live in Trinidad without others outside
of her race and family, but Kamla will invite the conditions of others into the narrative of
her life.

Overall, “Trinidadian literature is much more heterogeneous in terms of the ethnic
experiences it explores” than the literature of other large islands such as Jamaica and
Barbados (Yelvington 6). Many of its texts deal with the plurality of Trinidadian culture.
“At the end of Trinidad’s slavery in 1834, the apprenticeship program began in 1838”67
This program was much like the sharecropper work program in the United States that
allowed newly freed slaves to work on farms for small wages. They found a more
suitable “brown” group of laborers in India, and “from about 1845-1917 masses of East
Indians were brought to the Caribbean as indentured servants” (6).

Lakshmi Persaud has protagonist Kamla reflect more on instances of racial
difference than Merle Hodge allows Tee. Kamla’s sensitivity to race may be greater

because she is in the minority of Trinidad during the time period (1940-1950s) of the story. Though Kamla feels that her culture is not valued, she does find solidarity with the plight of other races; she asserts her contrary voice again:

“…during a West Indian history lesson…Mr. Braithwaite, our teacher, had talked about the English explorer[s], Sir Walter Raleigh,…Sir Francis Drake…and Sir John and [their involvement] in the slave trade. I questioned ‘… why should the Queen of England honor with knighthood men like Sir John Hawkins who started the slave trade to the West Indies and America?’ (Persaud 53).

Kamla’s statement is profound given that she makes it in a surrogate British classroom before Trinidad’s independence in 1962. Logically speaking, why would anyone celebrate kidnappers, murderers, and rapists? Hodge describes the situation in Trinidad after their Independence as one in which one form of colonization replaced another. She says that “today’s image-makers have at their disposal more powerful instruments of persuasion than did those of the pre-Independence era.” Television media and the internet can allow the Caribbean to continue to look outwards to any culture that it chooses to filter through computer and television cables. Kamla also speaks on the images she receives in the form of movies:

The cinema was the only form of entertainment Hindu girls enjoyed outside the festivities of their home and those of their wider family and community. I looked forward to the Sunday matinee show….It was all exciting and magically different from the life around me. (Persaud 69)
Though this indulgence is not entirely negative, it still changes the amount and level and quality of outside influences. And one must question how and if media can positively influence the images of the Caribbean.

Kamla finds the Red Indian and Cowboy films of her local theater to be barbaric and contradictory. After all, was it not the “civilized” White Cowboys who killed, maimed, and harassed the simple, nomadic, “savage” Native Americans? Often times, America is said to be hypocritical; instances like this prove America’s hypocrisy. Kamla’s “contrary mind” allow her to become uncomfortable when she cannot figure out the logic behind injustices. She will eventually learn, yet never fully accept that adults are not always logical and ethical, nor do they always strive to be.

Persaud uses an episodic narrative to allow Kamla to grow and to engage with others. Her treks will take her into the welcoming homes of her female relatives and friends and into the cold halls of her colonial school. Kamla has the ability to rebound from her challenges and prioritize the lessons within each of her engagements. She will be able to fight against her feelings of cultural alienation by positioning herself against the racial and religious diversity of her community.

In addition to blacks and Moslems, whites also live in Kamla’s neighborhood. The white, overseer-like, Mr. Rojas and his wife are almost a necessary nuisance to the Indians there. Mrs. Rojas sells mangoes when compelled to, but she and her husband have no need to interact with the “locals” other than for selling fruit. The sign on the Rojas’s gate, Beware of the Dog, is very indicative of Rojas’s inapproachability. Not many people in Kamla’s neighborhood of Tunapuna, Trinidad, have dogs, and if they do the dogs are certainly not a hindrance in socializing with other humans. It is particularly
ironic that a white family would move into the midst of an Indian community and not care to socialize with them. This is an example of white superiority complex. It is always present and piercing and the white family reminds the East Indians of Tunapuna that they should maintain some reasonable level of solidarity. Unfortunately, the Indians residents are not without their own levels of superiority and misunderstanding:

Some may think that because the Pasea Villagers were East Indians there was amongst them a uniformity of color and culture. What we had, in reality, was a mosaic of peoples:…

There was, of course, this matter of religion. Moslems were not invited to our kathas and pujas and [Hindus] were not invited to their mosques. So side by side we walked the dirt roads not knowing anything about the deeper feelings of the other. (Persaud 90)

In the classroom, Kamla gripes about not seeing enough Indian culture and Indian females. However, outside of class, she and her family daily walk by members of their race and choose not to interact with them. Yes, there is a difference between a middle-class Hindu, like Kamla, and a lower-class Muslim. Class can separate races as easily as religion can. Often, people just do not to accept others who think and live differently than themselves. However, the colonial schools and workforce should inspire more Indians to celebrate their similarities.

In the sub-section entitled “A Certain Way,” Kamla and her mother are interested in forming a friendly alliance with their Moslem neighbor, Mrs. Hassan. She accepts their dinner invitation only if she is allowed to prepare a chicken dinner the “correct Moslem way.” Compromise seems to be the method by which others accept and listen. In Trinidad
there has been a tug and pull more between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians than the Hindus and Moslems. These tense relationships that Kamla witnesses act as image-makers that will influence how she will view and respond to the world and to her community.

According to Caribbean critic Patricia Mohammed, blacks and the Creole middle class identified East Indians as a threat. Obviously the issues of slavery and indenture had soured their trust in each other. “The sentiment of the black majority was an understandable one. Ignorance of each other, as well as the threat of being out of favor because of another group, had created disharmony.” However, by 1946 the Indian community was strengthening socially and politically (Mohammed 67). By the time that Kamla matures and becomes a teacher in the late 1950s, she is able to look forward to her school’s Mahasabha movement that had the goal of maintaining cultural awareness about Trinidad Indians in academic and social settings. She is glad to be a teacher during this time and to participate in this cultural awakening and rejoicing.

Kamla’s career will not end as teacher. Soon after she accepts the position at a local school she receives a scholarship to study at a teacher’s college in Ireland. At first she is wary of Ireland, but subconsciously she knows that Trinidad will put limitations on her growth as a teacher, and a woman. Mohanty says that “one of the most crucial challenges for critical multicultural feminism is working out how to engage in ethical and caring dialogues across conflicts and identities” (486). Chandra T. Mohanty’s “Crafting Feminist Genealogies” essay acts as a great springboard into the Indo-Trinidadian homeland of Kamla. Mohanty’s criticism understands her questions, her lifestyle, her religion, and her future. She says that one of the central challenges Indian

68 Mohanty, 486.
feminists face at this time is how to rethink the relationship of nationalism and feminism in the context of religious identities. At this juncture, Kamla needs to travel abroad to continue to grow her identity and cultural self-awareness. Persaud has Kamla migrate to complete her higher education and cultural expansion:

> When the day arrived, the moment for my departure from my village, from my home and from my family, I had strange mixed feelings….Never before had a female, [on either side of my family], had the opportunity to go to university-…where there was neither family nor friend. (91)

Her departure is an act of defiance because there is no elder to watch her and she is openly postponing her domestic future as a wife and mother. Kamla will now contribute to making a new image for Indo-Caribbean women abroad.

*Butterfly in the Wind* has traced the passage of Kamla as a young woman with a strong character who has moved one step closer to understanding her Indian heritage and her budding feminist self-consciousness. Kamla’s process of inquiry teaches her that the conditions of subjective groups are not always documented as historically accurate. Her former statement of the “history in books were tales of far darker iniquity” rings true here. Persaud designs her female protagonist to “undo ingrained racial and sexual mythologies within communities by becoming fluent in each other’s histories” (Mohanty 486). Kamla’s interest in the historical fabric of others promises us that she will continue to be an engaged being. She has begun the work that is necessary to develop a multicultural feminism. Given her concern for others, we know that Kamla will return to her home city in Trinidad to finish her work of inquiry and change as an adult. Persaud
portrays Kamla as a sensitive and tenacious young woman who demands fairness for all groups. At the base of this fairness ideology are the tenets of conscious feminism.
CHAPTER 4

HER CROSS TO BEAR: FRAMING IDENTITY THROUGH CONFLICT AND CONQUEST IN PAULE MARSHALL’S BROWN GIRL, BROWNSTONES

Glancing down the interminable Brooklyn street you thought of those joined brownstones as one house reflected through a train of mirrors, with no walls between the houses but only vast rooms yawning endlessly into the other. Yet, looking close, you saw that under the thick ivy each house had something distinctively its own. (Marshall 3)

As a Caribbean woman writer, Paule Marshall creates a space like the brownstones of her description that sits squarely between two cultures, and yet is distinctive from them both. Her writing is entirely of neither Brooklyn nor Bridgetown, but is complete as both. Marshall’s novel represents the Caribbean-American immigrant whose identity is comprised of two homes. In the same vein as the setting described above, Marshall captures the essence of what it means to be at the intersections of cultural identities (American, black, female and Caribbean) and to occupy a space that is simultaneously both distinct and blended.

Marshall’s literature has helped to shape the Anglophone Caribbean tradition and expand the representation of the black family in the diaspora. Borrowing from Joyce Pettis’s Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall’s Fiction (1995), Marshall believes blacks can achieve wholeness by acknowledging and examining their cultural continuity. She is aware that “her cultural identity as an African-American and African-Caribbean allows

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70 Bridgetown is the capital of Barbados and has distinct regional characteristic like Brooklyn, New York.
her to understand how the two cultures diverge and coalesce.”\textsuperscript{71} In this chapter, I am interested in how Marshall articulates what it means to be a Barbadian American woman. Being Barbadian American means to juggle competing ideas of loyalty to and disdain for the island home. To be female means to balance resourcefulness and independence with the seemingly contradictory roles of nurturer and dependent. Selina is trying to carve out a role for herself somewhere in the middle of these competing strands while displaying a budding feminist sensibility.

The Barbadian author Kamau Brathwaite’s poem “The Emigrants” (1967) captures how West Indians often migrate in search of opportunity—educational, financial, and professional. Brathwaite’s poem also highlights the concept of continuity through the West Indian ritual of migration: “Why do they go?/ They do not know./ Seeking a job/ they settle for the very best/…jabbing a neighbor/ out of work for four bob less…”\textsuperscript{72} Having come from islands where there are few economic resources, West Indians are consumed by goals that will allow financial stability and professional variety. Karen Fog Olwig’s anthropological study \textit{Caribbean Journeys} (2007) provides an illuminating exploration into such pursuits by evaluating the migration rituals of three Caribbean family units. Her research shows that the migrant has a basic understanding that his or her goal is to secure employment, to establish a home abroad, and to support the less fortunate family back home. Yet, this mobility does not necessarily mean severing ties with the island.

To accomplish these practical goals, the Caribbean emigrants participate in many border crossings. Similar to Gloria Anzulúa’s argument in \textit{Borderlands} (1987), which


examines Mexican-American relations and how Chicana women should be both critical and proud of their culture. Caribbean Americans live within and negotiate dual or multiple identities or cultural identities, races, and languages. Their migration is the foundation of a multilayered, diasporic identity that Anzuldúa says is the “third country.” Carole Boyce Davies’s *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994) offers similar concepts of border identity, but differs from Anzuldúa’s work by focusing on African diasporic migratory routes and rituals.

When a person migrates from a developing Caribbean country to a developed, superpower country like America, he or she must immediately accept “an acknowledgement of otherness” (Denniston 6). By leaving the old home and “affirming what Simon Gikandi says, a new indigenous language of history and self” in the new other home, the emigrant creates a status that is other than native, other than local, and therefore an outsider, unprivileged status. As Edward Brathwaite summarizes, “[We] find a West Indian facing the metropolitan west on the one hand, and clinging to a memorable past on the other. Within this matrix, she formulates her enquiry into identity and change” (227).

Women are familiar with this status of “otherness” because they often occupy less powerful positions than their male counterparts. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), the women characters all deal with some level of otherness. They are representations of what Davies calls “migratory subjectivities,” which literally denotes persons lacking authority.

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away from home. Davies’s concept of “migratory subjectivities” acknowledges that African Caribbean women simultaneously deal with multiple oppressions based on race, gender, and emigrant status, and, at times even language, yet still find a way to traverse these supposed boundaries as they navigate throughout the diaspora. Women routinely take on a compromised status in order to provide for their family and themselves; however, this is part of a re-definition process that they will adopt in order to move forward. Davies asserts that black women writers “re-define literature in order to reconnect and re-member, and bring together black women dis-located by space and time” (996).

Set in a tumultuous time period, the action in Brown Girl, Brownstones is wedged between several climactic moments in the United States and abroad. Paule Marshall places her plot within the context of these conflicts in order to foreshadow events within the novel and to prove that the Boyce family can overcome internal and external tensions. The novel opens in 1939 in Brooklyn, New York. World War II is quickly brewing (1939-1945); the Great Depression has ended (1929-1933), but its effects have not; and the Black Protest movement (1940-1959) will soon arrive with the death of Jamaican-born leader and Back-to-Africa Movement organizer, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). In addition, Richard Wright’s Native Son (1940) will soon be published, thereby acknowledging the ongoing challenges of the black man (which include being labeled as criminal and being disenfranchised at home and work), and of blacks in

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76 Sometimes women who originate from the Hispanophone and Francophone Caribbean encounter challenges with language and accessibility when they migrate to the English-speaking U.S. and Great Britain. Although, unlike African-American women, most Caribbean women are bilingual. Language problems can place unnecessary boundaries on their mobility.

general in the U.S. Most importantly, black literature has just recently celebrated its Harlem Renaissance (1900-1940).  

Marshall recognized the significance of setting her novel during this convulsive and creative time. In her article “Black Immigrant Women in Brown Girl, Brownstones,” she compares what happens to the women characters in her novel with the real experiences of the West Indian female immigrant in America between the two World Wars. She opens by saying that if African Americans have endured invisibility in America, as Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) has shown, then the black foreigner suffers it doubly, and, finally, the West Indian immigrant woman in the United States experiences a triple invisibility---being black, foreign, and female. Marshall’s article speaks of the “impressive strength, authority, and style” of the West Indian woman and how her attributes have not been fully represented in the sociological and historical data of America.

African Americans in the 1940s were making historical strides in literature, science, politics, and sports. Dr. Charles Drew developed the modern day blood bank. Adams Clayton Powell was elected to the House of Representatives; Jackie Robinson was signed to the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Richard Wright published his autobiographical novel Black Boy (1945). On one level, Afro Caribbeans who were migrating into this country at this time were in worse condition than U.S-born African Americans because they were still the racial and national subjects of the British. Poverty, coupled with the

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78 I will explain why I have chosen these years for the Harlem Renaissance.


absence of national identity other than the one imposed by the British colonizers, were reasons that led several industrious Barbadians such as Marshall’s fictional family to flock to North America. Given the myriad of events that were occurring in North America, it would be World War II that gave fuel to the nationalist movement in the Caribbean. The goal of this movement was for colonized nations to seek political sovereignty from their colonizers by forming a Federation of the West Indies. The Federation only lasted from 1958 until 1962; unfortunately, it collapsed due to internal conflict amongst the islands.

It is notable that *Brown Girl, Brownstones* was published in 1959 during the brief existence of this organization. Because Marshall stayed rooted in her Barbadian culture, despite her American birthplace, she would have known about this organization and the nationalist movement that inspired it. The goal of the Caribbean nationalist movement was to achieve independence by making economic and social improvements in the region. Because the post-independence stages of most of the Anglophone Caribbean have occurred only within the twentieth century, the emancipated islands are still growing and strengthening in economic and political ways to distinguish their identity from their former colonizers. The identities of Caribbean citizens are invested in the challenges of their island nation states because their home island’s level of success or failure directly correlates to the strength of their family network and to the ethic of the individuals.

In *Brown Girl, Brownstones* the Boyces and their fellow islanders’ presence in New York City is compared to a “dark sea nudging its way onto a white beach” (Marshall 4). As the former Irish and Dutch emigrants move out to the suburbs and away from the city’s boroughs, the Barbadians “slowly edge” their way in to their former urban
enclaves. The Boyces consists of parents Silla and Deighton, and their daughters Selina and Ina who were both born and raised in Barbados. Silla holds disdain for Barbados, and Deighton defines it as a utopia. Silla views America as a place where she can build a foundation for prosperity, and Deighton views America as a stepping stone to allow him a triumphant return to Barbados and privileged, affluent twilight years spent on the island.

Ina, the elder sister, is demure, acquiescent, and passive. However, Selina, the protagonist, will stir up trouble by vacillating between her parents’ loyalties and her own struggles for independence.

Book One, entitled “A Long Day and a Long Night,” confirms that Selina has keen sensibilities. Though she is only ten years old, she relishes the quietness and serenity of her home. As her father naps and her sister sleeps, she quietly proclaims “this is the silence she loves” (5). In these moments of their repose, Selina is able to think and explore and absorb—she is always searching for evidence that indicates she is a part of the world:

She made only a cursory tour of the master bedroom…
opening the drawers to smell the lavender…running a finger
along the fluted edges of the high bed in which she had
been born…Going downstairs to the basement…[her] eyes reflected the family photograph, which did not include her, on the buffet. She wanted suddenly to send up a loud
importunate cry to declare herself, to bring someone running. (Marshall 6)
By using her senses of sound, smell, and touch, Selina finds comfort in her home’s treasures of quietness, lavender, and a ruffled bed. Only after she notices her physical absence from a family photo is she enticed to harass her sister Ina. The family photograph includes her parents and Ina with her now deceased infant brother. She inevitably feels that she “has come, strong and well-made, to take his place” (8). By declaring her presence through occasional outbursts and sensory explorations, Selina routinely confirms that she is in a better place than her brother—alive, with her family, whole.

Selina’s absence from the photo symbolizes her perceived exclusion from the family. Throughout the novel she will seek acknowledgement from her family, neighbors, and the world in general through individual trysts. Selina is aware that there was a Boyce family before her, but she does not like this fact. The family photograph confirms this; however, she engages in a personal quest to figuratively place herself “back in the picture.” She comments,” [it] was her father, mother, Ina, and the brother she had never known” (8). Her interest in her family’s life before she existed is common and understandable for an adolescent, yet she will regularly antagonize her family with questions and confrontations so that she can constantly affirm the vitality of their relationships.

In essence, Selina is proud that she has survived where her brother has died, and has adopted an inquisitive nature to celebrate it. She continues to explore her home by engaging her favorite person—her father. Deighton Boyce is always an interesting break from Selina’s daily musings. His simple greeting, “How the lady-folks?...was the signal that she and her father had stepped into an intimate circle and were joined together in the pause and beat of life” (9). His affectionate acknowledgement of her presence
overshadows the reality that he is regularly at home with the children. Is his daytime presence a sign of nurturing or lack of professional ambition? Always eager to engage his daughter, Deighton chastises Selina for pouting over a missed movie outing and decides he will entertain her with memories of his childhood romps in Barbados. He recalls playing cricket and football and dodge ball. Within his story he interjects, “I not like yuh mother and the ‘mounts of these Bajan that come from down some gully or up some hill behind God back and ain use to nothing…Pon a Sat’day I would walk’ bout town…like I did for own the damn place”(12). This is the first time that Deighton distinguishes himself from his wife. Up until this point, Deighton has told his daughters to obediently “mind yuh mother.” Yet, when bragging about Barbados, he alludes to Silla being backwards and rural. While certainly not rich, Deighton “lived a life of relative middle-class comfort. According to family friend Virgie, who was raised near him, his mother spared no expense on her only son” (Denniston 118.) Deighton feels his comfortable urban upbringing nevertheless prepared him to be street smart and proud. As a child on any given Sunday, he was confident in his ability to hustle money from rich white tourists. He admits “those people had so much of money it did turn them foolish”(Marshall 10). As Selina listens to her father, she regretfully slips into thoughts about her mother, and questions, “What had she done on Saturdays?”

Deighton’s childhood confidence in acquiring money has developed into conniving adult schemes for getting money. As an adult, he enrolls in school and seeks a way to subvert the timeline of a traditional education trek. He is taking accounting classes, and has decided that he will only study the final course material in order to make a quick transition through the program and get a “job making decent money.” He has no
desire to work his way from the bottom up educationally or professionally. He wants success to be handed to him. With a captive and private audience, Deighton confides in Selina about his most recent acquisition of money:

‘You see this [letter]? Don’t broadcast it…but my sister that just dead leave me piece of ground. Now how’s that for news?’

His teeth flashed in a strong smile. ‘Now let these bad minded Bajan here talk my name ‘cause I only leasing while they buying theirs…. And we gon have a house there—just like the white people own.’ (Marshall 12)

Using whites as his barometer for success, Deighton is sure his inheritance will bring him similar material success. He knows he can quell local gossip and make his mark in Barbados with the land his sister has willed him. Having only told Selina about his desire to return home and build, they enter into a secret alliance with each other. When he sends Selina off to buy celebratory candy, and undoubtedly to brag to friends, he re-enters the sun parlor to nap and dream about his future.

Though Selina innocently crowds her father with love and admiration, Deighton’s relationship with all other women is combustible. Marshall acknowledges the condition of the black man in America through her characterization of Deighton, who like Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas is a dreamer and outsider. Literally, both characters are asleep when we meet them in their respective novels. Deighton lounges in the sun parlor, and Bigger abruptly awakens with an “alarm clock [that] clanged in the dark and silent room.”81 Both characters’ slumber symbolizes they are indifferent to life; the places in which the men sleep represent the ideal environments they dream. Deighton longs for the

81 Richard Wright, *Native Son* (San Francisco: Perennial Classics, 1940), 3.
ideal sun and airiness of an island, and Bigger, being a city dweller usually surrounded by noise and bright lights, desires a quiet, lifeless place where he does not have to be responsible, challenged, or seen.

Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) was an urgent wake-up call to America to address the volatility of its race problems. Though *Brown Girl, Brownstones* does not thoroughly address immigrant race challenges, Marshall, having set her novel in 1939, would have been conscious of racial inequality in the states. Bigger believes whites are responsible for blacks’ constant setbacks and inferiority complex. Deighton dreams about securing wealth and academic success, yet he reluctantly pursues work and education. Although Deighton works at a mattress factory, he stays immaculately well-groomed and constantly socializes in the evenings. His behavior indicates he does not sacrifice his pleasures, but instead sacrifices his family’s well being.

Deighton, like Bigger, is an outsider for all the same reasons (race, class), except Deighton’s outsider status is heightened by lack of U.S. citizenship. Bigger and Deighton also are outsiders because they are “outside” of their masculine role of provider. Bigger’s mother rants:

‘We wouldn’t have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you. All you care about is your own pleasure!

Even when the relief offers you a job you won’t take it…

Bigger, honest, you the most no-countest man I ever seen in all my life.’ (Wright 9)

Bigger’s mother constantly reminds him of his inadequacies. Though he is not a husband or a father, as the eldest male in his household, he should be responsible for his family’s
financial security. Instead, we observe his mother, Mrs. Thomas, and his sister Vera working very hard to maintain their meager home. These are the circumstances that will cause Bigger to begin his physical and literal warring with women. Unfortunately, Deighton is also constantly at odds with his wife over his lack of ambition and his not being the main provider in the household. Deighton’s war with his wife and daughters will soon commence. His pleasure-seeking personality will provide the fuel for his and Silla’s explosive relationship.

Silla’s mood towards her daughters is directly influenced by her fights with Deighton. Left out of the “secret alliance” between Selina and Deighton, Ina also feels alienated from her father because she has begun to menstruate. Overhearing Deighton and Selina discussing a secret property in Barbados, Ina feels obliged to tell her mother. Thus, when Silla returns home from “a long day” at work at the beginning of Book One, its meaning becomes painfully clear; the family is now in for “a long night” of discord. Ina greets Selina with curt observations, “I saw Daddy going down Fulton Street…Is it true that we’ve got property home?… They were talking….Him and Selina” (43). Ina feels obliged to tell her mother about today’s events. On the threshold of womanhood, Ina enters an alliance with the other woman in her family, which leaves Selina out both because of her closeness to her father and her younger age.

Ina’s tattling, however, does not sever Selina and her father as she has planned, but instead further joins them in their shared deceit and places. Selina is at odds with Silla. Already overworked and underappreciated, Silla does not plan to entertain a long interrogation:

They were in the kitchen now, immured within its white
walls, and although they were motionless they seemed to be warily circling each other, feinting, probing for an opening. The mother’s voice swung wildly across to her, “What you two was talking today?” (Marshall 59)

The white walls of the kitchen suggest the sterile and intimidating nature of a police interrogation room. Mother and daughter circle each other like predator and prey. After Selina and Silla engage in an elaborate back and forth questioning Selina finally tells her mother about her father’s land. Silla recognizes that Selina has once again been seduced by Deighton’s daily stories of Barbados; however, this time his dreams for home hold more significance. Now, that Deighton has the means to actually go home—that plan is antithetical to the plans that Silla has for her family.

Selina’s view of home becomes more complicated as she tries to understand each parent’s circumstances. Dighton’s ideal is to retire to the island of Barbados, while Silla wants to gain access to the American dream. With a tone that wavers between bitterness and fury, Silla tells her daughter what “going there to live” really means:

‘Nice? Bimshire nice?...You know what I was doing when I was your age?...[I was] picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise in his heaven till it set. With some woman called a Driver to wash yuh tail in licks if yuh dare look up. Yes working harder than a man at the age of ten…’ (Marshall 45)

Silla assures Selina that the sun and beach do not only exist in her former Barbados, but cane and colonization occupy Barbados as well, and therefore children Selina’s age are
educated through rigorous labor, not academics. The only message that the overseer
wanted to teach the children was to be obedient and subservient. Silla ends her
lamentation with “working harder than a man at the age of ten….” to demonstrate that
even at ten years old, she was working harder than Deighton is now. Silla tells Selina that
she would easily be beaten for not picking cane grass efficiently, yet her daughter does
not, can not, process the meaning of this circumstance. It is true Selina acknowledges her
mother’s “rhapsodic fury,” yet she does not understand its source. Selina will never fully
understand the Barbados from which her parents come, mainly because her parents’
ideals and identities for their children are vastly different.

Like most impressionable children, Selina is guided by her parents’ desires and
experiences. Selina does not realize that the sun her father frolics under is the same sun
beneath which her mother toils. For some, the sun does not always invite pleasure and
play, but instead signals the labor of a new day. Selina’s innocent, yet equally defiant
reply of, “I still think I’d like it,” leaves Silla breathless; she cannot understand why her
daughter still does not see her quality of existence in America as a privilege. But should
she? Selina has always had the ability to live as a child should, carefree and whimsical.
Deighton’s eagerness to return, to claim, and to settle on his sister’s land is due in part to
his own spoiled childhood. So how is Selina to memorialize Barbados? According to
Beverly Johnson’s “Revolutionary Solutions,” Selina is not reluctant to state her position
and side with her father’s ambitions (Johnson 465). Silla is disappointed that her painful
childhood stories do not change her perspective. Yet, this independence that she asserts
represents the first signs of Selina finding her voice.
Underlying Silla’s frustration is the stark reality of Barbados in 1940. Since Barbados is still a colony under Great Britain at this time, she cannot understand why her husband cannot consider the entire experience of Barbados. Karen Fog Olwig’s ethnography *Caribbean Journeys* (2007) confirms the experience of Barbadian life in the early twentieth century:

[D]uring the 1930s and 1940s the black population finally was able to purchase smaller parcels from the ruined plantations… to gain a position of respect in society. The impoverishment of the local society meant…this recognition and respect rested on an extremely weak economic foundation. (Olwig 159)\(^82\)

Silla understands that land and a house cannot maintain themselves. There must be an economic infrastructure on the island to support them long term. At least, Brooklyn, given its challenges, came with the stability of a sovereign nation and regular sources of income; Barbados still had its own national identity to secure.

The Boyces illustrate that immigrant loyalties can become divided and a colonial home can be regarded with disdain when survival there is difficult. Marshall contrasts a Barbadian childhood with an American childhood, and between Silla with Deighton to show how Selina’s home life is truly a mixture of Caribbean American experiences. By holding steadfast to her opinion to memorialize Barbados, Selina has shown independence, and “has shown initial signs of integrity that will enable her to resist colonialist attitudes” (Johnson 465).

In Book Two, or *Brown Girl, Brownstones*’s “Pastorale,” Marshall momentarily steps away from the rising action of the story to capture the intimate and peaceful refuges of Selina’s life that influence and help to develop her sense of womanhood. Underlying the tranquility of this section is Silla’s quiet plotting; Silla characterizes the statement, the calm (“Pastorale,” Book Two) before the storm (“The War,” Book Three). “The Pastorale” also includes the last time Selina will enjoy the “silence she loved” in her home and family. This chapter represents Selina’s aside from her family. She takes time to reflect on the women in her life and how she is unlike them. But, she also is conscious of how she is feeling a distance that is not only biological, but personal as well. Her sense of Caribbean American identity will not mirror that of the women in her life.

Selina must officially venture beyond her sanctuary of home to be independent. “Her house was alive” like an organism, and she and her family were its vascular system. The house has often been treated as a metaphor for the body. Many architectural features align with features of the body (kitchen as heart, porch as eyes, etc.). Selina’s brownstone symbolizes members of the Barbadian American community who offer something “distinctively its own.” It is also a metaphor for Selina herself. Though physically she is similar to her neighbors and family, in the same way a house is a part of a community and resembles its surrounding dwellings upon close examination she distinguishes herself through her decisions and life experiences. In a similar way, a brownstone distinguishes itself by its interior designs and decorations, and by the family that lives within it.

The kitchen of the Boyce’s brownstone represents its heart and acts as a symbol for womanhood and fellowship. Kitchens typically are loci for women’s power, and since Silla is the matriarch of the home, the kitchen becomes her domain of strength. It is in the
kitchen that Selina and her mother make amends over tea and Silla acknowledges her daughter’s budding maturity:

“Can I go to Prospect Park with Beryl?”…

[Can] I go without Ina? Just this once, please.

[Her mother replies] What you need Ina for any more?
You’s more woman now than she’ll ever be, soul.

G’long.’ (Marshall 53).

Silla allows Selina to venture out into the neighborhood without a chaperone. Selina joyfully burst from the kitchen upon hearing this, but not until after she and her mother share a cup of tea—a more mature drink than the cup of lemonade they usually share.

The Boyce kitchen has the capacity for tranquility as well as conflict. And in this intimate moment, Silla recognizes a maturity in Selina that her older daughter Ina does not have.

Ina is the dutiful daughter who quickly tells about the private conversation she overhears, yet Selina is reluctant to share this information and challenges her mother’s point of view.

Selina also has relationships with the older and younger tenants in the brownstone community, showcasing her ability to be sociable and have alliances outside the home. She is gaining survival skills of a woman by being able to have productive relationships and differentiating her opinion from her mother’s; in short, she is learning how to think and behave independently. Selina’s montage of friends all offer a touchstone from their lives that contributes to the shaping of her feminist sensibilities.

Selina’s woman friend and wanton neighbor, Suggie, is an example of lust and vanity. Selina often finds her “sprawled amidst her rumpled sheets, sluggish from the
rough pleasures of her night” (51). Simply stated, Suggie is an endearing jezebel. Sexually flamboyant and uninhibited, she is an entertaining and non-judgmental adult whom Selina befriends not only for stories of her wild escapades, but because she fondly reminisces about Barbados, and embodies the exoticism of the island. She is hot, sultry, and representative of “every woman who gives herself without guile and with a full free passion…” (18). For Selina, Suggie’s independence is brazen, and enviable. Suggie is an outcast within the Barbadian community, and further evidence that Selina does not make the friends her mother advises.

Suggie is a stereotypical ready-for-fun black island girl, “who carried the sun inside her” (18). She is often the first to welcome the new adventure-seeking island men to the States, and the last to coddle the “island-dreamers,” like Deighton and Selina. Deighton is sexually seduced by Suggie, and Selina is romanticized by Suggie. She represents the openness of home when the urban jungle of North America is cold and harsh. When returning to Barbados is nearly impossible, Suggie emanates the warmth of the sun to all her male and female visitors. Most importantly, Selina admires Suggie because she is unlike the other Bajan female immigrants of the Brooklyn community. Suggie does not offer sad and negative images of the island. Suggie’s images are more palatable and promising. She never expresses disdain for being Barbadian American. Notwithstanding her lack of professional ambitions, Suggie wants to be re-connected to Barbados. She helps to shape Selina’s boldness and desire for home.

The Challenors represent the ideals of the Bajan community. They set the standard by which several of the brownstone residents wish to live by. They are buying their home, and “the wife, Gert Challenor, despised by the Bajan women because of her
docility, did day’s work” (54). Because husband Percy Challenor worked multiple jobs, an anomaly to Silla, Gert only had to work one day job, a luxury Silla and other Bajan wives were not afforded. Not only are the Challenors financially stable, but they are the exact opposite of the Boyce’s. Percy works long and often unlike Deighton; unlike Silla, Gert has one job and a male breadwinner and their daughter Beryl Challenor, while the same age as Selina is unlike her; Beryl is content with the educational and social options her parents offer her.

During one of Selina’s daily romps through her building, she seeks her confidant and playmate Beryl. Unexpectedly, Selina is greeted by her friend’s new body. Beryl Challenor has joined the “cult of blood and breasts” (62). With eagerness and dread, Selina listens to the story of Beryl’s induction into this new society called womanhood. Beryl’s explanations of her menstruation are simple and sympathetic; she speaks of how “it hurts sometimes,” but that she is “carrying something secret and special” (56); however, Selina still cannot fathom why “dripping blood felt important?” (61) Selina begins to feel as if this change will further take her “out of the picture” of their friendship. Even though Beryl tells her she will be a part of this cult soon, Selina is doubtful:

The mother had deceived her, saying that she was more of a woman than Ina yet never telling her the one important condition …She was not free but still trapped within a hard, flat body. She closed her eyes to hide the tears and was safe momentarily from Beryl and Ina and all the other joined against her in their cult of

83 I am referring back to the family picture in Book One when she was longing her presence amongst her siblings, Ina and now dead baby brother.
Selina ends Book Two no longer the confident young woman who traipsed out of mother’s kitchen; now she is a confused girl who is on a physical roller coaster. Though Beryl tries to assure Selina that all will end well, Selina is still uncertain about the changes to come. Suggie has empowered Selina about her sexuality and now Beryl has deflated it. As a budding feminist, Selina is genuinely concerned with the experiences of women in her community; however, she is not very confident now because she unconsciously recognizes that she will need to formulate her own affirming views about her changing body.

Book Three of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* begins with America’s induction into World War II. Obviously an uncertain time for all Americans, Silla’s girls “wait for her to define this in some way, to fit the war somehow into their lives” (65). Selina and Ina are frightened by the radio announcer’s constant images of blood, and the school’s piercing sound of air-raid horns. Marshall begins this chapter with images of blood and sirens to indicate that sacrifices, as in war, have to be made.

Book Three begins with some uncomfortable realities having been revealed to Selina. The kitchen interrogation scene proves Selina believes that integrity is very important. She chooses not to cow to her mother. Selina has told the truth to her mother and still defends her father’s right to do with the land as he pleases. The superficial conflicts with her sister and mother, the confirmed menstruation cycles of Ina and Beryl, and the casual and mature chats with Suggie clearly establish that womanhood is not easy. And if she is to have a role model, which woman would suffice? Young people tend to pattern their behavior after a favorable adult of the same gender. However, Selina
recognizes that she does not want to be like any of her female friends or elder women. She has several competing images of women and of her parents that she will have to overcome. This chapter will place her directly at a crossroads in her life. The concept of Barbadian womanhood is an even greater challenge because it means that there is a significant family pressure to take advantage of America’s opportunities. And the book title *Brown Girl, Brownstones* proves that her successes and failures are not her own. She is literally a brown girl living in a brownstone community, and yet she is also honing her own voice and identity.

World War II is one of three wars that Selina must endure. It was “[n]ot until later that winter when the war seemed to reach out and claim her. For her body was in sudden upheaval—her dark blood flowing as it flowed in the war” (66). Selina’s first conflict is internal. Like the world war that looms, her menstrual cycle wages war with her body. Her body abruptly sacrifices itself to womanhood. Now, as a woman, she can no longer be carefree with friends or easily disregard her father’s lack of responsibility. Selina views life with more critical eyes. Her eyes “were not the eyes of a child. Something too old lurked in their centers” (4). When the radio announcer speaks of the United States’s final engagement in war, Deighton slumbers in the sun parlor. Just as he is unplugged to his surrounding world, he selfishly seeks sleep in the sun parlor in December, thereby desiring warmth and brightness in a somber month. Still clinging to dreams about his island, he slowly wakes from his nap. Unable to offer comfort or counsel about the war to his daughters, it is Selina who tells him the U.S. has became engaged in war. “As she told him, she sensed him shrinking from the news as from some ugly sight” (66). On a subconscious level, Selina now sees Deighton as an “ugly sight” since she has started her
Selina is slowly evolving into a woman like Ina and Silla, and she too begins to see her father’s slumber as irresponsible for a grown man. Deighton shudders from the glare of another set of critical womanly eyes.

Now that Selina understands the reality of her body and her world, she turns to the “heart” of the home to seek comfort—her mother and the kitchen. When “she was frightened by the war and herself, … she would wander into the kitchen and sit at a small table in the corner, out of the mother’s way, yet near her” (67). By sitting near, Selina is able to benefit from Silla’s maternal presence while not inhibiting her routine. Selina’s “sitting near” is symbolic of a child seeking shelter and warmth, yet making sure to be “out of the way” signals maturity and the ability to give priority to others. She would sit at the kitchen table for hours being embraced by her mother’s banter with friends Iris and Florrie or by her cooking. As her body becomes irregular to her, Selina knows she can find regularity and female bonding in the kitchen.

From being a part of the kitchen counsel, Selina realizes that life is not simple for females. Her mother’s friends all speak of problems with their male partners and/or children, and how hard they have to work to keep them all focused and productive. Silla is always working, and moving, and preparing even in the casual company of home and friends. By witnessing her mother, Selina is taught that working, moving, and preparing are necessary for a woman’s independence. Her mother “made and sold Barbadian delicacies” such as black pudding, souse, and coconut bread. Even intimate moments in their kitchen are “inseperable from the world of work and capitalist profit” (Pettis 85). Selina and Ina would soon help their mother with her Saturday morning preparations and have “their fingers torn and their blood mixed with the shreds” (Marshall 67). They do
not realize that their blood in the shredded food inducts them into domestic womanhood, and on some level into the wheels of capitalism.

As a Barbadian American woman, Silla is adept at coping with economic deficiencies. As Olive Senior\(^{84}\) points out, Caribbean women are skilled in the phenomenon of “making do.” Poor women can and will engage inventive strategies to maintain their families. Senior also explains that “making do” involves “cutting and contriving.” For example, poor Caribbean women divide and create ways to maximize resources such as food and clothing. By recycling material items and finding additional sources of income like Silla’s selling of baked goods, these women become experts at sacrifice and providing security for dependents. Sources for support vary in poor women’s lives. Since the father is not always the husband and or not permanently working, adjustments to forms of support have to be made.

In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Selina sees how her mother and her mother’s friends cut and contrive in order to lessen the burden of their husbands’ financial inadequacies. Selina now learns that the quality of a family’s life cannot stop when the man stops working or leaves. Women have to multitask more. Again, Selina’s mother is her best example of hard work and savvy. Though Selina’s family is not poor by American or Barbadian standards, they are still determined to climb above their current condition.

Silla’s friends Iris and Florrie understand the concept of “making do” and talk at length about other Barbadians who buy houses from “every kind of way.” From the kitchen table, Iris lectures: “[They] working morning, noon and night for this big war

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money. Some going to the loan shark out there on Fulton Street. Some hitting the number for good money” (Marshall 74). After a full Saturday of gossiping about neighbors and cooking, Silla is seething as she considers her own financial plight amongst her peers:

[Silla]’s face became taut, her heavy breathing stilled. Suddenly her body convulsed and her voice clashed loud and exultant into Iris’ monotonous recital. ‘Oh God, I can get the money!’…I gon sell it…’ Silla lunged…. Everybody buying and I still leasing? Oh no, … I gon fix he and fix he good. I gon show the world that Silla ain nice’. (Marshall 75-76)

Silla knows that by selling the land she can afford to be independent as well as put a down payment on her American home. Selina gathers from her mother’s decision that people are sometimes hurt by their closest family. Caribbean family researcher Christine Barrow concludes in the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) that Caribbean poor women often are “resourceful and often successful social actors who have definite views about strategies applicable to certain problems in their situations and the ends they hope to achieve” (Barrow 132). The decision to sell her husband’s inheritance is not completely dependent upon any level of love or loyalty, but also facilitated by her ability to “make do,” or contrive and elevate her family’s status in Brooklyn. Selina knows that her mother does not hold any illusions of grandeur about her Barbadian home, like her father does. But what is unknown to Selina is that her mother’s immediate goal is to cut out her father because he has proven to be a parasite to her family’s success. Silla’s motive is captured by Caribbean critic, Rhonda Cobham, who states that “[t]he Caribbean women writer’s insistence on the presence of aggression and negation in the lives of the
protagonists, while affirming their potential for initiating change, differentiates their work also from all but the most experimental mainstream feminist writers”(49).  

Being integrity-driven, Selina defiantly interjects her voice and moral conscious into the household and community in an attempt to warn her father about her mother’s plan to sell his land. Selina shows an “old resistance that so infuriated the mother” (77). Earlier in the novel, Selina disagrees with her mother about their future in Barbados, but the stakes are higher now because Silla has shown her grown-up, less naive daughter a side of her that is callous and vindictive. Selina must quickly usurp her mother and enable her father to avoid ambush from her mother. Still torn by her mother’s fierce warning, “[if] I was to hear one word outta you ’bout what I said here today I gon kill you,” Selina manages to tell her father passively, yet swiftly, “She’s gonna sell it. She’s gonna sell it all” (76). With this announcement she has officially placed herself between the loyalties of her parents—not as child, but as a woman with an agenda. Unfortunately, her father’s reply does not echo her intensity. He tries to calm Selina with “there’s not a thing she can do. Don let she frighten you with her guff, girl” (87). In spite of WWII and her period, the juxtaposition between her parents will be her most challenging “war.” Her emotional fortitude will continue to be tested as her mother and father vie for a position of power over the Barbadian land.

Selina’s concern about her father’s land proves that she is loyal to her familial roots in Barbados. As she matures, Selina recognizes her father’s limitations for work and responsibility, but his land represents a valuable, endearing part of her family’s history. The land gives Deighton self-worth, something Silla reminds Selina that her father does

not have. By selling the land, Silla not only upsets Deighton, but she further distances their family from their island home. Given Selina’s relationships with other Barbadian tenants such as Beryl and Suggie, one can surmise that she is interested in preserving her core Barbadian connections. Through their conversations, she has physical proof the island still physically exists. Selina is a dreamer like Deighton and is encouraged by dreams of the island. Selina is carving an American identity that encompasses both American-ness and Barbadian-ness.

Selina is ever resourceful and knows that she must approach her “other” mother, Miss Thompson, in order to help her quell the tension in her household. Miss Thompson represents the older, wiser matriarch common in black women’s fiction. She is one of the few tenants in the brownstone community not from the Caribbean; she is from the American South, walks with a limp, and works two jobs even as a senior citizen. By virtue of her age, she has experienced several decades of pleasure and hardship and fills the role of surrogate grandmother figure to Selina. She is an important asset to Selina when her parents cannot provide sanity or logical solutions. According to Olive Senior’s Caribbean family study *Working Miracles* (1987), children learn:

…not only from those that consciously [teach] them but also teach themselves through observing the social world around them. Because of a desire to ‘fit in’ with society, the individual becomes a partner in the process of gender-role socialization. (Senior 25)

Proving her ability to be successful outside the home, her friendship with Miss Thompson is a product of Selina’s vast socialization skills. Selina usually prefers her company when she wanted physical as well as mental affection outside of her home. Selina “clung to
Miss Thompson, using her meager warmth as a shield against the snow and the mixed terror and excitement that flurried inside her.” Miss Thompson’s only advice to Selina is to “stop worrying about big peoples problems” (Marshall 94). This elder is Selina’s last line of defense for advice and for help in opposing her mother. In one last effort to try and make her mother change her mind about selling the land, she ventures beyond her neighborhood, out in the world alone to confront her mother at work.

Selina displays integrity and strength by confronting her mother outside of their home. Selina is steadfast about her convictions concerning the land and makes her mark as a fully arrived adult when she publicly announces her point of view against her mother at the war factory. Silla exclaims “…look at my crosses!...and taking trolley this time of night by sheself. Oh God, a force –ripe woman. …You’s too own-way. You’s too womanish” (102). The irony is that Selina has gained much of her effrontery from her mother. Silla can not believe someone she created would be so confrontational with her. This proves that Selina has integrity that supersedes her fear of her mother and father. When Selina stepped out of her neighborhood to head to her mother’s job, she accepted a specific pathway at the crossroads of life. She decided to go her own way and unashamedly defy her mother’s decision.

As Selina walks down the corridor to her mother’s work area, Marshall draws a strong contrast between Selina and the industrialized world. The noise of the machines was like a “single howl” and the workers performed a “pantomime role in a drama in which only the machines had a voice” (99). With the constant roar of the machines, work is one place where Silla’s “strong, angular figure” is not overbearing, and also not consumed by the filth, girth, and clamor of the machines. Her body against the machines...
proves that she can “hold her own” within an industrialized environment. She is like a black Rosie the Riveter, made strong in her efforts to replace and join men in the American workplace. Silla has the ability to survive in America and within its communes of capitalism and can take on the function of a machine, cold, hard, and calculated. Being a woman, and oftentimes being a feminist, require taking on a position of power that is unemotional and direct.

Selina witnesses the downfall of her father at her mother’s hands. In a sweeping cold victory, Silla forges Deighton’s name on family correspondences and official documents to get the money for the land. He desperately asks her, “[but] what kind of woman is you?” (Marshall 114). He enacts his revenge by squandering the proceeds from the land on many cheap gifts for himself and his family. He is almost joyful in his maniac spending. Selina sees that her father has given up more than money to the merchants; he has given them his dream and soul. The land that he has treasured throughout the novel now gives him the temporary satisfaction of being a breadwinner and bad loser. Marshall describes him in a “wild spin” with “eloquent eyes.” His eyes reflected “hollow places inside him and the grief which underlined his high glee” (125). Similar to the tantrums of a divorcing couple, both Silla and Deighton are like two fighting titans aching to lay a fatal blow. Selina stands out from her parents because she has integrity and is saddened by the painful cycle of revenge that they display. Her efforts to talk with both parents are in vain.

Selina’s family experiences a devastating turn of events by the end of novel. Silla’s decision to deport Deighton is an extreme conclusion to permanently rid herself of

86 Rosie the Riveter is a cultural icon developed during World War II. She represented millions of women who entered the workforce to take the place of the male workers who were away in war.
him, yet it shows how she can wield as much power as any man in order to ensure survival of her family. Beverly Johnson’s “Revolutionary Solutions” states that Silla never took the “time to seriously contemplate her actions concerning his deportation… [Silla] does not offer her children a strong example of a mother who has integrity” (466).

I find Johnson’s assessment problematic and naïve. It is Selina’s job to develop her own integrity and not gain it from her mother. By first clearly stating that her mother should not sell her father’s land by straying from Miss Thompson’s advice to stay out of her parents’ affairs, and by confronting her mother at the factory, Selina has gained integrity and a strong feminist identity (Carter 329).  

Her feminism grows out of understanding what it means to sacrifice as a Barbadian woman, and also believing that men and women deserve choices and fair treatment. Her feminism is not predicated upon a simple binary where men are victimizers and women are victims. She strongly believes that her father Deighton deserves fair treatment from her mother, even as she resents his laziness. She refers to her mother as “Hitler” for stealing his money, and plotting his deportment from the country even as she admires his resourcefulness and survival skills.

In Book Four, simply titled “Selina,” Selina is calloused by the previous year’s events, yet not broken. Her motive in joining the Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessman (Barbadian Association) is her final attempt at framing her American identity with her Barbadian culture. However, she finds the Barbadian Association to be an assembly line in producing youth with a superficial loyalty to their land and their professional success. Young Barbadians like Beryl Challenor and Ina plan to marry, attend college, and continue to support the community seemingly at the bequest of the

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Bajan parents, and not from their own internal ambitions. Now at age eighteen, Selina wants more out of life than directions from her parents.

In a final act of defiance Selina attends a local college in Brooklyn, and is a dance or performing arts student. Silla never wanted Selina to attend a local less prestigious school and study a professionally limiting major like dance. Denniston’s essay “Beyond Bildungsroman” correctly identifies her dance recital as analogous to the events in her own life. “[It] is important…no one from Selina’s West Indian community is present [at her dance recital]” (30). In contrast, peer Gatha Steed’s wedding was a large community event because it signified a preferred direction for the young ladies in the Barbadian community.

Selina’s final testimony will be to denounce the academic scholarship given to her by the Barbadian Association in an attempt to avenge her father’s deportation, and officially break from her mother’s circle. Commiserating with her boyfriend Clive Parker, Selina rages, “…I won’t be like them! I won’t be cut out of the same piece of cloth” (264). In the end we understand Selina to be a “heroine with a small but uncertain strength.” She has willingly broken from her sanctuary or home, yet ends the novel by planning a trip to Barbados. Though she will go as a tourist with a friend, Marshall wants us to understand that Selina must search Barbados and define her own experiences.

The resolution of the novel remains deliberately open-ended to suggest that Selina’s journey to the Caribbean is a continuation of her search. Her cultural identity has not yet been firmly established, yet her independence has. Her father’s and mother’s images of the West Indies continue to intrigue while she navigates her role as a second-generation Caribbean American.
CHAPTER 5

AND THEN THERE WAS ONE: UNCOVERING THE NARRATIVE OF A NATION IN ERNA BRODBER’S LOUISIANA

It’s not merely Nanny I’m going to talk about. I’m going to talk about Nanny but I’m also going to tell you a few things about this district, this historic place we call Moore Town. …Nanny was our greatest leader. In fact, the Maroons of Moore Town speak of her endearingly as “Grandy Nanny.”…I want to say that no dissertation can be given on the Maroons without mention of Nanny because I feel that she was the greatest of all our heroes, and perhaps that’s why the women in Moore Town are regarded as leaders in their own right, because Nanny was a woman and was one of the greatest people in our history….Nanny made her presence felt to the British army and one of the great things about her is that she was not only a military leader but was also a priestess. She had powers that science cannot explain. (Tanna 19)  

Colonel C. Harris, leader of the Jamaican Maroon, October 10, 1983, speech given at Moore Town history day celebration

This speech extolling the folk heroine Nanny exemplifies the importance of women’s community leadership in Jamaica’s culture and history. This speech is also evidence that oral history is the first keeper of records. It has only been since the twentieth century that Nanny’s triumphs have been written down, but her legend has been intact since the 1700s. Nanny the Maroon is a figurative representation of Jamaica and a literal representation of resilient Jamaican women. Louisiana’s protagonists Ms. Sue Anne Grant-King (affectionately known as Mammy) and Ella Townsend developed from Nanny’s legacy.

Nanny was a Jamaican leader of the Maroons, a group of escaped rebel slaves, who led prolonged guerilla warfare against the British at the beginning of the eighteenth century. She is celebrated by her country and region as a military strategist, priestess, and

political leader. Her position as a cultural hero precedes that of other famous Jamaicans such as Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley. Her story also contributes to the legacy of other great Caribbean revolts such as the Haitian Revolt of 1791 and the Cuban Revolt of 1868. Yet she stands apart from the other black Jamaican heroes and takes on the character of the folk heroine. She is said to have used magical methods or “work root” to aid escape and avoid capture. As a leader of the Maroons, she represents a larger story of success for the Caribbean. She symbolizes how a small group of unified, determined people can maintain key characteristics of their community despite slavery, relocation, or threat of genocide. Nanny is a figurative representation of Jamaica and a literal representation of Jamaican women. Though Nanny’s history and life predate the coining of the term “feminist,” she embodies the characteristics of feminism in her actions and existence. As a military leader, Nanny was able to occupy a position still not easily accessible to women in modern developed countries. She was able to govern men and women Maroons with the authority and diligence of a skilled leader not limited by her gender or any other traditional female role.

According to Denise Narain’s “The Body of the Woman in the Body of the Text: The Novels of Erna Brodber,” “Post-Colonial feminists such as Dionne Brand have stressed the centrality of the woman’s body as symbolic fodder in inspiring the colonizing ‘mission’, and, later, in providing nationalist patriarchs with an eroticized and feminized landscape to ‘rescue’ from the colonizers.”89 Narain suggests that in post-colonial texts and particularly in Brodber’s novels black women’s bodies have been

commodified, helpless, and vulnerable. In my opinion, however, Narain’s assessment of Brodber’s work is too simplistic. Louisiana’s protagonist Ella will sacrifice her own needs to the will of two older female mentors, yet Brodber’s narrative shows the unconventional ways in which Ella’s physical and professional sacrifices will provide her with the agency to uncover the symbolic journeys of three black women. Ella’s purpose hinges upon the idea that the black female body is limitless in her ability to serve her community.

Narain appropriately suggests that readers of postcolonial literature be aware of colonial literary aesthetics that are imbedded in the literature. The black female body is often described as sexual while simultaneously exploited in some way. Black women are often described as mothers, but no one directly talks about how they become mothers. From the postcolonial era through the twenty-first century, the terms “mother-tongue” and “motherland” are often used in Literature and History to describe places like Africa or non-English languages; these terms give a false indication of black women wielding power and gaining respect while continuing this legacy of not addressing their true condition, and while assigning them titles that suggest they safeguard the cultural practices and language of their homeland. Narain calls this “the conflation of the woman with the land” (99).

Nanny was a feminist because she was not limited by race and gender in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She did not let her biology dictate her future. She escaped slavery to reclaim ownership of her own body. She was not a mother or a wife (roles which assume a significant level of nurturing), though she was a conjure woman (a

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90 This statement is based on the image of the black woman after slavery. In an attempt to feminize black women previously seen as emasculated in slavery, black women writers showed black women as vulnerable, yet resilient.
role that assumes power and manipulation). She was able to capture the respect of Jamaica and the Caribbean without having to be placed in direct and subordinate position to a man. She is represented as a nationalist and feminist heroine. Throughout Caribbean history, women have played prominent roles in shaping Caribbean society. By tapping into the legacy of Nanny, Brodber can pay homage to one of the few documented Jamaican female heroes and prepare the cast for Louisiana’s protagonists, Mammy and Ella.

Brodber’s novel embodies a Jamaican cultural aesthetic that proves women are gatekeepers for their nation’s cultural history. And, in the tradition of Nanny’s conjure “powers that science cannot explain,” Brodber’s novel employs magical realism to link the relations between the deceased and living. In the spirit of Nanny’s ability to hoodoo or conjure, her novel also connects feminism through the technique of magical realism. Brodber’s nationalistic tendencies can be traced in her snapshots of Jamaica’s history and culture and in its heroes woven into the lives of her characters and their families’. Her characters are regional and international migrants who are concerned with preserving and resurrecting their roots.

Any discussion of Brodber’s novels must begin with a caveat. Her writing style is non-linear like Leslie Marmon Silko’s Almanac of the Dead (1991) with stream-of-consciousness monologues similar to James Joyce’s Ulysses (1922). Her novels have been described as “notoriously ‘difficult’ to read” and only exaggerated by “the predominant trend in Caribbean fiction for some form of realism to be the chosen mode of representation” (7). Brodber’s allegiance to the Caribbean region and to Jamaica in particular is also reminiscent of her Jamaican literary mother, Una Marson. Marson began

91 Taken from this chapter’s epigraph.
writing in the 1920s and was the first woman to promote Jamaican national literature. Her professional roots as a journalist and social worker are mirrored by Brodber’s training as a cultural anthropologist and sociologist. Brodber has said on several occasions that her novels emerge from her sociological research in Mona Jamaica and St. Augustine Trinidad. Her sociological research has centered on exploring the living conditions and possibilities for women in the Caribbean and Jamaican culture as a whole. Her research publications include Abandonment of Children in Jamaica (1974), Perceptions of Caribbean Women (1984), and “Reggae and Cultural Identity in Jamaica” (1981). Brodber creates works of fiction in an attempt to make the reality of social and historical conditions significant, timely, and “brought back into the realm of experienceable” (Toland-Dix).

Louisiana’s “Prologue” is actually a fictitious Editor’s note. The “Editor’s Note” gives an important clue that says the manuscript is actually comprised of Ella’s field notes and thoughts which alert the reader that this novel is “really a series of narrative fragments.” The novel begins in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and has the plot span over four decades, between the 1930s and the early 1970s. Columbia University student and cultural researcher Ella Townsend is assigned to document the history of a Louisiana storyteller and community figure, Sue Anne Grant-King, also known as Mammy. She is given this assignment by her Columbia mentors because she is a black anthropologist. They feel that she will be able to easily transition into predominately black St. Mary, Louisiana. She can readily gain access to their stories because her race


affords her the ability to be an informant who can be trusted and talk freely with local blacks. Ella collects interviews for Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Work Project Administration that commissioned young scholars to help de-center European and traditional collections of art and history, and create a more holistic archive of American cultural identity. One major goal of Roosevelt’s patronage was to access the slave history of blacks, particularly those in the South, through several interviews of community elders who had immediate familial ties to slaves or who were only one generation beyond slavery.95

According to Vera Kutzinski’s “Borders, Bodies, and Regions: The United States and the Caribbean,” Ella is actually a fictional version of Zora Neale Hurston. This connection is noteworthy because Hurston was an anthropologist like the character Ella, and attended Columbia University like Ella. Both Ella and Hurston relocate to a southern region to study its people, behavior, and characteristics. And Hurston not only compares to the fictional Ella, but to Brodber as well. Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) is a similar project to Louisiana in that each novel showcases how two black women live in the South and “come into a better understanding of their personality and habits borne out of their own experiences and relationships with their surroundings and surrogate community” (Kutzinski 60). Both Hurston’s character Janie Crawford and Ella ultimately find strength in storytelling and in becoming the story themselves. Their lives celebrate the power of oral culture.

Therefore, it is appropriate that Ella is an anthropologist and an academic; she is trained to uncover history and cultural artifacts as she analyzes and catalogues. Ella’s character is not so concerned about the final outcome of her research but the process of

95 For more information on the Roosevelt’s Work Project Administration, please consult Susan Quinn’s Furious Improvisation, New York: Macmillan, 2008.
her research leads her to help define who she is. She learns to better understand herself and her parents’ choices by collecting the life stories of others. This narrative challenges the female subject’s place in society and allows for repositioning within life and the afterlife. Ultimately, the women transcend subjectivity by exchanging the stories of their lives.

Ella is introduced in the novel as a working and researching adult. And though the details of the life are not revealed until Chapter Three entitled “Out of Eden,” her emotional growth as an adult and her movement towards a whole identity cannot be understood until her past is examined. She begins her discussion about her youth by describing herself seated by her mother in church:

My mother’s church had a stained glass window with a thorn-headed picture of Jesus the Christ…. [The] services my mother attended began at six am….I dropped out of church-going before I entered high school. This church, my mother’s church, was called by those around us the West Indian church and West Indians were called King George’s negroes. They were a funny lot. They kept themselves away from others on their blocks and formed their own clubs and societies, yet in these groups they seemed as apart from each other as they were from those outside them.

Ella’s childhood is unsettling to her because she has never felt like she belonged to a particular community. She is a second generation Jamaican immigrant and has always experienced living outside of her parents’ Jamaican community while not living entirely in the culture of her American neighborhood. She exists within the borders of two
cultures. By using phrases like “my mother’s church” instead of *our church* and “they were a funny lot” instead of “we were a funny lot,” she highlights her feelings of being an outsider. Her pronouns do not include herself. When she attends church with her mother she often stares out of the stained glass window, dreaming about where she will escape to when she is able. Ella is an only child living with both parents, and though she describes her parents’ relationship as intact, they seem more like roommates. Her father works hard at various jobs with long hours, but is often emotionally unavailable. Her mother works outside the home as well, but like *Brown Girl, Brownstone’s* Barbadian immigrant mother Silla Boyce, she mostly socializes with only her Caribbean neighbors and expects her daughter to follow a prescribed route to success in America which includes pursuing a higher education at a prestigious American college, earning a terminal or professional degree, and securing a well-paid job.

Ella was destined to leave her original Jamaican American community. Like Alice Walker’s motley collection of characters in *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989,) Ella represents a human soul in the universe that is connected to several other souls both living and dead. *The Temple* progresses as a series of revelations occur between lovers and friends who all embody a physical or spiritual trait of a former lover, family member, or friend. Erna Brodber will later show the purpose of Ella’s body and soul and further refute Narain’s assessment that the postcolonial woman’s body in the text can and does offer a subordinate position. Ella says that the “church of the King George’s negroes couldn’t hold me” (Brodber 59). Ella reacts to their strict religious rituals that go on in her church and to her inability to be “limited” in scope by her Caribbean American roots. She believes their socializations with each other do not make them whole. Ella leaves the
church wanting to live in an unrestricted life. She will later find out that her roots will broaden her scope on life. Because Ella does well in school, her rebellion against church and community is pardoned by parents. Her rebellion against church symbolizes her own break with colonial conditioning. Figuratively-speaking the church represents a cloister that Ella is not eager to join; she states she was not “confirmed in the church” and often “turned away from communion” (Brodber 28). In this case Narain is right that colonial remnants or values do infuse the church, and ironically Ella heads south to confront them.

Young Ella has several characteristics of Brown Girl, Brownstone’s protagonist Selina at this point novel. Like Selina, Ella experiences conflict with her mother and eventually breaks from her, is ambiguous about her loyalty to her Caribbean roots, and knows her live-in father as a walking ghost-of-sort—he is always around but she does not fully interact with him. Given that Brown Girl was published almost thirty years prior to Louisiana and was the inaugural narrative of Caribbean American identity, it is fair to assume that Brodber was aware of this text and eager to borrow a few characteristics from it. Ultimately, the connection with Brown Girl and Their Eyes Were Watching God symbolize Brodber’s awareness and intent to produce her own feminist text. Each of the former texts during the time of its publication made an indelible mark in the canon of African American and Caribbean literature and in the larger feminist debate because they showed young black women fashioning self-consciousness through their own struggles for independence.

Ella’s independence will continue to challenge her parent’s vision of success; after all she chooses Anthropology as a major at Columbia University whereas they would have strongly suggested a more lucrative and socially accepted major such as pre-
medicine or law. Nonetheless, the book begins as Ella believes (because she is told by the administrators of the WPA project) that she is coming to St. Mary’s Louisiana to interview Mammy King—who, unbeknownst to Ella, is also known as Miss Anna and Louisiana—a former slave born and raised in St. Mary. When Ella arrives in St. Mary she finds a macabre scene. Mammy is weak and expiring quickly and engaged in an other-worldly type conversation with her recently dead friend, Miss Lowly:

They sang it for me Anna. They sang it for me, and Anna,
had I any doubts about how they saw me and that in coming home I had done the right thing, I could now lay them to rest along with that crumbled old body to keep which in one piece had taken too much from too many people these past four years.

(Brodber 9)

Mammy is crossing-over into death and appears to talk to her friend during her passage. However, the quote above is only Mammy’s voice, and not her words. Miss Lowly is speaking through Mammy. Imagine a ventriloquist using a human puppet. Miss Lowly is the ventriloquist and Mammy is the puppet.

The first chapter presents this scene as a chaotic jumble of voices that we have, at that point, no way of identifying and distinguishing. What might be understood as a transition from a realist to a magical realist literary mode is rendered astonishingly clear as we move from the novel’s Prologue to its first chapter (Kutzinski 9). When Miss Lowly was alive she always referred to her friend Mammy as Anna, and the above conversation is Lowly “speaking” through Mammy and saying that she was pleased with her funeral or home-going ceremony and finds peace in death, but not rest. Lowly wants
to ease her sick friend into spiritual eternity, also. Though Mammy is still alive when Ella arrives, her words are occasionally not her own. Lowly and Mammy’s conversations (though they appear mostly as monologues) help to prepare Mammy for the afterlife and casually reacquaint two long-separated girlfriends. It is in this banter amongst girlfriends, one dead, one sick and dying, that Brodber entices the reader into the metaphysical.

Chapter One, “I heard a voice from Heaven say,” is written in a cumbersome scatter of conversation between Lowly and Mammy with Ella present to witness. In short, there is very little clarity in this chapter, just a slow submerge (albeit drowning) in dialogues and monologues that does not cease until Ella asserts herself in Chapter Two, “First the goat must be killed.” The first chapter uses elements of stream-of-consciousness. In his *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method*, Rober Humphrey begins with a caveat that states stream of consciousness (or stream) is often inappropriately called a “technique.” Humphrey refers to stream as an “interior monologue.”

A stream of consciousness novel should be regarded as one which has as its essential concern the exploitation of a wide area of consciousness, generally the entire area, of one or more characters; that is whatever plots, themes, or personal effects are achieved in these novels result from use of the consciousness of the characters as a “screen” or “film” on which they are depicted. What we mean by consciousness is actually the entire area of mental attention, which includes the gradations leading to unconsciousness.
as the state of complete awareness. (Friedman 3)

As much as *Louisiana* is about recording stories, it is also about harvesting those stories from the innermost regions of the characters’ minds. By tapping into Mammy and Lowly’s memories, Ella becomes an indispensable part of the St. Mary community and a substantial vessel for Lowly and Mammy. Ella passively steps into this role. But, “by November 11, 1936,” she states with bated breath “…I was no longer just me…I was theirs” (69). This quote shows her acknowledgement of her embodiment. After being in Louisiana for only one week, she realizes that she has been kidnapped by some savvy captors. She becomes their new and temporary refuge; they become her mentors.

For Mammy King, the WPA narratives hold significant value. Ella can only see this meeting as an academic adventure. She is armed with a tape recorder or what Mammy calls “that black box.” Being a former slave and recognized matriarch of the St. Mary community, Mammy describes Ella’s project as the “translation” of Mammy King. Several members of St. Mary and other nearby towns travel to witness Ella’s interviews and subsequently Mammy’s death. For Mammy King, this project represents the beginning of her passage to the other side, meeting relatives and friends who have died and gone over. The translation Mammy King envisions resembles a literal piecing together of narratives, lives, geographies, and worlds towards the ends of articulating the processes which have brought her to this historical juncture in life. Mammy’s understanding of this project differs from Ella’s in that she understands her translation to be a point of intersection between her former lives, as a Jamaican immigrant, political activist, scientist, priestess, and black American.
Ella finds Mammy to be a difficult subject who only reveals snippets of her life after she has tested Ella with a long series of silences. Ella eventually discovers that Mammy and Miss Lowly became friends when they were “working in a kitchen of what would be a rooming house” (Brodber 69). Though both were younger women, Mammy was considerably older and was to be the self-appointed guardian of the “Green gal from the islands” (61). Brodber reveals a subtle connection to the Caribbean with her brief description of Miss Lowly. Lowly is from an unspecified Caribbean island and befriended by Mammy. Now that Mammy is deathly sick, her loyal friend wants to ease her transition from life to death. However, Mammy is also very loyal to Lowly and spiritually recruit Ella to be their conduit.

Knowing that Mammy is close to death and at times stubbornly silent encourages Ella to spend more time with Mammy, and she begins to see that her written and recorded transcriptions turn into a series of self-questions as well as moments of conversation with Mammy and Lowly. Ella states, “I had … come to be with woman. The one woman had turned into two and here I was now totally taken up by them and the machine through which they communicated with me” (33). Just as Ella begins to make progress with her relationship with her “object of study,” Mammy dies suddenly and she is faced with the prospect of the end of her project. At Mammy’s funereal, Ella faints “kicks, foams,… and had to be taken from the church and given water.” She later comments that she felt like she was “in a kind of grotto” (35). When she is coherent again, Ella realizes that this is just the beginning, not the end of her project. For the first time Ella realizes there is more to this project than recording the lives of blacks in Louisiana. When Ella recovers from
her faint, she has remembered seeing her parents marriage certificate and noticing her mother’s original home town of “Windsor Castle in St. Mary, Jamaica” (Brodber 69.)

It is clear at times that Ella does not always want to be the mouthpiece, yet she accepts this role without much regard for her own energy. She bemoans that “Mammy had been to death’s door and back so often, couldn’t she just have stayed and had her story written in the normal fashion? I’d still be doing it and at no cost to any of us, for the President had kindly offered to pay” (106) Ella knows she has been chosen because of her dedication to cultural anthropology, despite the pay she receives from the US government. In becoming a medium she straddles two worlds, and borrowing a phrase from Boyce Davies, she “re-negotiates her identity” to live in this southern community and simultaneously live in the “other world” of her ancestors. This juxtaposition of fantasy and reality form a basic definition of magical realism.

Magical realism is most effective in the parameters of novel is where ordinary life and common folk are privy to extraordinary maneuverings. According to Caribbean critic David Mikic’s assessment of magical realism in the selected works of Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier, magical realism provides a “dream-like suspension on the border between the fantastic and the mundane offering a utopian, if evanescent, promise of transfigured perception, the hypnotic renewing of everyday existence” (Mikics 371). Magical realism provides an arena for transformation that gives license to encounters and discussions that could not happen within the criteria of reality. Ella lives in the present and the afterlife. She is transfigured into a woman with supernatural powers of correspondence between and amongst Lowly and Mammy. The purpose of and what Mikics says is the appeal of magical realism to Caribbean writers is that “it addresses the
weight of historical memory that survives in the day to day life In the West Indies (Mikics 373). Through the conjuring of Mammy and Lowly’s spirit, Ella can tap into, what Brodber says is “the behavior of our ancestors that can act as a tool for fostering black diasporic unity and understanding” (“Fiction”).

In “Fiction in the Scientific Procedure,” Brodber says that her fiction has “activist intentions: it is about studying the behavior of and transmitting these findings to the children of the people who were put on ships on the African beaches and woke up…in the New World” (165). Brodber means for her fiction to inform and record. By creating Ella as a cultural anthropologist whose job it is to record and interview, she/Ella is able to begin a self-discovery of her history and uncover personal resilience through discussions with a storyteller and matriarch.

Lowly and Mammy challenge the parameters of human existence by recruiting Ella after their deaths. The elder women, or as Ella describes them, “the venerable sisters” create opportunity for Ella and her boyfriend Reuben, who comes from New York to Louisiana searching for her, to reconnect with their parents legacy vis-à-vis oral culture. Ella can only hold up so long as a conduit, yet Lowly and Mammy have a surplus of information to share from beyond the grave. Ella’s transcriptions become invaluable snapshots of orature. The “venerable sisters” take on urgency in their demands of Ella. Rhonda Cobham’s “Revisioning Our Kumblas” essay attributes this urgency to the greater need to keep alive the dying art form of storytelling and (subsequently) the misplaced griot. Black nationalist writers are more likely to pass on oral culture rather than written culture. There are possibly codes entrenched in the spoken word that the

nationalist writers want to remain intact and authentic (Cobham 52). Erna Brodber thus challenges traditional methods of discourse and history acquisition. At the root of these non-traditional methods of engagement between Ella and her deceased mentors is the importance of re-connecting to one’s roots. The subject’s becoming connected is determined by her level of agency, particularly when systems consist of constantly changing and multiple historical figures.

By tapping into conversations and relations about Lowly and Mammy, Ella forms a lattice with these women which enable her to be a strong extension of a community of Caribbean American women. The following example shows Ella’s concern and loyalty to them. She is concerned with the quality and content of Mammy’s interview on a reel tape:

After we had learnt that the reel was full, not of silences but of words,…of Mammy reeling out her life story as a parting gift to a well-favored me, but of conversations between two women, one of them Mammy with interjections from me in words I didn’t know,…we fell off the end of that reel right through those word holes. In awe and dread and totally confounded, we lay together on the narrow still-scented bed in silence. Brodber 4

This scene shows further induction to a community of women who foster her growth and strength. Ella is shaped by the strong female hands that mold her.

Unfortunately, her power as a medium will not entirely sustain her desires for strength and control as a woman. She desires to hold power in the domestic realm as well. Ella contemplates, “Are female prophets allowed to have children?...I have been [with
Rueben] today fully a year and nothing in sight…We are even thinking of finding a house of our own. Perhaps then the child will come” (Brodber 107). In order for Ella to receive and house the spirits of Mammy and Lowly, she cannot occupy her body or womb with the growth of another human being. If pregnant, her body could not handle the physical occupation of the spirit elders. But one might consider that Ella is carrying with her something greater than a baby—or ask why strong, decisive women abandon their biological functions.

Ella’s recognition that she has experienced a passing on of souls has a significant impact on her perception of her work on the WPA narratives, moving her from and objective to an agent in history. She also recognizes that given her own identity as a Jamaican American and maternal connection to St. Mary, Jamaica, Mammy and Lowly have inducted her to come be their personal historian and voice. Now Ella can begin a new relationship with herself. She understands her role and why her body has been chosen. She internalizes two nations: America and Jamaica. Mammy and Lowly want a young woman who can support both of their worlds. Mammy is from America and Lowly is from Jamaica, and the town St. Mary is present in both locations.

Just from the title of the novel we know that Brodber has us planted in fertile ground for conjuring or magic. The state of Louisiana, and the city of New Orleans in particular are known for their “hoodoo” or religious subcultures. Therefore, Louisiana becomes an ideal place for Ella’s spiritual occupation to occur. In addition, Louisiana is geographically located above Jamaica and serves as an easy recipient for the island’s people and its stories. The nation-building of Jamaica can continue abroad because its culture becomes an active part of this St. Mary community. The women characters such
as Mammy and Ella are invested in maintaining history through stories. At the root of Brodber’s metaphysical explorations are her need to show how there is a constant quest for identity that is governed by women who are interested shaping their communities.

First, Brodber prepares her discussion about nationalism by choosing a state like Louisiana that is fertile for relationships with immigrants. Louisiana also welcomes this exchange between the United States and the Caribbean because it is a port city that offers entry and exit to the Gulf of Mexico. Louisiana is also known for voodoo-worshipping subculture that has been part of their regional landscape since the Haitian Slave Revolt of 1809. As a former colony of France, Louisiana holds a unique history within America. Magical realism offers a prime background for transatlantic connections because “magical realist writing often stems from a place and time in which different cultures or historical periods inhabit a single cultural space”—the state of Louisiana offers this environment. As well, the encounters that are common in this text speak to a larger need for historical connections and exchanges.

Erna Brodber’s writings draw strength from her interests in sociological and anthropological research that seek to join the dualities of community and the individual. However, In Louisiana, her protagonist Ella Townsend is a prototype of the African Diaspora-- specifically of St. Mary, Louisiana and the St. Mary, Jamaica parish. In Louisiana, Ella, Lowly, and Mammy all form a triangular relationship unit that allows each woman to tap into her personal history. Davies asserts, “the question of identity for Afro-Caribbean/Afro-American women writers involves a self-definition which takes into account the multifaceted nature of human existence and female identity” (Davies).
A basic premise of Brodber’s work is that there is an inadequate amount of documented Caribbean culture and history. Archives, as far as they exist, are in the hands of the colonizers. She privileges vernacular records that are of the people. Brodber’s goal is to search within non-traditional places for Caribbean culture. One non-traditional, yet rich resource has been the spirit world via the road map of magical realism in literature. Therefore, Brodber concludes, a grand narrative unifying the nation in one mythical master tale is not possible in a Creole, racially mixed culture. Brodber answers this problem by searching for an alternative history of those excluded from the written master records and by constructing a concept of the people from oral history and sociological research.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:

SACRIFICE AND SURVIVAL

“Song of Myself”

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you….

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,…

The smoke of my own breath,
Echoes, ripples, buzz’d whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-color’d sea-rocks,…

Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” understands that independence and expression are stepping stones to survival. His imagery of “atoms,” “ripples,” “sea,” and “air” symbolize Caribbean women’s ability to shift and adapt to different circumstances and locations. Ironically, all of these substances can and do conform to different shapes or containers without losing the properties of the original elements. Caribbean Women Novelists: Courting Feminism, Constructing Nation declares that Caribbean women do adjust and migrate without losing the values of home.

“Song of Myself” expresses the universal importance of speaking and writing oneself into existence. Women continue to speak themselves into existence with the production of their literature which “offers…female-centered narratives and poems with a preponderance of the first person and autobiographical modes” (Juneja 89). My study’s examination of Caribbean women in the Anglophone tradition explores select fictional contributions of authors, Merle Hodge, Lakshmi Persaud, Marshall, and Erna Brodber who desire to shape this tradition by framing stories of tension and growth that ultimately produce a conscious or unconscious feminism in the protagonist.

Strategies for survival are common in Caribbean women’s writing and speak to the importance of transcending voicelessness or warding off the doomed “silenced woman.” In Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival (2006), Meredith Gadsby discusses the legacy of survival in the Afro-Caribbean community illustrated by mothers who sucked salt to fend off hunger during times of adversity. Often, this practice was done so that their children could eat whatever scraps were available. Survival is the result of sacrifice. With nothing to eat, poor women would suck salt which would make the stomach feel fuller; then, they would proceed to plenty of water to ward off hunger. Gadsby’s research shows that “sucking salt” has it roots in the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Trinidad. Although both words “connote desperation and hopelessness,” they also suggest “overcoming hardship” (Gadsby 3). Her definition concludes that sucking salt prepares one for an impending hardship such as migration and is a skill passed on from generation to generation.

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As evidenced by the female relationships of each of my chapters’ protagonists, the strategies of sucking salt act as a metaphor for survival. In “Between a Rock and Hard Place: Examining Cultural and Social Values in Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey*,” Tee is an example of a marginalized young woman who has become aware of the complexities of her surroundings. Thus, marginalized women survive and rebuild from the interstices of oppression, which can include the confines of a patriarchal religion, or the rote curriculum of a postcolonial school system. By the end of *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee has gained valuable skills about adversity and survival. Her grandmother Ma’ is a maternal figure who entertains Tee with folktales and simple errands that display support and unconditional love. Her aunts Tantie and Beatrice have also sacrificed their homes in order to care for Tee and her brother. The values of sucking salt are present in the behavior of Tee’s caregivers. By the end of the novel, Tee’s “feels the weight” of the colonial culture, yet her college acceptance and pending departure all assure that Tee has survived her tumultuous circumstances. She has survived multiple homes, yet she is not happiness; nonetheless, she does get to reunite with her father and pursue higher education in England. Hodge is passionate about empowering young women for adversity, and in her second novel, *For the Life of Laetitia* (1993), tests the limits of survival and influence by having this novel’s protagonist return to a Creole household much like Aunt Beatrice’s home to be raised.

In my chapter entitled “A Precocious Deconstruction: Questioning Her Place and Moving Beyond Her Space in Lakshmi Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind*,” Kamla’s grandmother, mother, and cook pass on the tools necessary for her to negotiate her womanhood. At every encounter concerning men and education she asserts her own
independent voice that characterizes her as confident, feminist, conscious young woman. The crux of *Butterfly in the Wind* is that the women in her family provide her with anecdotal stories and real life circumstances that represent the virtues of Indo-Caribbean Hindu womanhood. By the end of the novel, Kamla’s decision to study in Ireland shows an implied defiance of her culture and of her island’s oppressor. Her decision to pursue education proves that she is not interested in beginning the domestic lifestyle that her mother, grandmother and cook Daya have chosen. Her educational pursuits vindicate their domesticity. She has initially chosen to venture on a journey in Hindu womanhood that does not involve an intimate relationship with a man thereby asserting her agenda to be governed by her own choices. Marriage and motherhood can be delayed until she has gained her full independence as an educated, critically engaged young woman. Given the historical tensions between Ireland and Great Britain, it is only logical that Kamla would choose the former country to study in for her teaching career. Her move to Ireland exorcises her British postcolonial education. Becoming an Irish citizen is in direct defiance of her British upbringing, and shows her ability to survive the realities of both Anglophone Caribbean and Irish cultures.

*Brown Girl, Brownstones* abounds with stories of survival and sacrifice. Silla and Selina’s other mothers, Miss Thompson and Suggie, each have personal histories that resonate with sucking salt. Gadsby cites the kitchen as the most empowering place in the Boyce household. She celebrates Marshall for “privileging the everyday speech of Black women in a space that mainstream feminist discourse had labeled a prison—the kitchen” (142). Gadsby recognizes the importance of the kitchen in her own second-generation Caribbean life by commenting “that being in the kitchen with the women in my family
gave me an edge,” and like Selina, she “learned family history and lessons on living life as woman” in the kitchen (142). Gadsby embodies the significance of Paule Marshall’s essay “From the Poets in the Kitchen” in which she acknowledges the diverse lessons young girls can receive from their mothers’ kitchens.

A Caribbean American like Louisiana’s Ella Townsend had no history of sucking salt or surviving hardship until she discovered her Caribbean identity while living in the American South. Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s The Repeating Island discussion of “socio-cultural fluidity” explains Ella’s influences. A pictorial image to describe his theory of socio-cultural fluidity would be to envision a rock being dropped into water; the cylindrical waves that emanate from that center point are like the culture of the Caribbean transmitting itself outward. The outer ring is always the widest part; yet not as powerful or strong as the innermost ring, it still can be felt and seen. The size of the rock, or figuratively-speaking, the size of the source is what determines how far and how powerful the ring will be. Ella felt the “vibration” from her Caribbean roots only when she sacrificed her life. Ella’s maternal teachers show her why sacrificing her life is most important to the greater survival of the small, black American community that welcomes her.

These individual stories are representations of a continuous tradition of sacrifice and survival. Patricia Mohammed promotes “understanding of the Caribbean region’s traditions” and stories first” (7). She stresses the work that will persist to “constantly define feminism in context” (24). My task as a scholar and teacher has been to recognize the traditions of the Anglophone Caribbean woman writer in an attempt to understand her

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influences. I may not ever understand what it means to be Caribbean, but I can sympathize and point to our shared experiences in literature and history. I also support Mohammed’s challenge to derive an indigenous feminism from the multiplicity of Caribbean stories because it continues to fight against what Edouard Glissant describes as the “struggle against a single history.” Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie translates this as the struggle against the “single story.” My dissertation reinforces the significance of sharing multiple stories about the Caribbean and continues the larger task of locating ways in which black and Caribbean women’s voices can be read and heard in public and private arenas.
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